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In-between as resistance: The post-migrant generation between discrimination and transnationalization

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ABSTRACT
Our article is based on a qualitative study conducted in 2015 in large cities in Turkey, encompassing 35 semi-structured interviews. Inquiry focused on the descendants of the so-called “Gastarbeiter” [“guest worker”] generation – youth who were born and grew up mainly in Germany and Austria, were educated there and who to a great extent are Austrian or German citizens. They left their country of birth and emigrated to the country of origin of their parents or grandparents, Turkey, where they hoped for better professional perspectives. In the public sphere they are perceived, if at all, as returning migrants. In this paper, we term this next generation post-migrant, a generation that moves in different “spaces in-between”, developing strategies for living from their distinctive positioning: between transnationalization and discrimination, here and there, between leaving and remaining. This promotes a confrontation with the respective local conditions. For this generation, a certain double distance to the uninterrogated normalities here and there is part of everyday life, and at the same time should be seen as a resistant praxis. Proceeding from the investigation mentioned, we attempt here to reconstruct that a praxis that can open up new perspectives, not only for social work.

KEY WORDS
Post-Migrant generation; transnationalisation; discrimination; mobility; transtopia

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1. Introduction
Since its early stages, much of migration research in Germany has been guided by a dogma of sedentariness, which has significantly contributed to the reproduction of an ethnic-national thinking based on difference. Concepts like origin, ethnicity or integration became central categories in the discourse on migration, defined its orientation in terms of content and ultimately condensed to become persistent everyday myths. Categories of national origin are only apparently analytical. In reality, they rather have the effect of producing reality, guiding our perceptions of reality and therefore ultimately once again have effect on society. At the same time, they blinker our view of the complexity of real life.

In order to analyze the relationship between the constructs of the Orient and the Occident, while at the same time subverting it, Edward Said once proposed (1993, p. 32) an interpretative method that works against these constructs. For the subject of migration, this method...
of “reading against (the grain)” means looking at social power relations from the perspective and experience of migration – thus, migration is not merely the object of research, but at the same time the starting point of how we think.

In this article, we apply this interpretative approach to counter the polarizing patterns of thinking that underlie common classifications like “natives/migrants” and “us/them”. In order to deconstruct these apparently clear-cut, fixed categories, we suggest shifting our attention to the interweaving, crossovers and transitions that reduce this kind of classification ad absurdum.

To do this, we must examine people’s general living conditions against the background of social power relations, and not just describe the ways and strategies they develop under certain circumstances, but place them at the very center of our thinking. The individuals are regarded thus as experts which of their everyday practice.

The focus of our article is on young emigrants who are at best perceived as “returning migrants” in the public eye and the media. However, our study does not concern immigrants who then return to their countries of origin, but the offspring of former “guest workers”, that which is known as the “second” and “third generation” (Aydin, 2013; Badawia, 2002; Beck-Gernsheim, 2004; Geisen & Riegel, 2009; Klein-Zimmer, 2016; Otyakmaz, 1995; Riegel & Geisen, 2009; Siouti, 2013; Yildiz, 2017) people who were born and grew up in Germany, finished their education there and in recent years have been moving back to Turkey, especially Istanbul, in increasing numbers, from where their parents or in some cases their grandparents emigrated many decades ago. We are therefore dealing with a “post-migrant” generation. This article considers how this generation shapes their transnational mobility, their relationships and networks that transcend borders, how they construct their life stories, create new models for living, and what biographical resources they use to establish themselves socially and in their professions. By the latter we mean what circumstances they find themselves confronted with in Turkey, how they deal with and manage them, and what transnational practices for life spring from these experiences.

2. Mobile sedentariness or sedentary mobility

For some time, there has been a certain consensus in the social sciences that it is not sedentary communities but migration that should be viewed as the historical norm. Every chapter of human history, every city history is also a history of migration. This is even more true in the era of global transformation caused by the rapid growth of information and transport technologies, in which the global and the local are linked together to continually form new networks – localities opening up to the world (Yildiz, 2013).

