



Working Paper No. 14/2014

UCL Anthropology Working Papers Series

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**MADE IN GERMANY:
THE EXPERIENCES AND DECISION
MAKING PROCESSES OF MIGRANT
MOTHERS IN BERLIN**

Dissertation submitted in 2012 for the BSc Anthropology

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B.Sc. in Anthropology Dissertation

**Made in Germany:
The experiences and decision making processes of
migrant mothers in Berlin**

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Word Count: 10,988

I declare that this word count is correct to the best of my knowledge.

Signed:

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of B.Sc. in Anthropology (UCL) of the University of London in 2013

Abstract

This paper explores how migrant mothers in Germany attempt to actively create meaningful transnational identities for themselves and their children within the constraints of the German nation-state. Fertility levels below replacement level, alongside an upsurge in the movement of people across national borders, have made understanding the reproductive behaviour of migrants in Europe an area of vital demographic and political interest. However, discourses on migration and reproduction inherently involve more than a consideration of numbers, reflecting underlying concerns about cultural and social reproduction (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991). Germany, as a low fertility context with one of the largest migrant populations in Europe (Behr, 2006), provides a pertinent example of such processes at work. I approach these issues through integrating existing demographic and anthropological literature with my own ethnographic research focussing on the reproductive experiences and decisions of migrant mothers in Berlin. At the heart of these debates, migrant mothers emerge as important social actors, both challenging and incorporating multiple cultural influences into their reproductive lives in creative ways. However, such attempts are largely ignored and delegitimised by dominant notions of identity and belonging in Germany today.

Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Chapter 1 Migration and Reproduction	11
Chapter 2 Citizenship and Belonging	22
Chapter 3 Language and the “Mother Tongue”	33
Conclusion	43
Appendix	45
Bibliography	47

Acknowledgements

I thank my supervisors, Dr Sara Randall and Dr Ruth Mandel for all their advice, support and encouragement over the past year. I also thank Ralf Walther, for sharing his invaluable insights into Berlin and always finding time to help with my translation queries, and Naia Headland-Vanni for her indispensable proof-reading and positivity. Last but by no means least, I am sincerely indebted to all of my informants who shared their time with me over multiple cups of tea, and whose thoughts and experiences shaped the content and direction of this paper.

Introduction

“We hope that our children will have more of a feeling of home here than we do. Because they’re a different generation, maybe they will feel differently. Hopefully. I hope they will grow up in a better society, and that the walls in people’s minds will change soon. Or they will change it.”

(H, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

The (re)production of social and cultural life is highly political, inextricably bound in many ways to the biological reproduction of individuals (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991). Reproductive decisions and the choices parents make in raising their children have important implications for how individuals and communities define themselves. This makes the management of people, and their reproductive capacities, a significant component of the “political arithmetic” of modern nation-states (Kanaaneh, 2002:33). Below replacement fertility levels in many European countries over the course of the twentieth-century, in conjunction with an increase in migration, have made understanding the reproductive behaviour of migrants an area of vital demographic and political interest, as migrant fertility increasingly contributes to population dynamics and growth (Salzmann et al., 2010). However, in many contexts the reproductive capacities of migrant mothers, rather than being viewed as a healthy offset to negative population momentum, are instead constructed as a threat to national and cultural identity (Castaneda, 2008; Kent, 2008; Sargent & Cordell, 2003; Westoff & Frejka, 2007; Vanderlinden, 2009). Germany provides an example of a low fertility context where migrant reproductive behaviour occupies a contested realm in the social imaginary and the decisions of migrant mothers are constructed as existing in opposition to dominant cultural values. Such conceptions

reveal deep-rooted notions of identity and belonging, which seek to delegitimise the complex reproductive strategies of migrant women. Through my own ethnographic research in Berlin, Germany, it emerged how many mothers actively challenge dominant conceptions of Germany as a mono-cultural, mono-lingual and mono-national unit, through their reproductive decisions and the choices they make in bringing up their children, in an attempt to construct and maintain meaningful identities for themselves and their families. Migrant mothers therefore emerge as occupying a contested realm in the German social imaginary, while at the same time playing a vital role in shaping hybrid, transnational affiliations among migrant communities.

Migration to Germany

“We called for labour, but people came instead”

(Max Frisch, 1967:1)

Germany has an uneasy and at times fraught relationship to its migrant population. Despite the repeated assertion during the first forty years of labour immigration, which began due to labour shortages following the Second World War, that, “We are not a country of immigration”, the movement of people to work and settle in the country has increased dramatically throughout the twentieth century (Brubaker, 1996[1992]:174). In 2011, 7.4 million foreign nationals, representing 9 percent of the population (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2011) were recorded to be living in the country. Furthermore, around 16 million “persons of migrant origin” (“Personen mit Migrationshintergrund”)¹, make up 19.5 percent of the population (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2013b), and it has been estimated

¹ This common yet problematic term includes all persons who migrated to Germany since 1949 and their descendants, and all German nationals born in Germany who have at least one foreign parent (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2013a).

that one-third of the population under five years old is of migrant origin (Schmid & Kohls, 2010:179). However, the reality of a diverse, settled and growing migrant population in Germany has not undermined a strongly ethno-cultural view of nationhood (Brubaker, 1996), whereby naturalisation is largely conceived of in culturally assimilationist terms and dual-nationality is not legally condoned (Howard, 2008). These legal barriers to belonging construct many migrants as perpetual outsiders, with cultural practices existing in opposition to the social 'norm' (Mandel, 2008).

Hybrid Identities and the Third Space

Such notions ignore, and thereby delegitimise, the complex negotiations of identity and culture which anthropological studies have demonstrated to be implicit in the post-colonial migration experience (Gupta & Ferguson, 1991). Bhabha's notion of the "hybrid" stresses that, rather than being bounded, homogenous or one-dimensional, identity is a necessarily fluid and multi-dimensional concept (Bhabha, 1990). As all social identities develop in relation to larger contexts they must be recognised as consisting of elements of different origins (ibid.). Hybrid identities emerge in a "third-space", where the "syncretic, adaptive politics and culture" of hybridity inherently question nationalist notions of cultural purity (Bhabha, 1989:64), emphasising how, in today's world, cultural identities must be viewed as processes rather than essences (Clifford, 1988). Through an anthropological focus on the narratives and experiences of migrants themselves we can see how the spaces they inhabit inherently involve a negotiation of identity and a reworking of cultural codes and norms within Germany (Mandel, 2008). My research emphasises a complex, fluid and multifaceted reality where citizenship and language policies are challenged by migrant

mothers determined to create and maintain meaningful hybrid and transnational identifications for themselves and their families.

Methodology

My research centres on the reproductive lives and experiences of first- and second-generation mothers, who had themselves migrated to Germany or whose parents had migrated to Germany, in the Berlin districts of Kreuzberg and Neukölln, (in)famous in media and political discourses, as well as the German imaginary, for their large migrant populations (see Buschkowsky, 2012).

I conducted my ethnographic research during the summer of 2012 in Berlin. I contacted mothers directly through family organisations and mother-children groups. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with sixteen respondents. These included ten individual interviews and three pair interviews, ranging from twenty minutes to two hours in length. Respondents included five mothers from Turkey and one mother from Lebanon, who were born and raised in Berlin, and who would broadly be categorised as second-generation migrants. In addition, seven interviewees were first-generation mothers who had themselves migrated from Turkey to Germany, and whose children were born in Germany. The remaining three interviews were conducted with first-generation mothers from Syria, Sudan and Iraq.

