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REFEREED PAPER

Patterns of social exclusion in mixed neighborhoods: A case study on neighborhood use of young Turkish newcomers in Berlin, Germany

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Abstract

For a newcomer in a city, the process of getting familiar with urban places does not only refer to memorizing the roads, but also learning how to live as a local. In this article, I argue that in a new urban structure, where newcomers confront subtle measures of social exclusion, becoming a local is key to feeling less isolated, yet it is not enough to feel at home. I examine cases of highly skilled young professionals and students from Turkey in Berlin with the aim of understanding transnational disparities and exclusion on the one hand, and social contact and inclusion on the other. I propose that both should be investigated because not only exclusion exists in a mixed neighborhood; acceptance and coexistence exist also. By focusing on Kreuzberg and Neukölln in Berlin, I search for the dynamics of neighborhood use of migrant youth, (*in*)visibility, ‘public familiarity’ (Blokland, 2003), and daily encounters to understand the processes entailed in becoming a local. Then, I discuss that their willingness to become a local in Berlin is extensively related to their past experiences and the present socio-political situation in Turkey. Therefore, the local experience of Turkish newcomers is not only influenced by inclusionary practices in said mixed neighborhoods, but also because of the marginalization practices and structures in Turkey. So, it is a trans-local experience. The data comes from thirty in-depth interviews conducted by the author in the period spanning from October 2018 to March 2019 for a different research study.

Keywords

social exclusion, mixed neighborhoods, high-skilled youth, trans-locality

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Introduction

Hillmann (2019) stressed that ‘European cities have increased their scope of action, at the regional, national and even supranational, i.e. the EU level, by negotiating local solutions concerning migration and integration. On the one hand cities are reaching out to newcomers (“flow population”), on the other hand they are compelled to react, internally, to processes of displacement and exclusion to which the resident population (“stock population”) may be subjected’ (Hillmann 2019, p. 86). With the globalization and huge migrating populations, Lofland’s description of cities has become more valid: ‘To live in a city is, among many other things, to live surrounded by large numbers of persons whom one does not know. To experience the city is ... to experience anonymity. To cope with the city is ... to cope with strangers’ (Lofland 1973, p. ix-x). Urban social life comprises manifold dynamics and grids. City dwellers layer their systems of meaning; engage in various fields of social life in different social roles; all the while carrying out their everyday lives and positioning their existence in urban order. Social exclusion may remain latent in such a complex grid, whereas subtle exclusionary practices may result in discrimination or racism. Therefore, in this research, I analyze the immigration processes of Turkish youth focusing on the exclusionary practices and discourses they face. I would argue that the positionality of immigrants in a new social environment is multidimensional, and it demands attention because it demonstrates the exclusionary practices and structures that impede integration and social inclusion. In other words, I would argue that looking into a group of newcomers in a city is also a way of understanding the unequal structures, discriminatory processes and exclusionary practices in society.

From the immigration process to the manner in which immigrants familiarize themselves with the city, use the neighborhoods, establish social ties, challenge discriminatory discourse, and become a local in time; this article argues that young migrants encounter subtle forms of exclusion rendering their experiences and strategies worth discussing. This research study will contribute to the already extensive literature on the processes involved in immigrating to German cities as well as to the literature on urban marginalization by examining the lived experiences of social exclusion of newcomers of Turkish descent in Berlin. Besides its empirical offering, this research study is an attempt to conceptualize social exclusion along with the concept of public familiarity (Blokland 2003) and trans-locality. In this conceptual development, I emphasize that gaining public familiarity in urban spaces and becoming a local within a neighborhood are prominent manoeuvres that newcomers employ against social exclusion. At the same time, this debate leads us to conceptualize trans-locality which I use to propose that local practices (in Berlin) include past experiences and present situations in another location (in this case, Turkey) as well.

Research Design

Methodologically, this article is an attempt to reconsider the positionality of Turkish skilled professionals and students, and the multiple dimensions of exclusionary practices they face by looking into their everyday routines and familiarization processes to urban spaces. I define the positionality of newcomers based on their own constructions, because I argue that

the ways in which they position themselves as immigrants, as strangers, or as locals, changes their way of interaction and understanding of Berlin, on a larger scale.

Acknowledging their self-positioning, I aim to uncover the exclusionary structures they encounter in urban life.

In this research study, I used qualitative research methods and techniques in order to better understand the experiences and perspectives of Turkish newcomers in Berlin. I conducted thirty in-depth interviews based on questions I had used in an earlier study, with follow-up questions as necessary. That earlier research study focused on the comparison of Turkish newcomers' routines and urban space uses in Turkey and in Berlin. In this study, on the broad scale, I focused on the districts of Kreuzberg and Neukölln. However, I concentrated more specifically on the areas of Rollbergsiedlung in Neukölln and Wrangelkiez in Kreuzberg.

The participants of this research were composed of individuals between the ages of twenty-four and thirty; sixteen of them being female and fourteen being male. At the time, all interviewees had at least a university degree, while half of them were pursuing additional higher education, and one third of them had already obtained a graduate degree. These participants were all new migrants in the sense that they had moved to Berlin within the last five years. The selection was also grounded by ensuring that all interviewees believed that living in Berlin, despite the challenges they faced, was still a better choice than facing marginalization and insecurity in Turkey. In the research process, snowball sampling was used. Besides the interviews as the main source of data collection, I was able to meet up with them mostly in ad hoc meetings and gatherings of friends. As many of them knew that I was working on this topic, they sometimes gave examples from recent experiences regarding the topics we had discussed during the interviews. Although these findings were not integrated into this paper itself as quotes, they did provide a certain degree of enlightenment for the construction of the theoretical framework.