Through the constant movement of migration, new ideas, relationships and patterns of living are generated that link different places with each other, transform spaces and create new ones. Niche areas, in which immigrants and their offspring live simultaneously here and there, are the expression of a new dynamic, one in which locality is produced and shaped based on a global society. Thus, “home countries” or “cultures of origin” and “traditions” are sometimes reinvented (Appadurai, 1998, p. 13). This tension between the global and the local, which Appadurai discusses, is relevant today for the development of new models of living and practices of localisation (Appadurai, 1998, p. 36). It is also relevant for the post-migrant generation focused on in this article. In this regard it should be noted that the local conditions people live under exercise a significant influence on their decisions for mobility.
After the popularization of mobility, we can also observe how mobility is controlled and a mobility hierarchy is emerging, associated with new processes of inclusion and exclusion.

In this context, Regina Römhild (2009, p. 234) identifies the existence of a “new cosmopolitanism from below.” A transverse movement that brings together regions, cultures, ways of thinking, which are often very far apart from each other geographically and temporally, on a local level makes both virtual and real connections possible; and leads to mutually productive exchange. According to Martin Albrow, this gives rise to a variety of “sociospheres” that display global social and life world patterns – a cosmopolitisation of models of ways of living, cultures and private milieus, a worldwide expansion of the individual’s network of relationships in the local context. These networks of relationships are “part of an intimate social network that produces linked activities involving the entire globe” (Albrow, 1998, p. 245).

In the globalized world, it seems that models of ways of living and senses of belonging undergo constant change; they have become more mobile and at the same time more unstable. Fewer and fewer people spend their lives in one single locality, many change locations numerous times, crossing national borders. In this process, geographic and cognitive movement go hand in hand. All of this is simply part of everyday life and only becomes apparent when one takes a closer look – when people tell their life stories, visualize and reflect on them. Concepts of home have also changed and are more ambiguous.

The opening up of localities to the world means, in this context, that everybody encounters various different contradictory positions in their everyday life, which are processed both individually and collectively, and condense to become local structures, cultures, models of ways of living and forms of communication. In this sense, a globalized understanding of everyday life does not view it as harmonious, but also implies radical differences and contradictions. These processes of opening up confront us with different, previously marginalized perspectives that question the ontological status of the “West” and demand that we interpret the world in a new way (Yildiz, 2013).

If we then take this approach, in other words readjust our focus, new interpretations more relevant to the modern world become available to us, which help us to see that global processes of opening up produce heterogeneous effects worldwide. Hybrid structures and cultures, different forms of civil society, escape routes and counter-movements all occur equally frequently. Different (cultural) elements of a global kind come into contact with each other in an “in-between space” on a local level, which in turn creates something new. Homi Bhabha, who introduced the terms “hybridity” and “third space” to describe this, argues that all forms of culture are in a constant process of cross-breeding and mixing. However, for him the significance of the hybrid is not that it can be traced back to two original elements that together have produced the third, but much rather that hybridity itself is the “third space” from which other positions, many-layered and multifaceted combinations (can) stem (Bhabha, 1997, p. 123f). In the process, new horizons are opened up that entail risks but also unexpected possibilities and opportunities. Something perceived as a crisis in a national context can be interpreted as something else from a cosmopolitan perspective, and this cannot be sufficiently understood with conventional “methodological nationalism” (Beck, 2004, p. 51f). Global processes of opening up can be viewed and used as potential resources for cultural processes of hybridisation and new localisations: ones that overcome national orientations and can point to alternative political possible action and movements. These
can only be identified and analyzed using a “methodological cosmopolitanism” (Beck, 2004, p. 125ff).

Along with such possibilities that can (and do) offer worldwide links, contacts and networks for individuals in their everyday lives, in many places there are however intensified security checks now being instituted along the borders of nation-states. Moreover, strict high-level security measures are operational on the external border of the European Union, such as the Bulgaria-Turkey border, and there is a concomitant control of mobility, compounded by economic and political discrimination, all efforts seeking to reduce and prevent migration. The paradoxical situation of a greater opening of borders combined simultaneously with increased control in regard to certain groups (refugees, illegals, etc.), who are viewed as “undesirable” or “superfluous” is creating even greater barriers for these persons. Thus, geographical mobility is not an even playing field; it becomes more of an option for some than others. Such a global hierarchy in mobility is integral to a redistribution of privileges and loss at the global and local level, while there is a concomitant “restructuring” of humankind, as noted by Bauman (1998, 2013, 2016).