My interview questions focused on reproductive decisions and family planning as well as the experience of having and raising children in Germany. Questions were phrased to be as broad and non-leading as possible to avoid the interviewer leading the interview in a particular direction and to enable respondents to interpret the questions as they wished in order to identify areas of interest to their lives. Interviews were conducted in German and

recorded using an external recording device. All participants were given and signed consent forms outlining the aims of the research project and the confidentiality of our conversations (see appendix 1).

Due to the broad, open-ended nature of the questions, interviews took unexpected turns, presenting issues which I had not previously assumed to be connected. As a result, questions were added and amended during the research process. For example, although none of my questions explicitly focussed on language, this emerged as a central theme through my interviews. I believe my position as a non-native German speaker could have influenced the mothers I interviewed to reflect on their own difficulties learning German, as well as the perception of bilingualism in Germany. This illuminates the central role of the researcher in anthropological research, as well as the benefit of ethnographic research, which allows areas of importance to informants to come to light by giving them the scope to take control over the theme and content of the interview.

None of my informants had finished their reproductive lives at the time of my interviews. This is limiting in one respect, as it is impossible to say what decisions they will make in the future, or how their opinions will change over the course of their reproductive lives. On the other hand, the factors which they see as important in influencing their reproductive decisions and experiences can be seen in the context of Germany today. Although the women I interviewed came from diverse backgrounds and had varying migration and family experiences, certain themes arose which illuminated how migration results in specific negotiations and constructions of identity in relation to reproduction and motherhood within the framework of the German state.

Mandel (2008) has highlighted the limitations of focusing on definitions of first-, second- or third-generation migrants. Through her ethnographic research of the Turkish German

population of Berlin, she demonstrates how important transnational links and flows of people across national borders question such categorisations. This also came to light through my interviews. Among my informants who were born in Germany, or who had migrated with their parents at a young age, there were a diverse range of relationships to their parents' country as well as to Germany. Many had returned to their parents' homeland for a period of time during childhood and some had attended school in more than one country. Furthermore, some of my informants had siblings who had remained after their parents emigrated and most had memories of summer holidays spent with family abroad. Among my first-generation informants most had migrated either through marriage to a Turkish or Arab husband in Germany, or had subsequently joined their husbands in Germany, while one informant had moved to study. Throughout my dissertation I shall distinguish between first- and second-generation informants, but deem it vital to stress the limitations of such categories.

Chapter 1

Migration and Reproduction

The relationship between migration and reproduction has emerged as an important field of demographic and anthropological inquiry in recent years, as the fertility of the immigrant population increasingly contributes to national population dynamics in low fertility contexts. A key issue in demographic studies is the adaptation of migrants to the reproductive “norms” of the receiving country, and how this relates to the duration of stay (Scott & Stanfors, 2010), an important part of estimating the contribution of migrant fertility levels to national population dynamics over time. Many studies attempt to evaluate the economic, social and cultural ‘integration’ of migrant groups based on their convergence to the fertility rate of the host society (Coleman, 1994; de Valk, et al., 2004). However, demographic theories have been viewed critically in anthropology for relying on assumptions that attempt to explain fertility differentials at a group level while failing to recognise the dynamic political, historical and culturally rooted experiences of individuals (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991; Greenhalgh, 1995). Reproductive decisions emerged through my research as a process rather than a fixed ideal. Economic, social and cultural factors are seen to influence, yet not determine, reproductive decisions, as women negotiate and incorporate various factors into their reproductive lives, highlighting the culturally and socially embedded nature of biological reproduction (Bledsoe, 2004). As anthropological inquiry has shown, reproduction is also inherently political, as discourses on reproduction at the national level often reveal assumptions about group identity and belonging, where some groups are encouraged to reproduce while the reproductive behaviour of others is represented as deviant or threatening (Chavez, 2004; Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991; Kanaaneh,

2002). This is increasingly the case in Germany, where political and popular discourses frequently construct migrant fertility, especially of the Muslim population, as a threat to national identity and security, discrimination which was actively felt by my informants in their daily lives.

Adaptation

Everything changes when you have children, I would like to have more, but it's too stressful today. Everything has changed, all the financial things. If I compare my childhood to that of my daughter, they're too spoilt. They always want more, but I also want to be able to offer them something. Everything's financial.

(N, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

The adaptation hypothesis posits that socio-economic conditions in the host country will gradually lead to migrant fertility levels coming to resemble those of the native population, as migrants adapt to socio-economic norms (Sobotka, 2008). For example, Mayer and Riphahn (2000) attribute the decline in the fertility of Greek, Spanish, Italian and Turkish migrants in Germany to economic differences between host and sending countries, as a result of the increased opportunity costs of having children. Kanaaneh (2002) demonstrates a similar process in her ethnography of Palestinian reproductive strategies. She notes how a need and desire for increased material and social investments in children due to modernisation has resulted in many families opting for smaller family sizes. However, while my informants consciously expressed the opportunity costs of having a large family, cultural and social factors were actively integrated into their reproductive strategies in complex and multi-faceted ways.

Assimilation

It's not just financial. We want to offer, to give, our children something. It's not a problem if everyone has 5 children, but to care for them, and to give yourself up to that - we don't want that... Naturally I want the best for my children, private schools, the best education, university, but it's not financially possible. As good as it can be, lots of contact and openness, that's really the most important thing.

(H, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Family planning decisions are not fully determined by economic factors in the host society, instead providing a framework within which women make active decisions regarding their reproductive lives, which are also subject to change over time, factors rarely captured in quantitative studies (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991; Greenhalgh, 2005). A report by the Federal Institute of Demographic Research claims that the fall in births in Germany, especially in the West, is foremost due to the cultural incompatibility of women having a career as well as a family (Bujard et al., 2012). The demographic theory of assimilation claims migrants will gradually adapt to the social and cultural norms of the host society, accounting for the fall in the total fertility rate (TFR) of migrants in many European contexts (Schmid & Kohls, 2010). This view was mirrored by one of my informants, who expressed the difficulty of having a career alongside a large family. However, rather than determining the number of children she desired, these limitations were integrated into her reproductive strategy through child spacing:

I always wanted 4 children... I have two, but I also want a career... Now the little one is older and I want to work, and if I have another child I would have to forget it. Here, they only give jobs to people who haven't been at home for too long, and I have already been at home for a long time with the children. If I had to stay at home again it would be very difficult to find a job. I hope first to find a job, a year, two years, and then maybe to think about having another child.

(F, first-generation, Sudanese, two children)

These examples demonstrate the limitations of relying purely on demographic theories based on statistical data. Family planning decisions are not fully determined by social and economic factors of the country of residence, instead providing a framework within which women make active decisions regarding their reproductive lives. An anthropological perspective demonstrates how mothers incorporate and negotiate dominant cultural norms and economic constraints into their reproduction decisions.

Generational Differences

As the child of a guestworker, it was difficult. As an only child I was always alone... I didn't want the same for my children.

(H, second-generation, Turkish German, two children)

My daughter is already 19 and she won't marry for the next 6 years, I hope. I don't want her to get married so early. One side is good. I'm still so young, with 2 grown-up children [19 and 14 years old]. Now I can do everything that I couldn't do before. Either one should do it really early, and have children afterwards, or you have them as early as possible. I also stayed young. I travel a lot now. I am doing everything that I couldn't do before.

