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1 Toward a Post-migrant Society? German Political Actors between Inclusion and Exclusion

> "Education policies must raise the value placed on intercultural skills. Our youth must learn that people with values, religions, cultural backgrounds, and ethnicities different from their own do not pose a threat to their identities."
> Rita Süssmuth (2007, pp. 201–202) – Former German Federal Minister of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

1.1 Integrating Diversity? The Importance of Political Actors' Negotiations

In early September 2015, I was invited to present my research and seek participants at a teachers' conference for ethics and social sciences at a low track school in highly diverse central Berlin. The school is located on a busy street in a small cul-de-sac surrounded by apartment buildings. When I entered through the school gates the school yard was quiet compared to the busy street a few meters behind me. It was after school hours, but some students were still hanging out on school grounds, talking, playing soccer, and getting ready to go home. I entered the main building, following the signs to the main office, to meet the school's principal and walk with her to the meeting.

I knocked and entered. Only one secretary, the principal and a few teachers were present. Yet the office was buzzing with activity. Despite the low number of people and the fact that the school year had just started, the atmosphere in the office felt hectic to me, hurried, as if too many things still needed to be accomplished with no time left to actually complete them. It was quite a contrast to the calm and tranquility of the surrounding school building and school yard. The principal greeted me quickly and asked me to take a seat while she finished a few things. "There is a lot going on at the moment" she said to me. I sat down and watched her make phone calls and sign paperwork.

A few minutes later the vice principal entered and was quickly introduced to me. Both principal and vice-principal grabbed a few notepads and indicated to me that we were now leaving. Just outside the office, another administrator ran up to the vice-principal holding up paperwork. "And what should we do about him?" she asked, continuing a previous conversation I had not witnessed. We did not stop as we were already running late for the meeting. Instead, the administrator walked with us. The vice-principal replied: "Who knows if he should even be here. He looks too old to be 14, I mean he already has a beard." The administrator nodded in agreement and replied "Yes, it is hard to tell with

some of them." The vice-principal elaborated, "Well, if he does not stop harassing the girls, he cannot be here." The administrator was satisfied with this answer, nodded and walked away as we continued our way to the meeting.

Guessing my puzzlement about this exchange the vice principal turned to me and explained that some of the newly arrived male refugees they had at the school were causing problems. He continued to explain that it was hard since refugees rarely had paperwork and no one knew anything about them. For all intents and purposes these youth could make things up to be counted as minors and attend school, he explained. The suspicion both the administrator and vice-principal based their conversation on was that the male student in question had lied about his age and was already beyond the law-mandated required school age of 16. The vice-principal concluded this exchange by saying, "And we have to suffer the consequences" (field notes, 9/8/2015).

This brief episode was one of my first encounters with the ramifications of the large influx of refugees that had arrived in Germany, and Berlin in particular, during the summer and fall of 2015. According to the national government (BMI and BAMF, 2016) about 890,000 new refugees came in 2015 alone. The number of asylum applications for 2015 showed an increase of 135 percent compared to the previous year (ibid, p. 9). Media coverage was dominated by images of overcrowded and underfunded refugee camps at the EU's southern borders, children that drowned during attempted crossings of the Mediterranean Sea, and large groups making their way north. Across Europe anti-refugee sentiments flared, borders were closed and policed again. Politicians negotiated new contracts to move the problem beyond Europe's borders. Later researchers would call this period the long summer of migration; to reframe the name media and politics had given it: the European migration crisis.

In Berlin, local media publications were filled with the catastrophic conditions around Berlin's registration administration. The city struggled greatly with registering, housing, and generally accommodating new arrivals to the point of a complete breakdown of administrative structures (cf. Kögel, 2015; Müchler, 2015; Pearson, 2015). What went unpublished was the profound uncertainty that arrived in Berlin's schools. They now had to accommodate and provide room for *Welcome Classes* that were to teach refugee students German and prepare them to enter regular classes and school activities (for an overview of inclusion practices in Germany see Massumi et al., 2015; for a discussion of them see Gräfe-Geusch and Okroi, 2024). During this time, teachers also had to confront their ideas of diversity as they now needed to engage with students in discussions about what was happening in their city, Germany, and Europe. During my fieldwork many of the schools I visited had student-designed poster presentations about refugees in entrance areas and hallways showing that thinking about refugees with students was common in classrooms around Berlin at the time.