3. After migration or: “post-migration”

A “concept of post-migration” means retelling the history of migration and radically rethinking the field of migration in the globalized world (Yildiz & Hill, 2015). This involves engaging with the perspectives of those who have, directly or indirectly, experienced migration processes. It is about processes of dislocation and relocation, ambiguity and border biographies. In the case of border biographies, this involves experiences that do not belong wholly to one “cultural circle” or another. This gives rise to models for living that make possible new identifications and points of reference which go beyond the conventional ethnic-national orientations.

The term “in-between” used metaphorically by Homi Bhabha (1997) proves to be especially productive for (post-)migrant situations as well, where the unambiguous location in one place is left behind and discontinuities come to the forefront. This “innovative break” radically questions habitual dichotomies such as Western/non-Western, natives/foreigners, which until now have functioned as signposts of social perceptions. Instead the focus is shifted to marginalized types of knowledge, multiple senses of belonging to a home and biographies that involve movement (Strasser, 2009). In this sense, post-migrant models of living represent cross-border spaces: not borders understood as national fronts, but instead as thresholds, places of transition and movement.

The commonly accepted metaphor of a life between two worlds is repeatedly used to describe a supposedly irresolvable situation: the inner conflict of the second and third migrant generation (Beck-Gernsheim, 2004, p. 76ff.). Their state of being “in-between”, usually considered problematic in public discourse, reveals itself on closer examination to be a creative social practice as well, which opens up spaces for individuality. For many, it is simply part of normal, everyday life – or as one of the persons interviewed said: “Being in-between has always defined me.”

Mark Terkessidis (2015, p. 96) notes: “Mobility is not precisely not a deviation from sedentariness, but our normal state and at the same time a necessary prerequisite of subjectivity.”

There are three main aspects of the idea of post-migrancy:
(1) The history of so-called “guest workers” is retold: it is not difficult to identify from historical documents that guest workers, female and male, were the pioneers of transnationalisation in a concrete sense. Forced by precarious living conditions to find new or unconventional ways to establish themselves in the new place, they developed transnational relationships and strategies, acquired transcultural competencies and accumulated a knowledge of mobility that could be adapted to each situation for social processes of localisation (Bojadzijev, 2007).

New forms of mobility were created, infrastructures and informal networks established, which made it possible for more people to follow after them. Transnationalisation processes that transcended national borders were thereby set in motion and a “globalization from the bottom up” propelled forward. These kinds of stories of mobility and movement are now being retold by the generations that followed and are linked to families’ experiences and visions for the future.

However, from a viewpoint restricted to nationalism, these ambivalent practices of localisation still appear to be deficits and are thus marginalized in society. Nonetheless, they continue to display the power to innovate, which is especially important for the biographical and spatial orientation of those involved.

(2) It is about models of ways of living that have developed in the subsequent generations, who have not had the same experience of migration as their parents or grandparents. They grew up in cities like Cologne, Berlin and Vienna and were socialized there, yet they are still predominantly perceived as migrants. To deal with conventional naming practices, post-migrants develop various counter-strategies and ironic names for themselves, which often subvert established perceptions: from “Kanak Attack” and “Tschuschenpower” to “Migrantenstadl” and “Die Unmündigen” (a film, TV series, blog, and association, respectively; all involve ironic uses of derogatory terms for migrants). We are dealing here with new, very diverse artistic and political self-reflection (Hill, 2017, p. 335 ff.; Önder & Imad, 2016).

(3) From this new perspective on social relations, an attempt is made to free conventional migration research from its previously fringe position and establish it as a central method of social analysis. This is why Regina Römhild (2015) speaks of “post-migrant migration studies”, arguing for a research orientation in which migration is a perspective and not the object of research. “Post-migration” therefore serves as a category of analysis for a society of mobility and diversity. It renders visible ruptures, ambiguities and marginalized memories that should not be located on the margins of society, but rather are expressions of fundamental relations in global society. This new perspective also leads to critical engagement with social power structures. The “post-migratory” thus becomes a discursive approach against the “migrantisation” and marginalization of people who see themselves as an integral part of society, against a discourse that continues to treat narratives of migration as specific, exceptional, historical phenomena and in which it is habitual to differentiate between native normality and “immigrant problems”. In summary, the post-migrant view allows new differences to be revealed, makes conventional understandings of difference seem questionable and reveals the previously unsaid, unseen and marginalized. This also entails a “radical revision of the social temporality” (Bhabha, 2004, p. 246).
4. The post-migrant generation on the move