(S, 38 years old, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Many of my informants noted important generational differences between their own circumstances and those of their parents' generation. Although demographic studies have highlighted differences between the fertility of migrants and their descendants, demonstrating how the fertility rate of subsequent generations adapts to the host country norm (Garssen & Nicolaas, 2008; Schoenmaeckers, et al., 1999), these are rarely examined in demographic studies of German migration and reproduction, as the data sets available tend to differentiate between migrants on the basis of nationality, rather than their

migration background or country of birth (Schmid & Kohls, 2010). This is particularly problematic in Germany where, despite changes to the citizenship law in 2000 allowing migrants to obtain German citizenship under certain conditions, naturalisation rates are incredibly low (Diez & Squire, 2008). Therefore, many second- and third-generation migrants do not hold German citizenship and are problematically categorised as foreigners (Howard, 2008). This demonstrates a fundamental limitation of quantitative approaches, which are limited in their analysis by the data available (Sobotka, 2008). Furthermore, the complex constellation of cultural and personal factors which emerged through the conscious reflection of my informants on their own and their parents' reproductive life histories and experiences cannot be captured quantitatively. The mothers I spoke to actively reflected on the reproductive expectations of their families and friends, challenging and integrating them into their reproductive lives, for example through child spacing:

My husband and I always wanted to have children. We waited one year because we wanted to have a bit of time and security. After one year we decided to have a child, and we did. It used to be that people got married and had children straight away. That we waited for a whole year, naturally [our families] commented... I told them I'm going to wait a year, focus on work, and then I'll have a child. And that's what I did, so it wasn't a big deal.

(S, second-generation, Turkish German, two children)

An anthropological focus demonstrates how mothers reflect on their own experiences growing up, as well as those of their parents, and how these influence their reproductive decisions. While partially upholding demographic theories based on the influence of economic, social and cultural influences on fertility, my research emphasises the need for a more nuanced approach, integrating the role of individual agency, as well as cultural perceptions and expectations, in reproductive decision making.

Stratified Reproduction and German discourse on high/low fertility

Especially when I am outside with my children, when Germans or others see us, they stare. A woman with so many children! As if I don't know what they are thinking, 'So many children' ... They really gape at us, they don't talk, just stare. I don't say anything. When people say something to me, then I will answer, but when people just stare at me like that then I don't react, I ignore it. How can you answer a look?

(J, first-generation Lebanese, four children)

They look at you like you're a foreigner, like I'm a dangerous person.

(S, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Anthropological research has demonstrated how discourses on migrant fertility often mask underlying ideological assumptions rather than empirical fact, a process which can also be seen in Germany today. Highlighting the inherently political nature of biological and social reproduction, Ginsburg and Rapp (1991) describe how, “Throughout history, state power has depended directly and indirectly on defining normative families and controlling populations” (ibid:314). The authors build on Colen’s (1990) concept of “stratified reproduction” in order to demonstrate how often within a population some women’s reproductive capacities are valued, “while others are despised” (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1991:3). Sargent and Cordell (2003) demonstrate this process through the differential treatment of women in France, highlighting how while French public policy has taken an overall pro-natalist stance throughout the twentieth century, it has been decidedly anti-natalist in regards to migrant populations. Similarly, exploring the media portrayal of Latina reproduction and fertility in the United States, Chavez (2004) describes how anti-immigrant sentiment during the 1980s and 1990s was specifically focused on the reproductive capacities of Mexican immigrant women, which were constructed as

“dangerous, pathological” and “abnormal” (ibid:173). This alarmist rhetoric contributed to the construction of Latina reproduction as a threat to a US society constructed in racial and demographic terms, set in contrast to the normative reproductive behaviour of white, Anglo women, masking underlying racist prejudices. As Chavez explains, “in societies with competing and often unequal social groups split along various lines of race, ethnicity, sexuality and immigration status, the biological and/or social reproduction of one or all of those groups can be the target of public debate and state policies aimed at controlling reproduction” (ibid:174). This demonstrates how the rhetoric surrounding the relationship between migration and reproduction inherently reflects the value of children for the reproduction of a nation’s population.

In recent years, the low fertility of “ethnic” Germans has frequently been discussed, in academic, media and political discourse, in relation to the (often exaggerated) higher fertility rates of the migrant, especially Muslim, population, which is constructed as deviant and threatening to national identity. The “German Demographic Challenge” of birth rates far below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman, an ageing population, falling population size and shrinking working age population have made migration a central political issue, as well as affecting, “how Germans see themselves and how they define themselves as a nation state” (Behr, 2006:465). In their analysis of the German press, Stark and Kohler (2004) reveal how discussions of low fertility are often appropriated in order to discuss political, economic and cultural issues outside of fertility concerns themselves. Similar ideological presuppositions are reflected in academic studies of migration and fertility in Germany. Turkish migrants and their descendants, as the largest minority in Germany, are often treated separately in demographic studies, and the differences in fertility level, age at marriage and age at first birth given a prominent

position. For example, Schmid and Kohls (2010) claim that Turkish migrants contribute the largest number of children to the total population in Germany than any other migrant group, while failing to make clear that they are also the largest minority group in Germany, thus implying a greater disparity in individual fertility levels than is actually the case. Furthermore, using data of “active insured persons”, the authors distinguish between “high” and “low” fertility migrant groups. While neighbouring countries and former European guest-worker countries have a TFR of 1.0-1.3, lower than the German average of 1.4, women from Africa, Asia and Turkey are categorised as “high fertility” groups, despite the range of a TFR of 1.8-2.2 being barely above replacement level. Furthermore, upon inspection, the Turkish population, with a TFR of 1.8, have just half a child more than the German average. In addition, with a mean age at birth of 28.83 years, Turkish German women are less than two years younger than the German mean of 30.48 years (ibid). Chavez (2004) notes a similar treatment of Latino fertility in the US. While media reports emphasised the “substantially” higher fertility rate of Latina mothers, it was actually only one more than the American average, “modest in comparison with the rhetoric surrounding Latina fertility” (ibid:178). In their analysis of Muslim fertility rates in Europe, Westoff and Frejka (2007) highlight a similar disparity between alarmist discourse and demographic reality. Their study reveals that although the fertility of the Muslim population in Europe is slightly higher than that of the general population it is consistently falling, often faster than among non-Muslims. The authors thereby dispel right-wing claims of a demographic takeover of “European” society (ibid.). Concerns regarding the rapid growth of the Turkish or Muslim population can be seen to emanate from popular perceptions rather than statistical evidence (Kent, 2008). These examples highlight the political and social nature of reproduction in Germany, as well as the importance of viewing reproduction as more than a question of numbers (Bledsoe, 2004).

As Vanderlinden points out, “Rather than being perceived as a healthy offset to negative population momentum”, the perceived higher fertility of the Muslim population creates “socio-political anxiety about a future Muslim majority and the creation of a “parallel society” incongruous with Germany culture and democracy”, as well as fears of the “Islamisation” of German society, emanating from an ingrained and persistent notion of a homogenous German people, or “Volk”, united by blood ties, language, culture and customs (Vanderlinden, 2009:267). Despite changes to naturalisation and citizenship laws in 2000, which made it possible for migrants and their descendants to become citizens (Howard, 2008), migrant reproduction continues to be constructed as a threat to the existence of the German nation as a unified cultural and biological unit (Castaneda, 2008). Certainly the most vocal and prominent proponent of such a view is the ex-Berlin finance minister and author Thilo Sarrazin. In his controversial book “Germany is doing away with itself” (‘Deutschland schafft sich ab’) he claims that, "If the birth-rate of migrants remains higher than that of the indigenous population, within a few generations migrants will take over the state and society" (Sarrazin, 2010:360). Implicating Turkish and Arab migrants as the worst culprits in such a demographic “take-over”, he claims that a failure to integrate, low labour market participation, high dependence on the welfare state (ibid) and the propensity of the population to produce “little girls in headscarves” (“Kopftuchmädchen”) (Berberich, 2009)² will result in the cultural and social disintegration of German society, as well as the population becoming less intelligent (Sarrazin, 2010). Despite the absurdity of his claims, the book has sold over a million copies, making it the most popular political book of the decade (Spiegel Online, 2010). Furthermore, according to a poll cited by the

² Following his comments in this interview, the German Turkish Association (TBB) unsuccessfully took Sarrazin to court for inciting racial hatred. However, the decision of the German state prosecutors that Sarrazin’s comments represented "a contribution to the intellectual debate in a question that was very significant to the public" were recently overturned by the UN committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, who claim his comments represent ideas based on racial superiority and hatred (Werner, 2013).