For the interviews, I categorized subtopics beforehand and started with the interviewees' decision to migrate to Berlin, their journey, their first days in Berlin, their first months and the challenges or exclusionary acts they had faced. We discussed all these experiences based on their comparisons between Berlin and the urban settlements in Turkey in which they had previously resided, including İstanbul, Ankara or İzmir. I inquired about the difficulties in finding a flat, forming social networks, or getting a job in Berlin. I also asked about exclusionary occasions and discriminatory urban encounters they had experienced. For most interviews, we met in a café for one to two hours and in a few of them I was invited to the flats of the interview partners. I used my phone, in all interviews, to record the conversations, but only after having obtained permission. The language of the interviews was Turkish. I later transcribed the records and while using the quotes in the analysis, I translated the selected parts to English. I analyzed the data based on subtopics and common answers after categorizing them under one title. Pseudonyms are used to identify interviewees.

A challenge I experienced in this research study, albeit one that put me in an advantageous position in the field, was being a recent Turkish graduate student newcomer to

Berlin myself. From an emic perspective it was easier to find common ground with interview partners, but it carried the risk of leading me to overlook important details. I tried to maintain a balance throughout the fieldwork both in the interviews and during the excursions I was invited to, while maintaining a self-reflexive disposition.

Background of Turkish Newcomers

The presence of the Turkish population in Germany is not a recent phenomenon. According to Germany's Federal Office for Statistics, 14% of 19.3 million immigrant people have Turkish roots (Staudenmaier 2018). On the other hand, Germany attracts skilled labor from different countries, particularly over the last three years, and Berlin is one of the popular destinations. Between 2005 and 2015, the foreign population of Berlin was around 400,000-500,000; whereas in the ensuing years 2016 and 2017, it has gone up respectively to 627,805 and 888,555¹. Along with this increase in immigration, this research showed that motivations to come to Berlin are dominantly circumstantial. To illustrate: when the reason for migration is based on education, this can be the result of learning about a graduate program from the suggestion of a friend, or from information from a university back home. Or, if the reason for migration is made on the basis of job opportunities, having a network in Berlin's labor market determines the decision to migrate. Besides these coincidental reasons, there are other umbrella reasons, such as the relatively cheap living conditions in Berlin (except housing), its lively social life, or free education opportunities. As for skilled professionals, the main umbrella reason is the recent demands of Berlin's labor market (based predominantly in the IT sector) that has led to vast call for highly skilled young professionals from all over the world. In short, the circumstances in Berlin coincide with the political and economic conditions of Turkey, where Turkish youth is yearning for a freer and reliable future and started to migrate.

'Migration-driven diversity should be anchored more firmly in civil society and volunteer activities' (Hillmann & Alpermann 2018, p. 17). Two factors that play a role in migrants' lives are the support from private social contacts and the assistance from institutions. 'Regarding migration, and especially the inclusion of refugees, the states formulate and implement their own housing, health, education, language, vocational training, and labor-market integration policies. They define the terms for access to social services' (Toğral Koca 2019, p. 549) However, for this sample, as they are students or employees who have been admitted and invited to the host country and as they have accepted to come of their own free-will; their migrant status is often overlooked. In the interviews, no mentions were made regarding the institutional support system provided to Turkish skilled migrants. Instead, interviewees usually established their own support mechanisms via personal relations or social media². These free-will and autonomous ascriptions are important for the analysis below.

¹ The statistics are retrieved from Statistisches Bundesamt <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Migration-Integration/Tables/foreigner-laender-time-serie.html>

² Since 2016, Turkish newcomers have actively used a closed Facebook group called 'New Wave in Berlin' to ask questions regarding bureaucratic issues, to obtain advice on various topics about the city and/or the country, or to meet with people who have recently arrived from Turkey.

Mixed Neighborhoods

A city is a place in which social inequalities are inevitably present. As there is usually a scarcity in resources, people are in a continuous struggle to carve out a niche for themselves. Socially and/or economically disadvantaged groups, thus, experience difficulties in accessing these resources. A migrant might not be disadvantaged necessarily; however, particularly in terms of networks and social and cultural capital, she/he might not be able to reach these resources. Or if she/he is able, she/he may still run into unfavorable discourses or acts.

In the relationship between social inequality, exclusion and mixed neighborhoods, it is important to know how to approach the term ‘mixed neighborhood’ itself, and beforehand to clarify what is a neighborhood. I define it as a collective of encounters, in some cases interactions and the whole spatial structure; while refusing the idea that it is equal to a community. Social mix, on the other hand, refers to all the different social, cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds in an urban space (i.e. city, district, street). I follow the concept of ‘public familiarity’ by Blokland (2003) and I regard regular everyday encounters as crucial to develop a feeling of attachment to a neighbourhood – a specific network system that people grow familiar with in time through everyday life.