From a historical perspective, a certain continuity is evident in the way questions around migration have been dealt with, even though concepts and terms used have changed. Although the neologism “migration background” is now considered politically correct (in Germany), those to whom this label is applied are often irritated by it. They do not want to be reduced to their alleged migration background. They are constantly confronted with “natives” who act as self-appointed experts on their origin, who persist in trying to find out where their actual home “really” is, when they plan to return there, or what their roots are if the answer does not meet their expectations – as though they wish to reveal the concealed truth: namely that the “migrants” do not really belong (Mecheril & Rigelsky, 2010).

If someone whose parents or grandparents were immigrants refers to themselves as being from Frankfurt or Cologne, because he or she was born or grew up in one of these cities, that claim is usually interpreted as an ironic evasion. This is due to the assumption that they have problems about their actual origins and do not want to give an honest answer. Members of the second and third generations regularly find themselves being asked questions that basically serve to reduce their status to that of permanent guests: “Where do you (actually) come from?” “Do you like it here in our country?” Someone may exclaim with amazement: “Why, you live just like we do”, or say in ironic praise: “But you speak very good German!” Regarding these discussions of origin, which Battaglia (2000) terms “origin dialogs”, Armin Nassehi (2014) notes:

“They clearly presume that there must be some sort of metaphysical continuity between the construction of ‘origin’ and the present – that is the only explanation for their insistence. They exhibit disbelief and disappointment that this ascribed trait is not capable of describing the rest of the person.”

5. Transnational Detours up the social ladder

We refer here to interviews carried out with second- and third-generation individuals in the summer of 2015 in Istanbul. As mentioned, central are the descendants of the so-called “guest worker/Gastarbeiter generation” – young persons who grew up and were educated primarily in Germany, and who for the most part are German citizens. They left their country of birth and emigrated to Turkey, the country of origin of their parents or grandparents, where they hoped for better opportunities to build a new life. In the Turkish public sphere they are perceived, if at all, as returning migrants.

The interviews were conducted using the methodology of Kaufmann as developed in Das verstehende Interview (1999). The analysis of the interviews is in the framework of case studies. Several persons interviewed, whom we intentionally contacted in Turkey, were known to us from the German and Austrian media. This led to further contacts. For that reason, one might speak here of a “guided snowball effect”.

The examples suggest that in everyday conversations of this kind, it is not an individual that is being communicated with, but rather the same old clichés and stereotypes. People are always first of all viewed as representatives of their supposed culture of origin. They are being implicitly told that they actually belong somewhere else. We have heard accounts of experiences like this in countless conversations, as exemplified in the following examples:
Ahmet, for example, who was born and grew up near Aachen, a city in western Germany, studied in Aachen and has been working as a construction engineer in Balikesir in Turkey for the last five years, tells the following story from his school days: once, after the summer break, when he told his teacher about how nice his holiday in Turkey with his parents was, she responded with: "Why didn't you just stay there then? No one's forcing you to be here." His biography is full of experiences like this. Sometimes he feels like a foreigner in Turkey too, especially because people immediately notice his accent in Turkish, but at least there he does not have to deal with absurd integration expectations and therefore feels much more comfortable.

Ayla also describes similar experiences. She was born in a town “in the middle of nowhere” near Frankfurt, grew up and went to school there, and has lived in Istanbul for the last seven years. She says that her primary school teacher tried in every possible way to prevent her from getting into the top-tier Gymnasium secondary school (in Germany schools are divided into three academic levels; the top level of Gymnasium is normally a prerequisite for university). Consequently, her parents had to struggle both against the school and this teacher. Nonetheless, Ayla ultimately managed to take her final academic exams for graduation and went on to university. She says she moved to Istanbul because she was sick and tired of small-town life. Although she has not managed to properly establish a career for herself as yet in Istanbul, and mentions a number of difficulties, she appears to be thoroughly enjoying her life in the city. Returning to Germany is not an option that she would consider, at least not yet.