Bild, a mass circulation German daily newspaper roughly equivalent to the *Sun* in Britain, 18 percent of those asked said they would vote for Sarrazin if he ran for election. In addition, 89 percent of *Bild* readers who responded to an online questionnaire answered positively to the statement “Sarrazin’s theories have convinced me” (Solms-Laubach, 2010). Such views demonstrate the inherently political nature of reproduction and the contested landscapes migrant women occupy when negotiating their reproductive lives.

In her ethnographic study of a fertility clinic in Berlin, Vanderlinden (2009) explores how the experiences of patients reflect the cultural politics of belonging in Germany. Viewing the fertility clinic as a “microcosm of larger societal tensions surrounding social reproduction, ideologies of inclusion and the politics of difference” (ibid:266), she reveals how Turkish German infertility patients experienced greater suffering and distress as a result of their dual stigma as outsiders in both German mainstream and Turkish culture. Migrant experiences of involuntary childlessness are ignored in media accounts and social and political discourses in Germany, with hyper-fertility associated with migrant populations while infertility is seen as an ethnic German problem. This lack of recognition is compounded by German insurance policies which create a “two-tiered medical system” catering to the privileged, who are more likely to be ethnic Germans (ibid:268).

Furthermore, in media accounts, Turkish German patients seeking fertility treatment are, “castigated for using the German medical system to reproduce more foreigners, already viewed as burdens on German society” (ibid:272). Thus, she claims, “the national angst” regarding German culture is “condensed onto the singular acts of biological reproduction. In this way, individual procreative decisions become politicised as sites and signifiers of the contested constitution of the German body politic” (ibid:272). Political and media discourses emphasising the threatening and deviant nature of migrant reproduction were

sensed by my informants in their everyday lives:

Sometimes I do get the feeling, when I'm riding the bus or something, that if my daughter cries, then suddenly people react as if I can't look after my own child. But if a German lets their child cry, then no one say anything at all. I've noticed this more than once. (N, second-generation Turkish German, 2 children)

People always look, sometimes people make problems. It's difficult [as a mother], more difficult than in Turkey

(Z, first-generation Turkish, two children)

The preoccupation with seeing Germany as a culturally and biologically homogenous entity makes it impossible for immigrants to feel fully accepted and excludes them from being fully incorporated into society, ignoring the multiple and complex ways mothers negotiate between different cultural codes and norms in order to construct a meaningful sense of belonging for themselves and their families.

Chapter 2

Legal Barriers to Belonging in Germany

I laugh when people say “I am German, I have a German passport.” Nonsense. You’re a German citizen, but you can’t hide that you look like you come from somewhere else and they let you feel that. If you’re walking down the street and someone shouts, “Fucking foreigner”, they’re not going to ask you what citizenship you hold, they’re judging you by what you look like... Citizenship might be shared but the German mentality hasn’t changed yet. It won’t change, it really won’t change, not even in the next generation, because the Germans carry on bringing up their children in the same way, how they want it to be.

(H, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Constructions of citizenship and national belonging, relating to Germany on the one hand and their own or their parents’ country of migration on the other, emerged through my interviews as an important area of frustration and concern. Modes of cultural belonging were conceptualised foremost through immediate and extended family networks, with an evident enduring emotional attachment to the nation of their own heritage as well as to Germany. However, attempts by mothers to construct and impart a meaningful sense of belonging to both places were seen to be hindered by German citizenship laws and practices, which instead create a sense of conflicting and incompatible interests. Germany has a long history of an exclusive and ethno-cultural definition of citizenship, which has hindered the successful incorporation of many immigrants and their descendants into the German body politic (Brubaker, 1996[1992]; Mandel, 2008). Despite, and partly because of, changes to the citizenship laws in 1990 and January 2000, many migrant communities

continue to feel disenfranchised, ignored and in some cases actively discriminated against in their attempts to actively construct and maintain identifications to more than one place, particularly given the continued lack of formal recognition of dual nationality. The family thus emerges as a central nexus through which creative forms of transnational identification and belonging are negotiated and constructed, destabilising dominant notions of fixed boundaries of national and cultural identity that continue to be represented by citizenship laws in Germany.

Citizenship, Identity and Belonging

You can never truly belong in Germany, you feel it. They judge you by how you look, not what citizenship you have

(N, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Naturalisation rates in Germany, especially among the Turkish community, are notoriously low (Anil, 2007; Howard, 2005). Most of my informants, although eligible, had not chosen to naturalise, and this was expressed in relation to the belief that, regardless of citizenship status, it was impossible to truly belong in Germany. As Brubaker argues, “definitions of citizenship continue to reflect deeply rooted understandings of nationhood”, which have real consequences for the civic incorporation of migrant communities into the body-politic of nation-states (Brubaker, 1996[1992]:3). Many theorists have focussed on the citizenship practices of modern nation-states as a lens through which to examine modes of identification and belonging. As Diez and Squire describe, “Citizenship might be defined both as a nodal point that draws together notions of belonging, access, rights and obligations, and as an institution around which concepts such as the nation and political community are articulated” (Diez & Squire, 2008:566). National formulations of

citizenship inherently involve the delineation of boundaries between imagined communities, making the legal definition of citizenship a “powerful instrument of social closure”, where the non-citizen exists as a “residually defined outsider” (Brubaker, 1996[1992]:23). Thus citizenship is more than a legal status, also framing a “broader discourse of national identity” (Diez & Squire: 566).

No country has received as much attention and criticism as Germany in social science studies of national citizenship policies (Howard, 2008). While notions of citizenship and nationhood are not static, but constantly negotiated, contested and reworked through time and place (Brubaker, 1996[1992]), throughout the twentieth-century Germany has relied on a restrictive notion of citizenship based on descent (*jus sanguinis*), rather than the more inclusive formulation of citizenship based on place of birth (*jus soli*). As a result, many second- and even third-generation migrants remain perpetual foreigners. This reflects an enduring ethno-cultural and differentialist understanding of nationhood, whereby the nation is understood foremost as an ethnic community, “independent of the institutional and territorial frame of the state” (Brubaker, 1996[1992]:123). Brubaker argues that these ideas are rooted in a Romantic understanding of the nation as an organic entity united constituted by a *Volksgeist* [national spirit] emanating from a people united by “language, custom, law, culture and the state” (ibid:9). Citizenship (*Staatsangehörigkeit*, literally ‘belonging to the state’) is therefore taken to express nationality (*Volkszugehörigkeit*, ‘belonging to the people’). As a result, becoming a German citizen requires becoming German “in some thicker, richer sense than merely acquiring a new passport” (ibid:178). Distinctions between citizens and non-citizens can thus be seen to emanate from a “quasi-‘natural’ distinction between the two that cannot, or can only exceptionally, be transgressed” (Diez & Squire, 2008:567). Citizenship practices and discourses on national identity within Germany continue to support the notion of a culturally homogenous ethnic

community (Green, 2005; Diez & Squire, 2008). As my research demonstrates, such constructions present legal and conceptual barriers to the transnational spaces inhabited by migrant communities, thus hindering the incorporation of many immigrants and their descendants into the German body-politic.