I consider the factors in the formation of mixed neighborhoods from two sides. The first is the structure known as urban development. The structural and social changes in neighborhoods, such as gentrification or urban renewal projects, redefine the dynamics of an urban space and thus create new ways of social networking and everyday practices. For example, in the 1970s, Kreuzberg was a *bezirk* (district) in which great numbers of single Turkish men resided at dormitories near the Berlin wall (Özyürek 2015, p. 13). In the 1990s and onwards, Kreuzberg-Kottbusser Tor was called ‘Little Istanbul’ due to the large Turkish population and urban structure. Today, while Wrangelkiez may still contain examples of Turkish culture, anyone roaming the streets will also observe bars and coffee shops. It is common in large cities for neighborhoods to change over time structurally. But, it is important to acknowledge that social networks also change.

The second angle I scrutinize pertaining to the formation of mixed neighborhoods, is the influence of social networks on the composition of social mix. In a mixed neighborhood, policy makers may expect that due to the coexistence of different social classes and groups, that social capital will be enhanced in mixed neighborhoods (Blokland & Nast 2014, p. 482). However, Blokland and Van Eijk (2010) argued that mixed neighborhoods are not necessarily producing mixed networks (Blokland & Van Eijk 2010, p. 315). Furthermore, they stressed that proximity does not suffice to obtain the necessary resources (ibid., p. 313). I will show in the analysis that young skilled Turkish youth do not gain any of the required resources simply by knowing people in their neighborhood. I will not explicitly discuss whether this group of newcomers constitute any kind of diaspora as it is beyond the scope of this paper. However, whether defined as diaspora or not, migrants change the urban structure simply by using the city. Finlay (2017) argues that ‘As the formation of diasporas frequently entails practices and strategies of place and home making, diasporas imbue cities

with ‘new’ cultures, identities and economies, participating in the transformation of urban space’ (Finlay 2017, p.2). I would also argue that the ways in which newcomers respond to exclusionary language or practices in the urban space influence the social structure of those neighborhoods in time.

In *Kulturelle Vielfalt in Städten Fakten–Positionen–Strategien* (2018), Hillmann and Alpermann categorized the cities in Germany based on different types of welcoming migrant populations and their various approaches towards different mobility patterns (Hillmann & Alpermann 2018, p. 14). In the middle of Berlin’s industrial crisis in the 1980s, Kreuzberg was a socioeconomic urban area that received its share of massive worldwide migration. ‘Turkish “guest workers” settled in the area’s Old Berlin *Hinterhäuser* – rental buildings with inner courtyards dating from the *Gründerzeit* of the late 19th century – and the modernist high-rise social housing estates around Kottbusser Tor’ (Spirova 2013). Kreuzberg was predominantly a migrant and working-class neighborhood³. Historically, its location also significantly changed overnight with the demolition of the Berlin Wall. It was at the border of West-Berlin until 1989. With the demolition of the Wall and as the West and East came together, Kreuzberg suddenly became very centralized in the city. It transformed into a part of the Berlin city center after years of being on the outskirts, focused on industry. This also strongly influenced the housing prices at that time. In the 2000s, as Kreuzberg became more attractive to international young people with alternative and hipster lifestyles, it started to host a great number of coffee shops, vintage clothing shops, bars, clubs and so on. Today, Kreuzberg is a multicultural, gentrified urban area in which languages, cultures, networks and institutions are intermingled. The interview partners who live in Kreuzberg have either settled in Wrangelkiez or use this neighborhood the most frequently. This neighborhood is a place where many bars and coffee shops exist. However, it is not a sterilized, gentrified area in that it still includes a great number of other shops and different social groups.

Although there are differences in urban structure and historicity at certain points, in general North Neukölln resembles Kreuzberg in that it is an urban space with one of the highest percentages of immigrant residents and in that it has been exposed to considerable urban change through gentrification processes. In Neukölln, the most frequently used neighborhood among participants was Rollbergsiedlung, where Karl-Marx-Strasse and Hermannstrasse are located. These boulevards and their surroundings involve many bars, cafés and clubs where youth frequently go.

For the following discussions, it is important to keep in mind that both places are highly desirable for students, youth, and skilled professionals from all over the world, including Turkey. Correspondingly, finding flats or rooms becomes quite difficult; and yet, the youth population prefers specific parts of Kreuzberg and Neukölln to spend time in, to study in, to meet with friends at, and so on. One of the interviewees, Zeynep, who is a

³ Technically, Kreuzberg is a district (bezirk); as I only refer to specific areas of it such as Kottbusser Tor, I refer to it as a neighborhood only in terms of this context. Since I will be referring to Turkish/gentrified places that Turkish youth use, I did not consider the entire district.

twenty-five-year-old student, stated that the primary problem all her friends and acquaintances experienced is finding flats for rent, especially if they are not working but doing their graduate studies. Similarly, seven other interviewees mentioned the difficulty of finding a place in the Kreuzberg area although they would like to spend time there. The popularity of the area has increased competition and rent prices.