Selma was brought to Berlin by her parents when she was a small child, after they had already been living there a while. She lived there for almost 40 years, moved to Istanbul six years ago and since then has worked in a hotel. She says she emigrated because she frequently experienced discrimination in Germany. She had always longed to be in Istanbul, which she says is her home and where she feels comfortable. As she spoke to us, it seemed she was attempting to suppress her memories of Berlin: “For me, life only really began when I came to Istanbul.”

These case studies show that the persons involved, as “children of ‘guest workers’” (Gastarbeiter) in Germany, were repeatedly confronted with experiences of discrimination and racism, both within institutional contexts (at school) and also in everyday life. As most interviewees expressed in their narratives, this entailed not only a visible and palpable structural racism, but increasingly also diverse everyday experiences that had racist consequences or overtones, a kind of “everyday racism”. Characteristic of this form of racism is that the population hardly perceives it as such. In this connection, Stuart Hall speaks of what he terms an “implicit racism”, pointing there to the normalization of racist practices (see Hall, 1981).

6. Post-migrant models of living as transtopia

One specific phenomenon of the change in our globalized world is, as already mentioned, a kind of mobile sedentariness or sedentary mobility. It is a phenomenon that increasingly influences our ways of living and grasp of reality, and therefore also encourages new ways of thinking. Thus, spaces are produced that we can call “transtopias”. These are partially realized utopias in a world shaped by mobility. They are spaces in which boundaries are traversed, where ambiguous and contradictory elements, both local and global, are linked with each other and condense to form urban structures and modes of communication. They
are places of transition, where marginalized actors and types of knowledge come into view, places in which dominant norms are questioned and a new kind of urban identity becomes possible or even is already being lived. In the broadest sense, transtopias are also thinking spaces, virtual spaces and mobile models for ways of living.

Thus, a “horizon of observation” (Beck, 1997) is formed that permits new strategies of assimilation and localisation, strategies that transcend the local, regional and national and connect our practice of everyday life with the world. (Post-)migrant models of ways of living and everyday strategies in particular are a vibrant expression of such transtopias. They reveal how global relationships are produced, how “multi-home” senses of belonging can come into being and what role they play in people’s everyday lives. The following biographical examples demonstrate this.1

Bilal, 43 years old, was born and raised in Maintal, a small town near Frankfurt am Main. His grandfather, parents and other family members stem from a village in Anatolia and came to Germany as guest workers at the beginning of the 1970s. He says his parents were simple people deeply steeped in traditional ways:

“My parents stemmed originally from simple circumstances in Anatolia. My grandparents were peasants. Both parents were first-born in the family. That already explains a lot, because the first-born kids generally only have a primary school education, like my dad and mom. And the first two, three children from such village circumstances always go to work in the fields, and the younger ones may possibly get a chance to study.”

After completing a degree in architecture in Darmstadt, Bilal moved to London for six years. Since 2011 he has been living with his German wife in Istanbul. He says that London had over time become too expensive to live there, and so to spend the next chapter in his life in Istanbul was thus for him an easy and convenient decision. He was familiar with the city from vacation trips and said he had always liked the city. He says his youngest brother is also thinking of coming to Istanbul, but is still hesitating, since for him the step to venture something new would be much more difficult.

Bilal’s family owns real estate in Istanbul, which now also offers him a sphere of activity as an architect. He says that many guest-worker families back then had purchased apartments and plots of land in Istanbul. After having lived so many years in Germany, a number of them could no longer imagine the prospect of returning to an Anatolian village, and people felt greater affinity with the metropolis of Istanbul. The apartments and parcels of land of the first guest-worker generation are now being used by their descendants.

He answers an emphatic “yes!” to the question as to whether he was ever called “Almanç”2 in Istanbul:

“You’re even conspicuous if you don’t open your mouth. You’re just already identified as one of them. From the way you walk, your gestures, facial expressions. And from the way you dress too. Just from the whole impression you make, you’re either thought of as a tourist or as someone different: You don’t need to fool yourself in that regard.”

However, that does not faze Bilal. He says he never felt the need “to be categorized as a guy 100% from Istanbul or a Turk.”

“Often when I’m out on the street, people may still address me in English or some other language, and when I reply in Turkish they say they’re sorry and beg my pardon. Although I don’t exactly understand at all why they feel so ashamed. But apparently, these people feel as though they’ve insulted me for not having recognized me as a Turk. I don’t have that problem.”
In everyday situations, shopping at the market, in bargaining for a purchase, he also sees the advantages in this: “Then, like you can also be German again and say: ‘OK, no thanks, I’ve changed my mind’. I’m much more direct in some such situations. Like I just say something then.”