Citizenship Decisions and the Family

*I'd like my daughter to go back at least once a year, to visit my parents.
Relationships are important, family relationships. They should also be there for her.
She should also experience some things herself, things I experienced, just for a
short amount of time, but that is alright. The cultural side is also there. For
example, we have Eid, and she should know about it and maybe enjoy it like
someone in Turkey, to have a feeling of belonging for Germany and also for Turkey.
(A, first-generation Turkish, one child)*

Germany's reliance on an ethno-cultural definition and understanding of citizenship stands in contrast to the complex and multi-faceted constellations of identity and belonging to more than one nation, which are a reality lived by a large proportion of the country's growing and increasingly settled migrant population (Mandel, 2008). Many of my informants articulated an enduring emotional and cultural bond to more than one country. This involved an active role on the part of mothers to maintain cultural and social ties, for example through frequent travel between countries and sustaining family relationships that cross national borders. The reality of a settled migrant population within Germany, many of whom would now be categorised as third- and even fourth-generation, emphasises the long-term construction of strong and enduring family networks, which constitute a vitally important part of their identities, as well as the places they inhabit (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2011). As D, a second-generation Turkish German mother of two children, who was herself born and brought up close to where she now lives in Berlin, explained, "I can't

imagine [living in Turkey], because my parents and family, they're all here. I don't have anyone there. Why should I move there? Everyone's here". She describes her decision to naturalise as based foremost on her marriage to a Turkish man, whom she could not bring to Berlin without German papers; "I didn't want the German citizenship at all, but I just did it because my husband wanted to come here and then it stayed like that." Such constructions of identity and belonging, rooted in transnational relationships, give weight to Davis' argument that the family domain must be taken into account in discussions of where political power resides and how it is organised, rather than relying purely on legal definitions of citizenship and national belonging. As she states, "Gender, sexuality, age and ability, as well as ethnicity and class are important factors in determining the relationship of people to their communities and states" (Davis, 1997:16). Furthermore, these emotional and cultural attachments were not seen by my informants as contradicting equally resonant ties to Germany:

I would never tell [my children] what to do, but I would like to show them, so that they might also want to live in Turkey in the future. But I think of course they will have children and live here, because they grew up here...Because of my children I would of course stay in Germany too, like my parents did for us. It's a circle...It's also my homeland here, I can't say that only Turkey is my homeland. After six months in Turkey I would also miss it here.

(S, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Recognition that their lives and those of their children were indelibly tied to more than one place highlights the active and creative construction and maintenance of complex identities transcending borders between nations. Recent studies of migration have highlighted such "transnational" identities as an enduring reality of modern nation states, albeit one which is often overlooked and undervalued (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2011). This highlights the fact that culture and identity are not static, but must be understood as existing in constant forms of translation, resulting in "hybrid" forms of identity among migrant communities,

conceptualised as a “third space” where new and original constructions of identity and authority emerge (Bhabha, in Rutherford, 1990:210-211). However, Mandel argues that Turkish Germans in particular, as social actors constructing and occupying transnational spaces, are conceptualised in the German social imaginary as “permanent outsiders inhabiting an illegitimate moral space beyond the limits of the German nation” (2008:11). This lack of social recognition delegitimises migrant claims to identity and belonging within Germany, a fact pertinently symbolised in current citizenship laws and practices.

German Citizenship Reform – The Duty to Choose

I had to decide, well I didn't decide actually, I just lost one , because I had both. After the new law you weren't allowed both. I had taken up the Turkish nationality again, so because of that I just lost my German citizenship automatically. Suddenly I was landless. I wasn't given any warning...You don't have any right of residency anymore, in a legal sense, no work rights, nothing, and then I was scared, we were scared...I was born here, I grew up here, and the funny thing is, now I just get a three-year residency. Because I was pregnant and I took maternity benefits I only got two years, and now that I have two small children I still only get three year rights. I can only get longer when I don't get "help". I would say I'm a Berliner, but that's the law. I could apply for German citizenship but I don't want it. I'm not going to go and do some tests, I mean, hello? Something isn't right with the laws. It's completely wrong...I was born here, grew up here, studied here, worked here and I'm treated like I just arrived. It makes me sad.

(H, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

The experience of H is a pertinent example of the continuing limitations of Germany's citizenship laws in relation to the incorporation of migrants into the body-politic. The new Nationality Act, championed by the Green Party in coalition with the Social Democratic Party in 1999, represented an ambitious attempt at liberalisation, by allowing dual

citizenship and easing naturalisation requirements. However, a compromise had to be reached following a huge mobilisation of xenophobic public opinion against the bill led by the centre-right Christian Democratic Union and their sister party in Bavaria, the Christian Social Union, which claimed that allowing dual citizenship would create divided loyalties, discourage integration and result in terrorist links between countries (Howard, 2008). The revised law represents a hybridised version of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* (Göktürk, et al., 2011). While introducing the recognition of entitlement to citizenship based on place of birth, it fell short of significantly altering the ethno-cultural perception of citizenship (Green, 2005). For example, although the length of residency necessary to qualify for naturalisation was reduced from ten to eight years, a German language test and oath of allegiance were introduced, adding to the ethno-cultural definition of citizenship. Anil (2007) suggests that these requirements actively discourage many Turkish Germans from naturalisation, a view supported by H's indignation at having to take a test in order to prove her German identity despite spending her entire life in the country. In addition, a loophole that previously had allowed many naturalised foreigners to reapply for their former nationality following naturalisation was closed (Green, 2005), resulting in many of those who had obtained dual nationality in this manner suddenly having their German passports revoked. Most significantly, the law introduced the principle of *jus soli* for children born on German soil after 1990 to foreign parents, provided their parents have held a legal residence permit for eight years or an unlimited residence permit for three years, have steady paid employment and are not reliant on the welfare state (Howard, 2008). However, Howard argues that these specifications effectively prevent the acquisition of German citizenship for up to sixty-percent of children born in Germany since the law has taken effect (ibid:53). Furthermore, under the 'option-model', eligible young people must choose between nationalities before the age of twenty-three, or risk

automatically losing their German citizenship (Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration (BAMF), 2012). Green argues that formal opposition to dual nationality discourages naturalisation, resulting in a legal definition of citizenship which, while paying lip service to the concept of *jus soli*, continues to operate on exclusionary terms (Green, 2005). This is backed up by a study by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), in which 67 percent of non-German nationals stated that the desire to retain their nationality was a significant factor discouraging them from applying for German citizenship (Worbs, 2008). Comments from my informants such as, “If I can't have both [nationalities], I'll keep my Turkish one” (N, second-generation Turkish German, two children) support such findings. Despite changes to the citizenship law in Germany, identifications to more than one country continue to be excluded from formal definitions of citizenship, thereby denying a meaningful sense of belonging to a large proportion of the migrant population.