The influx of refugees changed the narrative that schools related to me in response to my inquiry about study participation. When I initially started to procure possible participants for my study in January of 2015 the topic of how to accommodate religious and cultural diversity was ever present in media and public conception but not many schools felt it actually applied to them. Schools had cited a lack of (immigrant and Muslim) diversity at their schools when asked about participation, although my recruitment letter never mentioned that I was interested in Muslim students in particular or students with migration biographies more generally. However, these were the two categories that teachers assumed were important for my inquiry. During early stages of communication with schools, even schools that were willing to participate would point to a lack of diversity. One example of this would be the following passage from an Email I received from school 12: "… the students at this school are to be sure heterogeneous but the number of Muslim students is relatively low." (Personal Email communication, January 21, 2015).

Suddenly, however, during the summer of 2015 diversity, immigration, and especially refugee movements came to be front and center of communications about my research.[1] Now schools would not reference a lack of diversity but instead would claim to be overwhelmed with the amount of diversity they had to deal with. This is the response of one principal who had initially agreed to participate in January of 2015, but had changed their mind by early 2016. It is representative of many other conversations I had with school leaders:

> Yes, your topic is indeed very fascinating and interesting. I hope you understand that we too are currently grappling with this demanding situation of dealing with migration and refugees every day. In this position we are currently not able to exert additional energy and dedication for your undertaking. We work and act, to cope with, reflect upon, and process these daily challenges." (Personal Email communication, 2/8/2016).

This communication shows the desperation and powerlessness with which the topic of diversity and immigration was now viewed by schools. The strain put on schools by the sudden influx of new students, the lack of structures that provided schools with simple information, such as when and how many new students would join them, was palpable throughout many of the schools I communicated with and visited.

The uncertainties that these events placed on schools was also echoed in the ways that teachers discussed refugees and the new diversity they were faced with. This description by Herr Stade is a good example of just how pertinent this topic was:

1 In fact, all participating teachers stated during our conversations that the topic of the refugee movement was hugely important in their lessons during the 2015/2016 school year. Every single one had covered it in one way or another in their classes. For a discussion of my data related to teaching refugees please see Gräfe-Geusch (2020).

> Well, you never know... if there are people arriving here who are, I would say, strongly traumatized. Without being able to tell immediately what their background is and if they may, as a result have strange modes of behavior [...] Because especially now, in the face of these new refugee streams, I would not like to make a prediction. [...] I mean, we have already shown our goodwill in taking two such classes [welcome classes]. However, what are two classes in comparison to what is coming. Well, you have to look at it unemotionally. I have...I don't quite know what to do about it honestly. Like, no one here really does, it hits us more or less unprepared... Well, I am also really skeptical about how we can deal with this. We don't have a solution for it [...] Well, so there are quite a few people, that... I would say, were indeed psychologically traumatized and they were exposed to hardships, grew up with violence, know the language of violence better than the other language [...] Well, if you are used to solving conflicts with violence, then you cannot just get rid of it just because you are somewhere different. This is how I.... just see it. [...] Then you add cultural destabilizers to it...Because they come from different countries, that are often shaped by Islam and if you then see from the outside what Berlin looks like... it doesn't necessarily fit together with a conservative Muslim attitude. Well, I am openly skeptical [laughs]. (Herr Stade, Interview on 9/1/2015)[2]

The fear of these uncertainties, produced by the influx of refugees and the sheer chaos it caused in Berlin's bureaucracy, can be felt in these words. They echo public and political discourse of the time.

Researchers have pointed out that "forced migration is a study about *us*" (Pinson et al., 2010, p. 1, emphasis in original). The strains put on societies by large refugee streams and the logics they expose "requires us [...] to ask what our responsibility is and what our moral commitments are to the strangers on our doorstep" (Pinson et al., 2010, p. 1). Further, the question of refugees also "importantly illuminates remaining and ongoing challenges in meeting the right to education for the most marginalized national children" (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018, p. 7). It is therefore not surprising that these events prompted the teachers in my study to carefully consider the categories of diversity and belonging they espoused in their conversations with me, as well as in their teaching.

While my study focused on ethics instruction in typical Berlin classrooms, my data captures a moment when categories of diversity and national identity were actively negotiated and re-evaluated by teachers, policy makers, and the German public. This period marks a profound shift in Germany's attitude towards (ethnic and religious) diversity. These events strengthened the street mobilization of the *Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident* (PEGIDA, cf. Herold and Schäller, 2023) and prepared the electoral success of

2 Herr Stade speaks of the psychological traumas that children in conflict affected areas would be exposed to, not to mention the possible traumas endured along the way to their country of refuge. We also know little about the educational experience of refugee children prior to resettlement in Europe, the US, Australia or elsewhere; (cf. Dryden-Peterson, 2016).

the Alternative for Germany (AfD; cf. Gessler and Hunger, 2023). They are best described within what Foroutan (2019) termed a post-migrant society. This conceptual framework pays close attention to the ways that migration in its myriad forms transforms and reshapes societies (Yurdakul, 2024). That is, within it the analysis seeks to correlate "societal transformation moments" beyond the act of migration with each other (Foroutan 2019: 60; original in German translation by the author). For education this means that schools are not just places of diversity integration, but rather exist within the tension of the „negotiation and acceptance of equality as central promise of a modern democracy" (Foroutan, 2019, p. 13).