Responding to whether he had had any negative experiences in Germany due to his family background, he says:

“I was a foreigner both there (in Germany) and also here (in Istanbul). But here I never felt so strongly I was a foreigner. I feel here nevertheless at home. Back there, despite my perfect knowledge of German and my biography, I actually always felt like a foreigner, like I didn’t belong. There were countless examples where people tried to make clear to me that I didn’t belong there. In every phase of your life you were very much made to understand that”

After all, in most of the countries in northern Europe and the very developed economies there, like there’s a kind of attitude that all the other countries are so underprivileged, or underdeveloped, and also culturally underdeveloped. Or that people look down a bit on other countries that economically are not so strong. And then they feel they also have a need to educate the people from those regions. And that’s the unpleasant thing, and in Germany, well, that was always especially strong. You often get deprecated a bit, put down.”

He says that this berating, getting dressed down, can begin already on the stairway or out in the street. “Maybe it’d be better if people would leave each other alone and a little more in peace.”

He gives an example of this kind of recurrent paternalistic critique:

“Like when children are out playing, see, and they all have dark hair, then they don’t just always make an ‘educational’ comment of some kind. No, they also say: ‘Do you act like this in your own country too?’ Then what you always get is a mixture of an educational comment (like about behavior) plus the added regional humiliation. Now if they were all blond kids, people would only say: ‘OK, try to be a little quieter’, or something like that. But then what comes is always this brief remark added on, this little morsel of hatred of the foreigners.”

Responding to the question as to how he spent his time in London, he says:

“In London in any case I actually felt more like I belonged, more than in Germany. Because in London it’s simply, well, it’s genuinely very multicultural. Like, I mean, almost everyone’s a foreigner”.

Bilal comments that in public offices, in the police or at banks you’d see people from all kinds of different backgrounds. “There are no regulations about how and what you mustn’t do.” He says he especially liked the fact that even in banks, women in a headscarf could work “in a fairly relaxed way”. He says his sister in Germany was heavily discriminated against because of her headscarf, and had been more frequently followed while on the street and heckled by “psychopaths or right-wingers”.

But he also comments on the “well-meaning” kinds of discrimination:

“Like then, there are in turn also acts of discrimination by women’s rights activists who think they have to liberate the women wearing a headscarf, and they put them under such compulsion and pressure at school that they come home in tears. And maybe the teacher means well, thinking she’s helping her and liberating her from the pressures of the family. Yet it was this woman’s own decision to wear the headscarf. We’ve even had legal disputes because of that. We took the school to court over this. We no longer had any parents ordering her to do something. No, she just wanted herself to wear a headscarf.”
He goes on to talk about how his sister was an enthusiastic basketball player, but that her female teacher simply wouldn’t tolerate her in the sports group because of the headscarf she wore.

“That’s where I have the feeling then that people sometimes are a bit too militant in their views about their own educational values. Like how they think they have to force them on others. That they say: ‘my culture, my values of democracy and freedom are the only ones, there can’t be another kind of democracy.’ That’s already just so-o-o politicized.”

In conclusion, he says that he continues to maintain ties with relatives in other countries; part of his family is in Germany, France, and other countries. “Also, it can’t be ruled out that sometime in future maybe I’ll go back again to Germany.” The very typical Turkish question is: “Have you come back forever?” In respect to that, Bilal does not want to commit himself. His future and that of his children later on could lie in Germany or somewhere else completely. He could also imagine living in two different countries. However, he expresses his worries and concerns about the increasingly negative mood against refugees and migrants in Germany, about attacks on refugee hostels or activities of extreme right-wing groups. He thinks the government is doing too little to combat this. “I’ve always had the feeling that the danger that something bad’s going to happen to a person is the greatest in Germany.”