Renewed pressure to review the existing citizenship law emanates from the experiences of the first cohort affected by the ‘option model’, who reach their twenty-third birthday this year (Die Welt, 2013). In recent months, high profile instances of young people having their German nationality revoked as a result of bureaucratic inconsistencies or failure to choose by the deadline have revealed limitations and complications inherent in the current law (The Economist, 2013). Furthermore, under European Union law, children of European citizens born in Germany can hold multiple passports. Similarly, children born to parents from countries where it is not possible to revoke citizenship, such as Morocco and Iran, as well as children born to at least one German parent, are also exempt from this rule (Die Zeit, 2013). As a result, an estimated 55 percent of naturalised citizens in Germany are *de facto* dual nationals (Gaugele, 2013). In contrast, the majority of those affected by the option-model are Turkish-Germans (Die Zeit, 2013):

It's about my children; they should decide when they're eighteen. Strangely, it's like that for Turks. I have a friend from Poland and she's allowed to keep her Polish passport. Her husband comes from Greece and he's allowed to keep his too. Their children have three passports! Great, and we're not even allowed to have two.

(S, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Advocates of dual nationality have become increasingly vocal in their view that forcing young people born in Germany to choose between different nationalities poses a huge barrier to successful integration (Die Welt, 2011). The co-chairman of the Green Party, Cem Özdemir, has been a consistent proponent of change to the current law, claiming that in a globalised world the ban on dual nationality for certain groups represents “a mind-set from the previous millennium”, while the option-model “turns natives into foreigners” by forcing them to choose between integral parts of their identity (Röttger & Meyer, 2010). Nevertheless, sceptics continue to argue that dual nationality will hinder successful integration of migrant populations and result in divided loyalties (Die Welt, 2013). With the resurgence of the debate occurring just months before elections in Germany this looks to be a divisive electoral issue, demonstrating both the growing recognition of the transnational affiliations of a significant population within Germany, as well as strong resistance from a substantial proportion of the electorate, who continue to conceive the country as a mono-national, and by extension mono-cultural, nation (Green, 2005).

Civic Exclusion and Cultural Racism

I was born here, my daughter was born here, she has a German passport and she is still a “migrant” – what kind of word is that? What does it mean?

(S, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

One has more rights, you know? But at the same time you don't. You're still a foreigner nevertheless. (D, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Germany's citizenship policies with regards to non-European migrants stands in marked contrast to the treatment of "ethnic German" *Aussiedler*, re-settlers from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union who immigrated to Germany predominantly in the 1990s. Due to political emphasis on their common German roots, this group received considerable integration assistance, in contrast to the longstanding Turkish population (Mandel, 2008) and, significantly, are legally allowed to hold dual nationality (Howard, 2008). Mandel suggests that a hierarchically ordered scheme exists within the German social imaginary, categorising foreign nationals in terms of "social, cultural and physical proxemics", as well as "cultural, economic and social capital" (Mandel, 2008:91). The more distant the group from the perceived German 'norm', the lower they are on the scale. European immigrants, due to their shared "basic values and Christian heritage" (ibid.:91), are considered closer, higher on the scale and therefore more integrable. *Aussiedler*, given their claim to German ancestry, are similarly considered to possess an inherent "German" quality which predisposes them to assimilate into society. Turks and other non-Christian, non-'Western' and non-European migrants, on the other hand, occupy the lowest rung, emphasising an ingrained view of immutable cultural difference, which negates the potential for transnational identifications to more than one place and culture (Mandel, 2008). These notions can be linked to the rise of 'cultural racisms' in Europe, whereby cultural rather than biological differences between groups are taken as inviolable and thereby used as the basis for discrimination (Modood, 1997). Silverstein, examining the "perjuring problematisation of the immigrant as the object of national integration" (Silverstein, 2005:363-364), demonstrates a "discursive shift" in Western Europe, whereby racist views based on biological and genetic differences have given way to notions of cultural difference as the "fundamental and immutable basis of identity and belonging" (ibid:366). The views expressed by my informants above can thus be understood within a wider social

context; it is not the immigrant who refuses to integrate who is at the root of the integration 'problem' (Anil, 2007), but the wider socio-cultural conception of national identity within Germany, represented through its citizenship policies, as well as wider political and media discourses, which denies the possibility that certain groups of migrants may ever truly belong. This notion delegitimises claims to transnational identifications, excluding migrants and their families from a meaningful sense of cultural, social and political belonging.

Chapter 3

Language and the “Mother-Tongue”

They all think the headscarf cannot speak. I speak my opinion, why not?

(D, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Language emerged through my interviews as an important source of pride and identity, as well as concern and frustration, for my informants. The transmission of the “Muttersprache” (mother-tongue) from mothers to their children was seen as an important cultural resource, central to the construction and maintenance of transnational identities. However, dominant discourses in Germany emphasising a monolingual, German speaking society as an integral part of cultural identity delegitimise such efforts. While pedagogic theory has moved in the direction of supporting bilingual education in recent years (Engin, 2010), political and media discourses continue to present parents who do not ensure their children’s ability in the German language as a barrier to their successful integration (Backus et al., 2010; Esser, 2006). However, the cultural creativity and agency involved in my informants’ strategies to impart their mother-tongue to their children and ensure bilingual competency questions the validity of viewing minority and majority cultures as bounded entities (Mandel, 2008). Language can therefore be seen as an important medium through which my informants develop and assert their identity as mothers, migrants and members of society within the framework of the German nation-state.

Language and identity

Language as a marker of cultural identity has been recognised in linguistic anthropology as an important aspect of the construction of identities in modern nation-states as well as the lives of migrants who live within them (Buchholtz & Hall, 2007; Alleman-Ghionda et al., 2010). Buchholtz & Hall assert that it is through language that culturally specific subject positions are enacted and performed, producing and reproducing culturally specific identities (ibid.). At the same time, the authors highlight the relationship between different languages and the formation of power relations within a society, claiming that, “the perception of shared identity often requires as its foil a sense of alterity, of an Other who can be positioned against those socially constituted as the same” (ibid.:371). These “language ideologies” co-exist within hierarchies of power, where the value accorded to certain languages or ways of speaking creates dominant and dominated groups within society (Bourdieu, 1991). Such processes can be seen in Germany through the negative treatment of non-European languages, as well as the lack of institutional support given to bilingual education (Pfaff, 2011).

Bilingualism in Germany

Debates surrounding bilingualism in Germany often play out around polarised ideological standpoints. On the one hand, cultural relativists argue that supporting languages other than German within the education system is important to maintain and support a pluralistic society where all groups feel equal and welcome (Alleman-Ghionda, et al. 2010).

However, politicians and academics have persistently argued that the focus should be on assimilation into the dominant culture, including the dominant language, and that encouraging bilingualism results in lowered educational attainment, hindering the

educational achievements, job prospects and cultural integration of migrants (Esser, 2006; Schaeffer & Meyer, 2010). Allemann-Ghionda, et al.(2010) attempt to move beyond these ideological assumptions, demonstrating a more complex picture where discrimination and social inequality are proven to adversely affect students' educational attainment far more than learning German as a second language. Nevertheless, language policies in Germany, as in other European countries, remain influenced by the idea that "nations are, or ideally should be, monolingual" (Pfaff, 2011:3). This reflects what Blommaert and Verschueren describe as the "dogma of homogeneity"; "a view of society in which differences are seen as dangerous and centrifugal and in which the 'best' society is suggested to be one without intergroup differences" (1998:194-195). Such notions reflect what Urciuoli terms, "linguistic racialisation" (1996:37). Through her ethnographic study of Puerto Rican bilingualism in America, she demonstrates how, "the philosophy underlying U.S. linguistic racialisation is that the natural language of the United States is an English naturally unmarked as the white, middle-class heart of the nation-state itself" (ibid). As a result, languages other than English spoken in the public sphere are constructed as "dangerously out of order" and "out of place" (Urciuoli, 1996:37), inspiring judgement and complaints from the wider population (ibid.:35). Similar processes can be seen to be at work in Germany, reflecting a language hierarchy actively sensed by many mothers:

French or Swedish is treated differently. Ok, they're also foreigners, but they are called foreigners in a different manner. It's strange, but that's how it is. Polish is also a different language, but it's more similar. But Turkish and Arabic, they are completely different languages, totally distinct languages, really difficult languages. Even we can't command them properly, so how should our children command Turkish [and] German? And when a child actually does manage it, how many people do you think accept that? That they have done it really well? Very few people. (S, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Being bilingual has so many advantages, but we're not seen as bilingual, we're seen as foreigners, and, strangely, that's always seen negatively (H, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Constructions of Germany as a mono-cultural and thereby mono-linguistic entity, threatened by the existence of foreign languages (Preuss, 2003), hinders attempts by mothers to construct meaningful transnational identities for themselves and their children, reflected in the active decision to bring up their children as bilingual.