Understanding Social Exclusion

Social inequality, polarization and exclusion are components of urban development. For many years, scholars have focused on these themes in analyzing urban social life (Sassen 1991; Marcuse 1996; Thorns 2002; Hamnett 2010; Lelo et al. 2019). The relationship between social inequality, exclusion, and migration is also a long-standing debate in urban studies (Black et al. 2006; Bhopal 2012; Verwiebe et al. 2014; Faist 2016). I emphasize the case of Turkish youth from the perspective of their newcomer status in the city rather than their ethnic and racial identities. Therefore, in this research study, the aim is not to directly describe categorical mechanisms of discrimination or racism. Instead it is an endeavor to understand the subtle ways of social exclusion that new urbanites experience. By ruling out the debate on racism and discrimination, I do not ignore the fact that these practices exist. Racism and discrimination confront Turkish newcomers through various channels although they are not put on the table in this paper. In fact, in latent exclusionary practices, ethnic/national/cultural distinctions frequently emerge as a manner of exclusion. Tilly (1998) suggested that 'bounded categories' must be analyzed in order to understand persisting inequalities in society; because 'bounded categories' such as female-male, citizen-foreigner crystallize long-lasting/deeply entrenched inequalities (Tilly 1998, p. 4). I follow this idea throughout the article.

'In a policy context, social exclusion is most commonly used to describe a 'state' in which people or groups are assumed to be 'excluded' from social systems and relationships' (Popay et al. 2008, p. 33). Or, it can also be defined as 'typically a euphemism for poverty and disadvantage, providing a wider lens to understand the causes and consequences of unequal power relationships' (Popay et al. 2008, p. 39). Based on the collected data, I specify the most prominent factors that generate social exclusion for Turkish newcomers. These are the labor market, social capital, housing and language. First, contrary to popular opinion, finding jobs in the labor market is difficult for many educated Turkish graduates. In Turkey, the migration of young skilled professionals is often seen as brain drain and correspondingly it is assumed that they will be significantly successful in Europe and the United States because they have every tool they need to perfectly adapt to the western labor market. However, without any representativeness claim, this research gives hints that the status of young Turkish newcomers is changed with migration. For example, many graduate students from the well-known universities of Turkey start another master's degree in Berlin, even if they do not need or want such education, because it is the most eligible way of 'going abroad'. Similarly, many young professionals who were senior associates in their previous jobs in Turkey, applied and accepted junior associate positions in the new context of Berlin only for the sake of 'getting out'. Additionally, there are people who migrated with

political asylum seeker visas and they lost their jobs or titles⁴. Second, social capital is achieved over time with various channels and networks. Newcomers cannot easily gain access to these resources. Although this factor is temporary and many newcomers find ways to connect and create bonds, this may create a disadvantageous position for them at the beginning when facing multiple challenges. Third, housing is a prevalent problem in Berlin over the last few years which makes it difficult for newcomers to find flats. A dearth of flats for rent results in the selectiveness of landlords and competition among tenant candidates. Social exclusion towards Turkish newcomer youth, and likewise many other social groups, deepened with this factor. Lastly, language is often a channel through which Turkish newcomers feel isolated or discriminated against.

Migration is a structural, constitutional part of marginal urbanity (Hillmann, 2013, Max-Planck online lecture). I follow this idea and I take social exclusion as a result of both structural mechanisms in Berlin and of the newcomer status when Turkish skilled youth first set foot in the European Union. To see exclusion as a composition of different factors helps derive a better understanding of the position of migrants in mixed neighborhoods. These factors are mainly social structure, the labor market, networks, language and cultural capital.

Findings & Analysis

Facing Exclusionary and Dominating Practices in Urban Encounters

Regardless of social exclusion in temporary urban encounters, interviews showed that Turkish newcomers are not exposed to any harsh discrimination in peer to peer communication on a regular basis. The most important reason for this is their social networks. Except for two out of the thirty participants, all interviewees said that their closest social circle is made up of other Turks who came to Berlin for education or for a high-skilled job. Furthermore, their second closest social circle is composed of international graduate students or high-skilled professionals. Therefore, they are predominantly engaged in social relations in which discrimination or racism are not obtrusive.

The second reason appears to be the educational background of these Turkish young migrants. Almost half of the interviewees believe that their level of education and social cultural capital are effective in their relatively easier adaptation to Berlin as well as their unlikelihood of exposing explicit discrimination. However, it is important to keep in mind that adaptation does not necessarily mean that less racism and discrimination will be faced. ‘I live more comfortably here, because it is easier for me to adapt to this culture, in comparison to a Turkish guest worker in the 1960s. I have an education; I have the language; and this makes the way easier’ says Kaan, a twenty-seven-year-old law student. Additionally, like his Turkish peers, he has an intimate social circle that is composed of people from well-known prestigious universities in Turkey. This creates a closed and protected social environment as well as a familiar support system.

However, that is not to say that they are completely free of exclusion and that they

⁴ For more information on *Barış Akademisyenler*, (*Academics for Peace*), see <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/English>

have never experienced any act of discrimination. In the interviews, I asked whether they had any experience in Berlin that could be counted as racist or discriminatory. In doing so, my aim was not to collect examples of racism; rather, I wanted to see how Turkish newcomers evaluate the unpleasant experiences originating from racism or xenophobia. In other words, I aimed to understand their way of defining discrimination through their personal experiences. Almost all interviewees except two (who had moved to Berlin only a couple of months prior) stated that they had faced discrimination in one way or another. Moreover, like some other interviewees, Gizem, a twenty-five-year old graduate student in social sciences, expressed that they—Turkish high-skilled youth in Berlin—are living in socially unequal conditions and said that ‘We are all aware of this, aren’t we? But we think that it was worse being subjected to the discrimination in our own country. Here we can fight against hate crimes or racism. In Turkey, you cannot fight anymore. They are everywhere, powerful and you cannot do anything.’ Knowing, or at least believing, that there is possibility of defending one’s rights comforts Turkish newcomers. Especially, after they are accustomed to bureaucracy and the unwritten codes in the city, this perception helps them to cope with the inequalities in social life. This will be discussed later in detail.

