



Turkish Girls: The Veil and a Sense of Belonging to Germany

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Abstract

This article focuses on Turkish girls who wear the veil and their sense of belonging in Germany. Data was collected in five different cities in the federal state of North Rhein Westphalia from girls who were from 13 to 21 years old. Focus group interviews, socio-economic questionnaire and life history interviews were the source for the data. The data was analysed with Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2019). The analysis interprets how being Muslim, wearing the veil, and gender intersect in defining belonging to a nation. The research would reflect policy making in school education and public sphere for women with veil.

Keywords: Turkish, girls, veil, school, Germany

Introduction: Gender and the Veil

‘Muslim veil’ is an intersectional issue: the term suggests that the garment in question is religious in nature. It is also clearly gender-specific, as only Muslim women (and not Muslim men) adopt the practice of wearing it. As Meer et al. (2010) point out, social constructions of gender are central to the imagination and reproduction of national identities.

When a Muslim girl arrives at school in a headscarf for the first time, many German teachers and her non-Muslim peers consider this an (unfortunate) continuity of her migrant background, and potentially a sign of parental control. Since the 1990s, veiling has become a matter of concern for state policy and has come to be the ultimate marker of the ‘integration’ of the so-called second and third generation migrants in European societies. Muslim feminists warned of the accommodation of the headscarf as a form of pseudo-tolerance that jeopardized Muslim girls’ rights to freedom and equality (Andreassen & Letting, 2012).

“In the debates, women thus become a physical marker between the two cultures, which are constructed as each other’s opposite in a hierarchical manner, hence making it

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impossible to be an integrated part of both simultaneously. This integration into European national societies is therefore not simply a question of shared values and norms; it is also a physical integration. Muslim women become, with their bodies, physical symbols of the success or failure of that integration. In a Western European context, this may negatively impact Muslim women's struggles for emancipation by forcing them into an either-or choice between a national white community – where they are not fully included – and a diaspora community – where a critique of unequal gender structures might be seen as a betrayal of the group” (Ghorashi, 2006).

Education in Germany is the responsibility of the regional states, each of which has its own education ministry. In September 2003, the German Federal Constitutional Court ruled that the states could ban the wearing of Islamic headscarves by female teachers, and that this would not infringe upon the constitutional protection of freedom of religion. However, a ban could only be implemented by a state law, and not by administrative decisions. Eight out of Germany's sixteen states have implemented restrictions on wearing the hijab: first Baden-Württemberg, then Bavaria, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Saarland, Bremen, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Berlin. The city-state of Berlin also banned all religious symbols in public institutions, including the Christian crucifix and the kippa (the skullcap worn by religiously observant Jewish males). Eventually, this research aims to close the gap well-being of the girls in the public sphere who wears veil. Recent publications in Germany mainly focus on the legislation on the veil issue. Fairly, there is not any research that focuses on the

The research was designed using grounded theory data collection method and methodology, as the most suitable for answering the research questions. Another reason for applying grounded theory is that the research on this theme is relatively limited in Germany: As a result, grounded theory created an opportunity to develop new theoretical concepts to answer the research questions and contribute to theories in the field of identity and belonging research in the German and European context. Grounded Theory (GT) has several methodological genres: Each variant is an extension and development of the original grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967) Constructivist GT, the third genre developed and explicated by Bryant and Charmaz, a symbolic interactionist, has its roots in constructivism (2019). Constructivist GT's methodological underpinnings focus on how participants construct meaning in relation to the area of inquiry.

In this study the following procedure was applied: Purposeful sampling; constant data collection and analysis through various stages of coding in conjunction with constant comparative analysis; theoretical sampling and memoing. Theoretical sampling was employed until theoretical saturation was reached. Focus groups were the primary data source. The

focus groups helped to analyse collective understanding of what does it mean to be a girl in Germany from a Turkish Muslim background. In order to understand personal experiences of the girls, individual data were also collected through the individual life history method (Ochieng et. al. 2017; Davis et. al, 2019; Flynn et. al, 2018; Kruger et. al. 2019; Jessee 2018)

The data were collected in five different cities in the federal state of North Rhein Westphalia in school and girls' free time activity organizations. The cities in North Rhein Westphalia had been chosen because North Rhein Westphalia had high number of people from migrant background. The girls were 13 to 21 years old. We sent a letter of invitation to schools and these associations. Girls who were interested in joining the research responded to the person whom we were in contact for data collection. Around 90% of the invitations were positively responded by the girls. Girls, who were under 18 years old brought a signed consent their parents or guardians. The focus groups were conducted with four girls from same age in each group. Each focus group lasted one to two hours. Focus groups started with ice-breaking questions such as their hobbies and free time activities.