Language and national identity in Germany

“The language is the mirror of the nation, if we look into this mirror, then a great and excellent image of ourselves advances”

(Xenien, together with Goethe, quoted in Möller, 1989:56)

Language has long been central to German conceptions of national identity, and remains so to this day (Brubaker, 1996[1992]). Preuss (2003) notes how this association arose in Germany during the 16th century at a time when German Empire existed as a collection of principalities under the Holy Roman Empire. While Latin existed as the language of the Catholic Church and French the language of the princely courts, the growing middle classes developed a sense national identity through the German language as a politically motivated claim to a collective identity in the absence of a unified or homogenous German state (ibid.:41). This is reflected in the etymology of the word *Deutsch* (German), which emerged in the 8th century as a term for non-Latin speakers. *Deutsch* and *Deutschland* (Germany) were therefore originally terms used to designate a linguistic, as opposed to a national, community (ibid.). The historic link between language and a collective, national identity goes some way to explaining how many within Germany today view the rise of

multi-lingualism as a threat to the formulation of national identity based on the notion of “one nation, one language” (Pfaff, 2011:2).

Language and Citizenship

These language ideologies are encoded in the legal routes to belonging in Germany and language proficiency has emerged as an important condition to acquiring citizenship (Pfaff, 2011). Social policies are increasingly formulated in terms of language. For example, a reform of the immigration law in 2007 requires prospective migrants to prove language proficiency before entering the country. Pfaff argues the basis for this revision was aimed more at targeting, “purported (or feared) aspects of the potential immigrants or citizens” than language ability in itself” (ibid:8). This is demonstrated by the exemption of many countries, including all Schengen countries, as well as spouses from Australia, Israel, Japan, Canada, the Korean Republic, New Zealand and the USA (Pfaff, 2011). Furthermore, despite the rise in bilingual education programs in Germany, they remain largely elitist, as many are only available in private schools (Pfaff, 2011) and focus primarily on European languages (Allemann-Ghionda, 2010).

Bilingual identities

I speak great German, but I don't speak German at home. Now, today, the third- and fourth-generation, many of them don't speak their mother-tongue and I think that's bad! It's a gift...I'm also not perfect in my mother tongue, but it's understandable, I have a good pronunciation...they should at least have that, to be able to understand. That's the most important, in first place, that they have their mother tongue. At home I try to speak our language, only our language.”

(H, second-generation Turkish German, two children).

In opposition to dominant notions of Germany as a monolingual society, bilingualism was articulated by many of my informants as an important asset to their children, especially among those who grew up in Germany. At the same time, as children of labour migrants who were given no formal training in the German language (Mandel, 2008), they actively reflected on the limitations of not speaking German:

It was really difficult for my parents. My mother didn't find the language. My father was working in construction and learnt German like that, "yes, no, good day, good bye". It was a difficult time."

(D, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

As guest-workers, they didn't know the laws, they didn't know the language, so they didn't know what they should do."

(H, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Perhaps as a result of such experiences, none of my informants expressed the desire that their children should not speak German to an equal proficiency as their first language. Instead, due to the lack of institutional support for bilingual families, the mother-tongue was seen as an important resource which needed to be imparted within the home, while German would be learnt through contacts outside of the home, for example through German speaking friends, mother-children groups and kindergartens. However, the dominant institutional view that parents who speak another language to their children at home hinder their children's ability to learn German and integrate into society (Esser, 2006) opposes such attempts. For example, one mother I spoke to described the active discrimination she faced in her attempt to secure a kindergarten place for her daughter, precisely so that she could ensure her immersion in a German speaking environment before starting school:

When I wanted to get a place [at the kindergarten] they said, “You were born here, you can speak German, why would you want to speak Turkish to your child?” That's what they said to me. They can't understand that I want to speak Turkish so that they learn their mother-tongue. They don't understand that. That's why I didn't get a place. I didn't get the voucher and you can't get a place without the voucher for the payment. They were of the opinion that I can speak super German, so why would I speak Turkish to my child?

(H, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Such institutionalised discrimination reflects and promotes a view of Germany as a monolingual society, thereby denying and delegitimising attempts by mothers to construct transnational identifications for themselves and their children.

(Re-)Learning the “Muttersprache”

For many mothers who themselves grew up in Germany, teaching their children the “mother-tongue” of their parents required a conscious effort not to speak German, which came more naturally. This seen as due to years of schooling, work and living away from the natal family, where the primary language spoken was German, before starting a family of their own:

I can't speak great Turkish, German is easier, which is unfortunate, but I speak both to the children.

(N, second-generation Turkish German, 2 children)

You have to really give yourself courage not to speak German...[You must] concentrate, it's difficult, but it gets easier gradually. When you really focus on speaking only Turkish then you can...I need to think about it, and then words come back, words that I've forgotten.

(H, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

It wasn't easy, because I speak both languages myself, and I speak more German than Arabic. Sometimes I have to think, 'What is this word in Arabic?', but then I have to pull myself together. I also had to learn.

(L, second-generation Lebanese, four children)

Having children emerges as an important element in the construction of these women's own cultural identities, offering mothers an opportunity to reconnect with the language of their parents and cultural heritage, which often involves re-learning or improving their own fluency. This highlights the active role mothers play in the construction of a transnational identity for their children, as well as themselves, which emerges as an on-going process through life.

Bilingualism among first generation migrants

We speak in my mother-tongue, because I don't speak such good German.

(M, first-generation Turkish, 2 children)

Those who had migrated as adults to Germany expressed a somewhat different relationship to language. Although for them, too, bilingualism was important to impart to their children, these efforts were combined with feelings of anxiety and stress, related to what they perceived to be their lack of fluency in German and lack of institutional support. As one of my informants explained:

My daughter is in the fourth class now and with her homework I don't understand everything. For a mother who finished school and graduated college, who can't help her own children, that's incredibly difficult. Sometimes I'm really sad, because I'm not just a housewife who didn't go to school, and if I can't help my children, that's naturally really hard for me.

(L, first-generation Iraqi, three children)

The external view of my informant as an “uneducated housewife” was forced upon her, due to the difficulties she faced in supporting her daughter within a system that does not recognise the capabilities and skills of non-German speakers. The damaging consequences of such views were poignantly conveyed by G, who relayed the problems she experienced when her son repeatedly got in trouble at school, which she connected to discrimination based on to his cultural background:

Lots of papers and letters, talking, talking, again and again. It's really difficult when German is your second language. I visited a therapist once a week for three years. My son was also there twice a week. I wanted that because I was scared, always stress, stress, school stress, but I wanted my son to have a job, that's why I had to fight. I couldn't do it alone, that's why I went to the therapist. I wanted to.