Language Use & Social Exclusion

The use of language in communication is often tricky because innocent questions or comments in a conversation among people from different cultures and places may be destructive or unpleasant. I use the examples of exclusionary language to refer to the ways in which Turkish newcomers feel excluded in society. It is certainly not possible to cover all exclusionary practices and discourses but attempts to cover as much as possible in this short paper have been made.

‘It is so funny, but also annoying to hear ‘you do not look like a Turk’ or ‘you are so different from the Turkish people in Germany.’ I mean I am not nationalist but when I hear those words I felt like ‘Excuse me! Did you just say something good or bad?’ Hande, a twenty-eight-year old economist, was outraged because her national background was attached to an exclusionary discourse. Even though such expressions are rarely intentional; hearing them may create a barrier in the relationship of Turkish newcomers and locals or other migrants. Hande explained that when people say that Turks in Germany are usually conservative, covered and not-so-integrated, she feels that her national background is seen as underdeveloped, and that it is stereotyped; she is upset because of this thought.

According to the interviews, statements and questions that Turkish newcomers frequently receive from non-Turkish peers can be categorized as regarding financial situations, career planning, language sufficiency and cultural prejudices. Pelin, a twenty-five-year-old graphic designer, explained a recent situation with her landlord:

‘He always comes to see the flat, whether we take good care of the furniture etc., but he is so rude. Last week he came and saw a tiny scratch on the door, and he started to complain. Then, he said, ‘Can you afford to continue paying the rent in the following months? Because I do not want to chase after you to collect the payment’ We were shocked, I mean we have the contract, of course we will pay. It was out of nowhere and he just started to humiliate us over our potential financial insecurities. In fact, we do not have financial insecurities.’

Pelin expressed her disappointment because of this attitude, as if they were ‘students in a dormitory’ and she regarded this as connected to their foreign status. She also was surprised by how easily people can talk and ask about the financial status of Turkish people (more generally, migrants and refugees) whereas it is usually not very welcomed in Germany to ask one’s salary or income. Similarly, Hande told that she has been asked ‘Is your money enough for the rent in this neighborhood?’ while she was living in Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf. The idea that the Turkish population suffers from a poor financial situation is a generic mindset that comes from the current economic crisis in Turkey. However, the issue is not whether Turkish skilled youth makes good money in Germany or not. It is rather about how they feel when they are asked about their financial situation.

The second example of exclusionary language interviewees mentioned frequently was about career plans and German language sufficiency. These two are usually connected in questions or arguments. One of the interviewees, Eylül, a twenty-six-year-old graduate of international relations, commented on a memory that she described as very unpleasant:

‘I have a neighbor. I am not sure if she is racist or just a jerk, but she literally hates us, I do not know why. And once, at the doorstep, she complained about the music we played the other day and when I replied to her in English, she started to yell like crazy saying that I must speak German, because we are in Germany. I mean, I try to learn German, but I cannot explain myself in such situations in German yet. Some people do not understand that we are trying. They do not want to understand.’

As in the example of Eylül’s experience with her neighbor, not speaking German is not something Turkish youth prefer. But when they are exposed to exclusionary discourse due to their insufficient language skills, they feel frustrated. They would like to learn the language and for the most part, they want to learn for the sake of getting involved in social life. However, they sometimes encounter statements like ‘*You should learn German as soon as possible*’ or ‘*How do you plan to stay in Germany?*’ These expressions and questions are emotionally stressful for Turkish newcomers if they are in the adaptation period. Halil, a twenty-five-year-old journalist, recounted that it was so difficult to handle such expressions when he was so new to Germany, but after two years, he says he is not bothered by such statements. He also stated that:

‘Well, I already felt very bad about my status in Germany. I was a journalist and a student in Turkey, but when I took political refuge and came to Germany, I was nothing. I was not a journalist, and not yet a student. A lawsuit had been opened against me in Turkey. I lost my status. And telling people who I am now was already difficult. When they asked, ‘What do you do in Germany?’ or ‘What do you plan to do in Germany?’ I was just paralyzed.’

The last set of examples of social exclusionary language concern cultural prejudices and stereotypical judgements. As the AKP (Justice and Development Party) run government promoted and featured religiosity in the political scene and more than 50% of the Turkish population in Germany voted for the AKP⁵, Turkish youth might encounter questions

⁵ The AKP (Justice and Development Party) has been the ruling party in Turkey since 2002. In the latest parliamentary elections, in 2018, the AKP received 55.7% of votes from Turks in Germany; the percentage from

regarding religion or conservatism; such as ‘*Did you uncover your head when you came here?*’ or ‘*Do you drink alcohol?*’ My aim in this article is not to detect who perceives Turks like this or why they think in this way. I rather ask how Turkish young people reply to these questions. Berk explained, ‘Once, a German guy asked my girlfriend if she veils her head when she is in Turkey, well, we were shocked, does this question still exist? (*he laughs*) Some people do not know anything about their own small world and they only continue to speak with hearsay assumptions’. Similarly, Gözde, a twenty-five-year-old fine arts student, said:

‘When I tried to make new friends in the first months, I was trying to be in international environments because I wanted to have friends not just from Turkey, but from other countries and cultures too. The people I met were usually students of social sciences etc. so I did not face any stupid questions about Turkish culture. They knew about political stuff and everything in Turkey. However, once, I was asked if I drink beer or not. I did not understand and asked why he said something like that. He replied, ‘Well, I do not know, do Muslims drink?’ (*laughs*)’

The assumption is that Gözde is -or is likely to be – a practicing Muslim as she came from a country in which the Muslim population makes up the majority. These examples usually occur because of a lack of knowledge about other cultures and countries. They are not necessarily intentionally exclusionary; however, they create a ‘weird moment’, as Berk described it, which could be a barrier for fostering a real social tie. I also asked interviewees how they answer or cope with such discourses. They usually try to clarify misunderstandings about Turkish culture. Many of the interviewees also said that they feel responsible to explain the right and wrong facts about their culture since they believe that it can change the negative or prejudiced judgements.

Becoming a Local in the City

In this article, I use the concept of ‘public familiarity’ by Blokland (2014) and I ask how Turkish newcomers as migrants adapt to social life in public spaces and in which ways their ‘public familiarity’ to Kreuzberg and Neukölln affects their feeling of belonging as a tool to get around exclusion. For newcomers in the city, as they have few or no social ties at all, occasional and random social encounters are crucial initially. Living in Kreuzberg or Neukölln makes it easier for Turkish youth to adapt to the city structure since these neighborhoods offer familiar social structures. In many cases, Turkish newcomers are not willing to interact with other Turkish people, especially those who are conservative, religious or with a traditional point of view⁶. Therefore, temporary encounters with other Turks (i.e. getting to know each other with the owner of the späti (small grocery shop) around the corner) provide a standard and desirable type of social relation. Additionally, such familiarity has the potential to bring a sense of attachment to the neighborhood regardless of whether it is preferred at first or not.

Blokland and Nast (2014) define belonging as:

Berlin was 45.3% for the AKP. This statistical data was retrieved from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/secim/24-haziran-2018-secimleri/almanya-milletvekili-secim-sonuclari> on 12.11.2019.

⁶ The reason for this intentional withdrawal from such social networks will be clarified by the next section.

consist[ing] of an experience of being expected, accepted or tolerated as present, of having a reasonable understanding of the social codes and unwritten rules of the public space, of knowing enough about the street grid and built environment to find one's way easily, and of being able to assess what to expect from others (Blokland & Nast 2014, p. 1144).

Following their perspective, even though it may not lead to a sense of belonging, becoming a local for Turkish youth also requires the acceptance and recognition by others – and especially from other locals. To manage this, they need to somehow get into contact with, if not become friends with, them. For this, language is crucial. Previously, I discussed how language may result in feeling excluded, but it can also be a way of familiarization in time. Language appears to be an obstacle even in Berlin, where the proportion of the foreign-born population in the total population is 20%⁷ and in which English is by no means an exception. As language is not an immediately earned asset, newcomers face various challenges in the process of achieving adequate levels of local language. Many interviewees expressed that, as they started to understand German – even if they did not use it in their daily lives— they began to feel more like a local day by day. In other words, once they started to speak or at least understand German, they felt they become more familiarized. It is important to remember that becoming local remains a slow and messy process even after acquiring all the necessary skills like language or gaining public familiarity. To acknowledge this as a slow-going act of learning, know-how appears to be the first key factor of becoming local. Getting to know the urban structure (neighborhood use) and generating routines are two important tactics in the process of becoming a local.

Neighborhood Use & Daily Routines

The change in urban structure that alters the facade of neighborhoods has also an impact on the social structure. Gentrification and urban renewal are in fact very significant in rapidly changing neighborhoods. The varied neighborhood characters of Kreuzberg and Neukölln enable Turkish newcomers to adapt to two different environments at the same time. These two urban areas include both an alternative bohemian community that emerged with gentrification and a Turkish community that was established many decades before. Therefore, Turkish newcomers can more easily find a common ground in these neighborhoods. As they aspire to expand their networks into a more global community and as they are seeking variety in their new social relations, they display a great willingness to go to bars and cafés where differences are welcomed and embraced. ‘There is a café on that corner,’ said Ozan, a twenty-six-year-old master student who has lived in Berlin for two years, ‘on its door, it writes “AfD⁸ supporters are not allowed”. I like that café so much.’ He continues by saying that even though he is not a smoker, he likes the idea that people can smoke indoors and thus there is a relaxed environment inside. Gizem said ‘After Turkey, you know, all those bans and restrictions in the public arena, Berlin gives me great relief. Especially around here [in Neukölln], there are so many pretty places you can sit all day, get to know new people, chill

⁷ ‘Around 748,472 foreigners were registered as living in Berlin at the end of 2018, with roughly 37,200 of them having been added that year’ (Berlin-Brandenburg Office of Statistics, 2019).

⁸AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) is a far-right political party in Germany. It is known for its radical opposition against migrants and refugees, xenophobia and racism.

or work... do anything you like'. Besides, these cafés and bars in Kreuzberg and Neukölln usually provide Turkish menus, newspapers, journals and posters. Considering the research question, this creates a cultural familiarity and it usually functions as an intermediary between foreknown culture and recently engaged culture.