After ice-breaking questions, focus questions were asked. These questions were such as: what does a 'good life' mean for all girls in the world at your age; what is a good life for all girls from your background and your age in Germany; what do you think is a good life for girls from your age from other backgrounds in Germany. In order to investigate girls' aspirations, the following question was asked: if girls were under 18 years old, the questions phrased as 'imagine your 18th birthday. How do you imagine that day to be; how is your life on that day'. If girls were 18 years old, this question is formulating as 'how do you imagine your life to be in the next two to three years? How would you imagine the day, and your life, two or three years from today? In order to analyse girl's agency, the following question was asked: what you do in order to remove difficulties in your life which you have discussed today'. After each focus group interviews girls were given a socio-economic questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted 12 questions adopted from Jugend 2015: 17. Shell Jugendstudie (2015).

Secondly, we conducted individual life history interviews, lasting 1,5 hours to 2 hours. There were two main interview questions: their important life events from childhood up until now; and how they see these life events have affected their educational careers. All interviews were conducted in a private place where participants could feel comfortable. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The names of the participants and the schools remained anonymous. In total, 30 focus groups and 25 individual life history interviews were conducted.

Research Method

Grounded theory coding is an analytical process used to identify concepts, similarities and conceptual reoccurrences in data. Coding is the vital link between collecting and developing a theory that explains the data. While coding data, memo writing is another important analytical tool. In this research memos are ideas generated and documented through interacting with data. Thus, memos provided informal analytic notes about the data and the theoretical connections between categories. Constant comparative analysis is an analytical process used in GT for coding and category development. It is used to find consistencies and differences, with the aim of continually refining concepts and theoretically relevant categories. Incidents are identified in the data and coded. The initial stage of analysis compares incident to incident in each code. Initial codes are then compared to other codes. Codes are then collapsed into categories. Theoretical sampling coupled with constant comparative analysis raises the conceptual levels of data analysis and directs ongoing data collection or generation.

Results and Discussion

Diversities are treated differently in the German community. Being against capitalism or wearing a cross as part of the Christian religion is not seen as a threat in the German community. The girls interpreted that wearing a headscarf, being a woman, being Turkish and of immigrant origin reduced their opportunities for a good life. As a result, the discrimination of diversities is an obstacle to the girls associating themselves with the wider society.

Nil: (Nil is a girls who wears a veil since she is 12 years old. Wearing a veil is her independent decision).

[Referring to a German protester with bare feet] He is opposed to capitalism, that is why he has bare feet. He is not discriminated against everyone is so close with him. Why is it with we Muslims, girls with headscarves, people go one step back? That is what I don't understand, if they have something to say about the headscarf on our heads, they must get rid of hairclips too. It is the same if you wear a hair clip or head scarf. Majority population's norms were dominating the discussions, and the views of Germany's sub-groups were not included. The concepts emerging from the data included plural needs as obstacles and a threat in everyday school education.

Data has revealed that Islam is an important aspect of girls' identity construction. In the quote below, Nil felt awkward about being banned from wearing her headscarf in public as it is as normal for her as other people wearing hairclips in their hair. Nil could not understand why the headscarf was highly politicized in Germany. Nil was wondering why

wearing a headscarf was such a disturbance for the German public and why others associated the headscarf with marginalization. She was clear that she wore a headscarf as a religious obligation which did not have any other meaning.

The findings of the OSI (Open Society Institute) supported other research in this field, showing the high relevance of the issue of discrimination against women wearing headscarves to Muslims in Berlin. "Discrimination of any kind is a barrier to a common future, especially when, in this case, the withdrawal of women from the public sphere is a common reaction to discrimination rather than civil resistance" (2010, p. 97).

Nil: That is what I don't understand, if they have something to say about a headscarf on our heads, they must take hairclips away too, it is the same if you wear a hair clip or a headscarf.

In the next quotes, Deniz adds that the headscarf was a greater obstacle than being from an immigrant background. Being of Turkish origin added to their vulnerable situation in terms of accessing to a meaningful life in Germany. The grounded concepts in the girls' discussion are the societal mechanisms associated with a lack of civil rights. In a society where civil rights are obligatory and provided by the state through legislation, girls should not be confronted with such barriers to living a good life. The girls emphasized the intersectionality of migrant background, ethnicity, and gendered treatments. The grounded concepts in the data revealed a lack of fundamental rights which constrain the opportunities for socially vulnerable girls to have a good life.

Deniz is another participant who decided to wear veil when she was 11 years old. Since she was a child, she wanted to wear a veil. She has also decided wearing a veil independently. The headscarf was more of an obstacle, more than our migrant background.

Nil: It is enough to be Turkish.

Interviewer: Which one is the biggest obstacle?

Deniz: Headscarf. Later to be a Turk, we have all the combinations ((laughs)). The girls commented on that not only wearing a veil is a difficult for their lives. Also, ethnicity and migration background play an important role in the quality of their lives. The girls felt even they do not wear veil they are subject to discrimination. But, wearing a veil creates more difficulties for them.

Extending the discussion, the next quotes highlight the borderline aspects of wearing a headscarf. Wearing a headscarf contradicts German society's expectations of girls of migrant origin. The girls may value wearing a headscarf for the love of their religion, values, and traditions. From the quotes below, it became apparent that wearing a headscarf is a lifestyle and, more specifically, it provides them with space, belonging and an identity.