(G, first-generation Turkish, 26 years living in Berlin, three children)

Despite the problems she and her son faced, G took action into her own hands and sought out the help that hadn't been offered previously. Such examples highlight how, despite over fifty years of organised labour immigration to Germany, resulting in diverse and settled migrant communities in many German towns and cities, the education system still fails to offer sufficient support to bilingual families. This was also demonstrated by the fact that many of the first-generation mothers I spoke to frequently apologised for their lack of language proficiency, despite the fact that their German was more fluent than my own. This mentality is influenced by the popular view that migrant communities do not, cannot and will not integrate, suggesting an insurmountable cultural gulf between German and Turkish or Arab cultures as homogenous entities, thereby condemning integration to failure without offering any support to the endeavours of migrants to construct meaningful cosmopolitan identities (Mandel, 2008).

So many Turkish children study, but they still only see the ones who don't study, who don't go to university, who can't speak such good German, or the old people, or the ones who have just arrived from Turkey, they only see these people and say, "You can't speak German, you didn't learn anything"... or, they say, "These people aren't Turkish". They aren't shown as Turkish.

(S, second-generation Turkish German, two children)

Conclusion

Through my research I have attempted to convey the complex and multi-faceted ways that migrant mothers construct and maintain transnational identities for themselves and their children. Reproductive decisions, family networks and language practices among migrant communities in Germany demonstrate the fluidity and hybridity of identity (Bhabha, 1989). Yet this active negotiation of cultural difference must be seen within the framework of the German state, where enduring ideas of the nation as an organic, moral and mono-cultural community delegitimise such efforts. This is reflected in the legal and institutional barriers to transnational practices in Germany today, as well as popular perceptions that project the reproductive behaviour of migrant mothers and the choices they make in raising their children as a threat to national identity.

The reproductive decisions of the mothers I spoke to emerged as resistant to generalising theories, emphasising the role of individual agency and creativity in negotiating their reproductive lives. Furthermore, migration and reproduction emerged as contested realms in the German social imaginary, resulting in active discrimination which was felt by my informants. This is an area that politicians and demographers are increasingly attempting to understand quantitatively in order to assess the impact of migration on population dynamics, an area of growing significance in Europe today. However, an anthropological perspective demonstrates the importance of approaching the issues which arise from the increased mobility of people with a combined “social, cultural and legal lens.” (Bledsoe, 2004:91).

German citizenship laws were viewed as problematic and discriminating by my informants, for whom enduring identifications to more than one country were hindered by the lack of provision of dual nationality. This reflects an ethno-cultural definition of citizenship and belonging emphasising a homogenous cultural community, which excludes many migrants and their descendants from the German body-politic, denying them a meaningful sense of belonging. As a result, we can see how, for many naturalised foreigners in Germany, “The colour of their new passports is no guarantee of overcoming prejudice, discrimination and social marginality” (Mandel, 2008:223) they face in their day to day lives.

The importance of maintaining bilingualism reflects the active construction of cosmopolitan, transnational identities by mothers for their children. At the same time, these efforts were seen to be hindered by a lack of institutional support, resulting in the necessary delineation of language realms into private and public spheres. The devaluation of non-European foreign languages in Germany further reflects the enduring importance of monolingual cultural homogeneity to notions of German national identity. This demonstrates an ingrained cultural and linguistic racism, which falsely views migrants as lacking the desire or ability to integrate into German society, due to the perception of insurmountable cultural differences.

Long-standing, settled and growing migrant communities are a reality in many modern European nations. Germany provides a pertinent example of the perjuring problematisation of migrants, which effectively exclude them and their descendants from participating and belonging in society. The rise of such cultural racism in Western Europe, based on the notion of inherent and immutable cultural differences (Silverstein, 2005), ignores the creative ways migrants negotiate their identities within and between national borders (Bledsoe, 2004).

APPENDIX 1

Copy of consent form page 1:

Einverständniserklärung

Projektbezeichnung

Made in Germany: Erfahrungen und Entscheidungen von Müttern mit Migrationshintergrund der 2. und 3. Generation in Deutschland

Ich freue mich, dass Sie an meinem Forschungsprojekt teilnehmen und danke Ihnen für die Zeit, die Sie sich nehmen. Ihre Teilnahme sollte freiwillig sein. Bevor Sie an diesem Forschungsprojekt teilnehmen, lesen Sie sich bitte die folgenden Informationen aufmerksam durch.

Ziele des Forschungsprojektes

Ziel dieses Forschungsprojektes ist es, die Erfahrungen von Müttern mit Migrationshintergrund in Deutschland besser zu verstehen. Meine in den Interviews gewonnenen Erkenntnisse werde ich anschliessend mit Aussagen in der Fach-Literatur zur Demographischen Entwicklung sowie mit der aktuellen politischen Diskussion und der in den Medien vergleichen und analysieren.

Forschungsinhalte

Sie werden in diesem offenen Interview zu Ihren persönlichen Erfahrungen als Mutter befragt. Dabei werden Ihnen insbesondere Fragen gestellt zu Ihrem Entscheidungseinfluss auf die Erziehung Ihrer Kinder, Ihrer Familienplanung, zu Problemen, die Sie als Mutter erfahren haben sowie zu Ihren Hoffnungen und Erwartungen für die Zukunft Ihrer Kinder. Ich würde mich sehr freuen, wenn Sie auf die Fragen so offen wie möglich antworten.

Alle in diesem Interview aufgezeichneten Daten werden vertraulich behandelt und anonymisiert, so dass es unmöglich sein wird, Ihre persönlichen Daten zu identifizieren. In jeder Veröffentlichung oder Vorstellung dieser Fallstudie wird ein Pseudonym verwendet.

Teilnahme an dem Forschungsprojekt

Falls Sie Ihr Einverständnis geben an diesem Projekt teilzunehmen, werden wir einen Termin für das offene Interview vereinbaren. Den Ort, an dem das Interview stattfinden soll können Sie frei wählen. Das Interview sollte in einer ungezwungenen Atmosphäre stattfinden, die es Ihnen erlaubt, frei die Themen anzusprechen, die Sie als wichtig empfinden. Sie können das Interview zu jeder Zeit abbrechen und haben selbstverständlich das Recht bestimmte Fragen nicht zu beantworten.

Gemäß den Bestimmungen des University College London werden alle Daten unter dem Data Protection Act 1998 behandelt, dass den Bestimmungen des Bundesdatenschutzgesetzes entspricht.

Vielen Dank,

Charlotte Peel

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Copy of consent form page 2:

Falls Sie weitere Fragen zum Ablauf des Forschungsprojekts haben, wenden Sie sich bitte an Ihren Interviewer bevor Sie Ihre Teilnahme bestätigen. Sie erhalten eine Kopie dieser Einverständniserklärung.

Hiermit erkläre ich , _____,

dass ich die erhaltenen Information gelesen und verstanden habe;

dass ich zur Kenntnis genommen habe, dass ich das meine Teilnahme an dem Forschungsprojekt jederzeit abbrechen kann;

mein Einverständnis, dass meine persönlichen Informationen für Forschungszwecke im Rahmen dieses Projektes verwendet werden;

dass ich zur Kenntnis genommen habe, dass alle Informationen vertraulich behandelt werden gemäß des Data Protection Act 1998

dass mir das Forschungsprojekt erklärt wurde und ich mich einverstanden erkläre daran teilzunehmen.

Unterschrift

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