To understand how Germany would manage the transformation moment created by the influx of people in the summer and fall of 2015, it is essential to examine the structures and logics regarding diversity that were already in place as well as those that were being created during this time. The questions of how to deal with diversity in education and how to create inclusive school environments would and will be one of the most pressing challenges for Germany, and the rest of Europe more generally, in the past and coming decades.[3] Thus, Berlin is not alone in its quest to include minoritized and racialized group identities in its society. Over the past two and a half decades, Germany and many Western European societies have vastly extended their education policy frameworks with regard to minority populations (cf. Jackson, 2008). In Germany, these policy frameworks are inclusive of minority populations, calling for more attention and integration in curricula and practice (Kultusministerkonferenz, 1996/2013, 2003, 2015). Yet, research has also shown that there is a stark division between inclusive and diversity-oriented policy frameworks and the reality and practice in public schools (Abu El-Haj, 2010; Abu El-Haj et al., 2017; Bowen, Bertossi, Duyvendak, Krook, 2013; Jaffe-Walter, 2013; Niehaus, 2017, 2018; Ríos-Rojas, 2014; Schiffauer, 2015; Simel, 1996; Štimac, 2014; Sunier, 2013). This study examines how inclusive education policies can become exclusive and discriminatory practices.

Historically, sociologists have understood this divergence between policy and practice as a natural division of policy ideals and practical reality (Edelman, 1990, 1992; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Nonet and Selznick, 1978). In other words, diversity-friendly policies are mere window-dressing that do not impact educational practice. More recently, others have theorized a lack of knowledge at the policy level regarding what works, which may ultimately lead to divergence in practice (Dobbin and Kalev, 2017). Policy makers are thus assumed not to know enough about teaching practice to propose laws or measures that promote a diversity-friendly school environment. A third expla-

3 The issue of diversity integration becomes even more pressing if we consider research on refugees which has pointed to the fact that most refugee situations are protracted and refugees need to be provided with ways to permanently integrate and settle in their country of asylum (Dryden-Peterson, 2017; Loescher, et al. 2008).

nation stipulates that individualistic factors which cannot be systematically captured are the reason why diversity-friendly policy may fail in practice (Ortloff, 2009; Sunier, 2013). It may be a teacher's previous interaction with students, their personal history or other specific factors. Anthropologists often interpret minority youth discrimination in school through a framework of deterministic governmentality that does not allow for individual actors' agency (Jaffe-Walter, 2013; Ríos-Rojas, 2014). These arguments assume state interests of minority group surveillance and control to be uncritically carried out by teachers in schools. German education scholars rather point to structural discrimination immanently anchored in schools' organizational logics and frameworks (Gomolla, 2020; Gomolla and Radtke, 2009). However, these theories generally focus on either the level of policy formation *or* the ways in which policies are enacted at the school level (cf. Levin, 2009; for a critique of this division see also Ball, 1993, 2015). By examining how diversity is understood and negotiated within and across these levels drawing on the vertical case study approach (Vavrus and Bartlett, 2006, 2009), this study offers rich insights into the complexities of the policy process and sheds light on how and why certain outcomes are more or less likely to emerge.

Further, research is often limited to ethnic and religiously highly diverse contexts, thus ignoring the possible ways in which hegemonic logics and structures may be reproduced within majority populations. Through an in-depth comparison of ethnic and religiously diverse and non-diverse school environments, I seek to offer an account that transverses this singular focus on highly diverse classrooms. I thus ask:

1. How do political actors (in government and public education) understand and negotiate diversity and diversity's place in society?
2. How do these negotiations vary across different school and individual contexts?

These questions allow me to trace the negotiation of logics of diversity in multiple contexts to expose the ways in which they might differ across and within them.

In this study, I choose the term diversity rather than immigrant population specifically for three reasons. First, while much of Germany's ethnic and religious diversity has roots in international migration processes, it is not the sole source of diversity. Many of those that are perceived to be ethnically and religiously diverse were in fact born in Germany and are German citizens. In Germany these populations are commonly referred to and statistically researched as people "with migration background" (Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund). However, there is much critical debate about this category and its potential for prolonged othering and exclusion from the national imagination (Elrick and Farah Schwartzman, 2015; Will, 2019). Second, a focus on migration exclusively also obscures other sources of religious diversity like religious