The twofold character of these two neighborhoods also operates in open public areas such as parks, squares or streets. LGBT member interviewees frequently mention that they could not feel comfortable in public spaces when they were in Turkey but here, they can express their identities more freely. 'People do not judge you when you walk down a street in Neukölln, I mean, of course, there are still many people especially from the Middle East who look at me as if I am a freak, but they are not the majority here and that makes the difference', stated Tolga. Neighborhood choices of Turkish newcomers for residency as well as for spending daily time depend on the social structure of the inhabitants that can offer diversity on one hand and cultural familiarity on the other. Interviewees expressed that in contrast to discriminatory discourses and feelings of isolation, they find Kreuzberg and Neukölln as safe places where they can express themselves freely while not completely detaching from their habits and cultural background. In other words, their neighborhood choice shows that it operates as a tool, as a carrier to cope with isolation and detachment.

Along with neighborhood choices a second question emerges in how Turkish newcomers use these urban spaces. This question is pertinent because it is not only the place of residency, but these most frequently used places in the city also unearth social exclusionary practices. Interviewees were asked to describe which places they go more often and what kind of challenges in using public spaces may occur due to their 'newcomer' status. By understanding this, public space use is determined by the self-positioning of the person as well as how their networks function as a decisive factor for neighborhood use. Halil stated that his first year in Berlin was quite challenging for him because he was aware of the possible opportunities in the city but at the same time he could not achieve them because he was lacking the necessary skills and capital. These opportunities are mainly occupational and, in some cases, pertain to the social networks. The most important resource was language according to him. In Berlin, a great majority of the population understand English, however as Halil expressed himself; 'At some point, to get more into the society, to have a closer relationship with people and to feel like a local, you have to speak the language. Otherwise, no matter what, you will always be a stranger'. The link between using the neighborhood and speaking the language is so strong that many other interviewees also stated that they feel uncomfortable when they cannot understand what is happening around them. All interviewees somehow tried to learn German and thus have attended German courses in different institutions. However, remembering the experience Eylül had with her neighbor who asserted that she needs to speak in German as she lives in Germany, Turkish newcomers may find themselves in a difficult position. Her experience was not exceptional. Although Berlin is accepted by many interviewees as one of the most open cities in Europe to newcomers, they also mention that exclusionary reactions still exist. Thus, I asked in what ways these reactions may influence the ways in which Turkish newcomers use public spaces. The interviews reveal that due to the mixed social structure of Kreuzberg and

Neukölln, discrimination is minimized, yet has not completely disappeared. Social exclusion, on the other hand, is always present. And in cases of social exclusion, they feel more open and comfortable in expressing themselves without hesitation as they develop a sense of belonging to Berlin rather than feeling as a stranger, but only when Turkish newcomers are not so 'new' anymore⁹. 'Berlin is so welcoming, I mean, the city offers you a lot and makes you comfortable and happy. How? It is just so mixed and varied... You can be whoever you want. And, if a person somehow tries to humiliate you or something, you can always play the card 'Freiheit für alle!' ['Freedom for everyone'] Berlin is a free city, if you are aware of that, you can defend your rights well', says Hande. This perception usually functions as a mechanism to claim their rights as newcomers.

Nevertheless, eliminating structural factors are not as easy as maneuvers against exclusionary language or hate speech. The most prominent example is about going to certain places and not going to others. It mostly results from financial situations and, correspondingly, the currency exchange rates of Turkish lira and the Euro. In the interview, Ozan laughed and said 'Tiergarten, Mitte or Charlottenburg... These places are beyond us, you know. I will not pay€4 for a beer. In Neukölln, you can drink it for €1. Those areas are also good, but they are just, I mean, not for us'. The point is that it is not important whether those districts are expensive or not. Because, in many bars around those urban areas, one can also find cheaper goods and services. However, the idea of Ozan shows the self-positioning of a Turkish newcomer. Regarding their use of urban spaces, I also tried to follow their everyday routines to understand how exclusion is felt and understood.

Trans-local Experiences

In the summer of 2013 in Turkey, crowds were pouring into the streets, protesting the neoliberal undertakings of the Turkish AKP government. Police violence was becoming intensified as protests grew. The nature of the protests was changing. It eventually became a voice against the government and its repressive ways of consolidating power. In the meantime, the AKP-led Turkish government was trying to oppress the growing protests. Youth played a fundamental role in these protests, which are known as the Gezi Movement; hence they became visible in public places by their acts and discourses. In a very short time, the Gezi Movement turned into a socio-political phenomenon to defend not only people's right in the city, but also their outcry against Erdoğan's neoliberal populism. Okumuş (2019) summarises Akçay's idea as 'Neoliberal populism pursued by Erdoğan's government [is] an amalgamation of neoliberal austerity measures and political Islam deepened the political and economic instability in Turkey especially over the past 5 years' (Akçay 2018 paraphrased in Okumuş 2019). Before and after the Gezi uprising, longstanding tensions amongst people continued to increase. Yet, Gezi was the starkest response to the marginalization of young, 'secular', alternative lifestyles and to socio-economic instability. However, for many young people in Turkey, hopelessness followed it.