Deniz: I started to wear a headscarf in Hauptschule1 (First level of secondary school in Germany)

Interviewer: Why?

Deniz: I really wanted to. Why did you want to?

Deniz: These were (referring to her friend) attractive to me, I was so envious of them, so much.

This conversation reveals the complexity and diversity of being Muslim and the role of the veil in negotiating religious identities through specific encounters in public places. It suggests that veiling fashion is not conventional fashion: veiling fashion includes ‘a particular ethical practice’ (Gökarıksel & Secor 2014), that of an Islamic form of modesty. In their work on veiled women in Istanbul, Gökarıksel and Secor (2014) have argued that the aesthetic ideal of veiling fashion is characterized by harmony: ‘harmony between elements of the dress, harmony between appearance and conduct, and harmony between appearance and belief’ (Bendixsen 2017)

In the following quotes, the girls highlighted the fact that mosque-related activities might have had an influence in uniting Turks living in Germany. Mosques may serve as necessary welfare support to enable community belonging in a foreign country. Also, associating the quotes below with the quotes above, the mosques might represent a place for unity in which people unite with other diverse Turks, who are from the same nation-state but different in terms of their sub-cultures.

Interviewer: Why do you think Turks living in Germany are more religious than the Turks in Turkey?

Nil: In the meantime, the first generation, the second generation too, we are Turks, we shouldn't be losing our culture. They attached to each other, what else remained to attach to, it was Turks' Ülkü Ocak (Turkish Nationalist gatherings), and Kurdish Ocak (Kurdish Nationalist gathering). What made us all come together were the mosques. People gathered in the mosques. I see many families that still pressure their children to be a member of a mosque. This finding reveals that young girls are 'looking for a meaning in belonging' and 'finding a place for acceptance with one's pluralities. Therefore, in the lives of young, Turkish women, mosques play a role in preserving their cultural background. Islam is not only a religion in their lives, wearing a headscarf as a religious practice is a tool of agency to build resilience and stand up against being excluded.

In the next quotes, girls discussed of why wearing head scarf is important for their belonging. Obviously, mosque activities create sense of belonging to a community which these girls cannot experience in wider German society.

Deniz: I cannot explain, I don't know how I can explain. How can I tell you? I cannot explain, head scarf was so pretty. It seemed to me to be so pretty to wear, to match with my dress. I really liked it. It was pretty. We went to the mosque a lot. We grew up in the mosque. For instance, we came for the holidays from Frankfurt, I stayed at the mosque overnight, in the Medrese (Islamic learning centre). Then I saw other girls, I was so envious of the girls wearing head scarf.

Interviewer: This is a hypothetical question. If you were born and grew up in Turkey, would you wear head scarf?

Deniz: I wouldn't (she said immediately). I think because we go to the mosque in Germany, not to lose our Turkishness, not to lose our culture, not to become German. That is why we attach more to head scarf. Here for instance, Turks mean Muslim in peoples' mind. Do you understand what I mean?

Conclusion

The findings revealed that Islam, as a religion, provided an identity and mosques, that serves as a space of belonging, which girls could not find in the wider German society. In this regard, a 'mainstream identity' was necessary for the girls to identify themselves with the majority and with other sub-groups living in Germany. From this perspective, the girls might have two main challenges. The first main challenge was isolation from the majority identity, i.e. not being a 'proper' German, because of a lack of relating to the majority society. In Germany, there is not a strong discourse that Muslim youth are also part of Germany. The second main challenge for the girls was relating to other sub-groups in Germany. This situation might create confusion for the girls, as they were isolating themselves within their own sub-group, to identify themselves with their own culture and traditions and find answers to the challenges to their religion. The dilemmas of the girls described in existing literature, Islam is expressed as the hallmark of identity by some immigrant women, and it has been rediscovered and reconstructed in this context. In this way, the religion provided a general framework that helped individuals to understand the world and find an answer for the unexplainable (Altuntaş, 2009, p. 345).

Wearing a headscarf in public sphere in Germany has been a contradictory. The rhetoric surrounding the wearing of the headscarf became a political discourse in 1997. "The president of the German office for the protection of the Constitution, Peter Frisch, said that Islam would probably become the biggest problem for Germany's internal security. Peter Frisch discussed that wearing headscarves could be interpreted as a sign of Muslims' deliberate self-exclusion from German society" (Collet 2004, p. 131). The girls of Turkish origin with a head scarf had

an ambivalent voice when they defined belonging in Germany society. The girls interpreted that their religious diversity is not valued in Germany society which is an ill belonging for these girls. Such everyday experiences send girls message that they don't belong to Germany. Such interpretations may have little practical application, have the power to create an "us" against "them" mentality, hinder integration, and potentially contribute to the radicalization of Islam (Braun 2017).

As a result, the Turkish girls who wear head scarf do not feel they belong to Germany. In order to support inclusion of Turkish girls with head scarf to German society, education and social policy makers should determine various opportunities for these girls to feel they are part of Germany society.

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