'After the Gezi Movement, all hopes were gone. I was so hopeful, all of us were... We

⁹ The average time period to feel more comfortable and attached to Berlin is seven to eight months. For some interviewees it was six months, for others, it was a year and a half.

could never unite again like that' says Ozan, 'I find it more useful now to be here and continue to fight against violence and pressure. It is not worth struggling there anymore.' His words unveil the increase of unrest and reluctance of Turkish youth who migrated to Europe in recent years. Although the Gezi uprising was not *the* reason for their migration, it has an important impact on their perception about Turkey. 'Of course, it started with Gezi, we thought we could do something, and yet we saw that we cannot ...' says Sude, a twenty-nine-year-old PhD researcher in neurosciences. I do not claim that the Gezi Movement is a reason for Turkish youth to migrate; however, I would say that it is the symbolic happening of urban marginalization in Turkey'.

Interviewees frequently refer to their former lives in Turkey stating that their current situation is far better regardless of the difficulties and exclusion they encounter in Berlin. They usually mentioned that they were unhappy¹⁰ in Turkey and that they were marginalized by the dominant view and structure that had been imposed in recent years. I argue that their local experiences in Berlin are in fact trans-local experiences in which their past experiences like Gezi movement and the current socio-political situation in Turkey co-exist.

'How is your life in Berlin?' I asked the interviewees. Ozan replied, 'It was so positive at the beginning. I had friends, I was going out, not giving a shit about anything, but in time, as now I have to find a job and so on, my life is getting more difficult.' Minutes later, he added, 'But my worst day in Berlin is even better than the best day in 2016 Turkey'. In order to understand how Turkish newcomers cope with discrimination and social inequality in their lives, it is useful to probe into the nexus of Berlin-Turkey. 2016 was a tough year in Turkey given a string of consecutive terrorist attacks inducing and aggravating fear in public spaces. Like many others, Ozan thinks that the exclusion that they encounter in Germany is easier to cope with than being in a fearful, insecure environment in Turkey. This does not excuse hate speech or discriminatory acts, but the lived world of Turkish youth in Berlin is deeply shaped by the juxtaposition of socio-economic and political conditions in Turkey and the challenges they face in Berlin.

Although becoming a local is a useful way of eliminating social exclusion from one's daily life, it is not the mixed neighborhoods themselves which create those ways and tools. The main reason that Turkish newcomers are willing to stay in Berlin despite the exclusion and unequal structures is their previous experiences in Turkey and its current socio-political situation. It was illustrated by the Gezi uprising as a symbolic example of urban marginalization, although the movement itself was not the single incentive. There is a runaway situation in the past few years for young highly skilled people from Turkey to the west; there is unwillingness for the interviewees to return to Turkey. The main reason is that they feel socio-economically insecure and socially marginalized in Turkey. This creates a coping mechanism to endure the challenges and hardship of feeling alone or detached in Berlin. On the other hand, it can be a burden sometimes since the idea of 'I do not want to

¹⁰ I use the word 'unhappy' not out of my own inferences, instead I refer to the interviewees' expressions; 'I was so unhappy in Turkey' (Bora), 'Turkey was making me upset and unhappy.' (Gizem), '...my worst day in Berlin is even better than the best day in 2016 Turkey.' (Ozan).

turn back' might cause *anxiety to stay*. However, this is beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusion

Social exclusion sometimes occurs in ways in which tracing is not easy. It is formed by the organization of urban public space. It is reinforced by practice and language. For a newcomer, the city itself is a space presenting a wealth of opportunities and challenges. Even if the migrant is assumed to have the necessary knowledge and skills for a straightforward adaptation to the host city, it is shown in this research that these migrants still experience isolation, exclusion or detachment. I argued in this paper that social exclusion is one of the primary challenges that immigrants come across; and one way of getting around social exclusion is to become locals. Becoming a local is highly related to neighborhood use, creating daily routines, and achieving necessary tools such as language. I focused on highly skilled young Turkish migrants who came to Berlin within the last five years. Berlin offers a great variety of social and cultural opportunities to the new migrant groups. But in the meantime, exclusion and marginalization in urban social life persist. In fact, it is intensified in conversations; such as a trivial question about veil coverings or a simple advice on learning German. Focusing on the neighborhoods that are considered in this research, Kreuzberg and Neukölln, are two significant public spaces for Turkish youth to feel more comfortable and freer. These two neighborhoods provide both a familiar cultural order with existing Turkish settlements (but in a way that youth are not too close but still have it) and the European lifestyle that they are longing for – resulting from their education, social and cultural capitals, and worldviews. However, I avoided arguing that these two neighborhoods are the only places they use or that there is a neighborhood effect which is *the only reason* they feel attached to these areas or gain social networks. Finally, I argued that the daily experiences are trans-local experiences which means that what Turkish newcomers live through in Berlin relates closely to their past experiences in Turkey and their views on the current socio-political situation in Turkey.

To sum up, based on the existing Turkish culture and correspondingly the urban structure organized over many decades in Kreuzberg and Neukölln, highly skilled young Turkish people can form a freer alternative to Turkey. The socio-economic imbalance and social polarization amongst different lifestyles in Turkey unsettled the future plans and job opportunities of its high-skilled youth. After they migrated to Berlin, interviewees mostly have felt isolated or excluded until they get to know the city and become locals in their neighborhoods. By challenging or sometimes conceding subtle forms of social exclusion, they find their ways to become a part of urban social life. In this twofold effort, they stay in Berlin even if they have boundaries and hardship, rather than considering going back to Turkey. In other words, their wish to stay in Berlin comes from the idea that they will cope with the exclusionary acts by getting familiar with the urban social life first, and then by claiming their rights. However, they do not have the same hope for their own country, unless marginalization and social polarization are solved.

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