Ertan, who came from Turkey at the age of 10 years to join his family in Munich, where he grew up, is also an architect. After working in his profession for several years, 10 years ago he moved to Istanbul in order to realize his dream of restoring old houses and apartments with a view of the Bosphorus and then renting them to tourists. He has since managed to restore and renovate numerous centrally located old apartments in a stylish mixture of traditional and modern design elements. Despite a number of bureaucratic hurdles at the start, he quickly became accustomed to his new circumstances. Ertan compares Istanbul to New York: interesting, exciting, diverse and cosmopolitan. He has maintained his personal links to Munich; they are now very useful to him for his projects. Besides renting out apartments to German-speaking guests, he organizes – together with his wife and a bilingual team from Germany – cultural activities that are also available to his clients. During the conversation, it becomes clear that he benefits from his biographical experiences in Munich and can translate them into everyday practice. On the other hand, he feels he is often faced with local problems that in his view restrict his creativity. Maintaining a certain distance from local norms also helps him to look at and assess the circumstances in a more differentiated manner. For him, this “in-betweenness” is a creative way of living and a source for unique ideas.

Mehtap was born into a guest-worker family in Berlin, where she also grew up and studied construction engineering. She says her mother especially placed a high value on a good education. She has lived in Istanbul for the last eight years. Since she always wanted to go there, she successfully applied for a six-month internship after she finished university. After the internship, she went back to Berlin. Later, she applied for and obtained another job in Istanbul, this time well-paid. It was only when she was in Turkey that she realized how “German” her socialization had been. At first in Turkey, she missed the well-ordered life she was used to in Germany. Everything seemed more chaotic and informal, but at the same time there were no obligations. She says it took her a while to get used to these circumstances. Conversely, her work colleagues seemed to find her strict work ethic and her way of dealing with people a little odd. Some of them did not understand her direct manner. They immediately categorized her as an “Almanci”. Over time, however, they began to
appreciate her ideas. Mehtap says that she has now learned to reconcile the two different attitudes. She has grown used to the fast style of life in Istanbul that follows a different logic. It is clear that she has reassessed the circumstances and her time in Berlin from a new vantage of distance and now sees her everyday routines from the past in a new light. For example, in Berlin when she spoke to her “fellow Turks”, it was always in a mix of languages. She said she simply could better express certain things in Turkish, others in German.

This widespread, pragmatic mix of languages is specific to each situation, a translation of acquired linguistic competencies in everyday communication. This is clearly a competency, but is still predominantly viewed as problematic in the German-speaking discourse on migration.

7. In conclusion: “in-between”3 – subversive resistance

To summarize, in most interviews, the individual motives mentioned for emigration to Turkey are experience of discrimination suffered in Germany as “guest worker children”. Only a small number mentions financially attractive positions offered to them, jobs which they could only dream of, in Germany or Austria. Most spoke rather about experiences of discrimination they had had which then induced them to emigrate. Others pointed to heated debates on integration and the constant pressure to justify oneself – elements in the society to which they felt they were subject to as supposed foreigners – as the underlying reason for their emigration.

Although they have been socialized and educated in Germany, and most also had a university degree, they saw few opportunities for social advancement. As current studies confirm, members of the second or third migration generation, whose parents or grandparents for the most part originate from Turkey, often experience discrimination in the German labor market (Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2014; Schneider, Crul, & Lelie, 2014). They are frequently denied a job because of their name, their purported origin or family religious background. In this connection, the formal qualifications they have acquired evidently play no role or only a subordinate one. Thus, those individuals felt they were constrained to develop other alternative perspectives and strategies for their future. In the hope to make better use of their professional skills and cultural capital, such as multilingual abilities and transnational connections, and to be able to climb up the social ladder, they have recently chosen to emigrate to the countries of origin of their parents or grandparents, where in some instances they have again experienced new modes of exclusion. Here they are viewed as “Almanci”.

Our observations indicate that in Istanbul, for example, the number of those who have found a job in well-known companies and who have achieved a high social status are increasing. Well-educated individuals, who for the most part have citizenship in an East European country, are proficient in Turkish and have experiences in mobility, are attractive colleagues for these companies. With citizenship in a European country, it means that the interviewees can move freely both in Turkey and also in most European countries. Turkish citizens must in most cases apply for a tourist visa, and that is bound up with various restrictions. Then members of the second and third generation function as intermediaries between Turkish and European companies. Precisely this freedom of movement enjoyed by the interviewees is used by the companies in Turkey as a resource for mobility. In addition, their competencies in various languages are deemed a great advantage.
The above biographical examples of young emigrants, who often commute between two or more places, point up the diverse creative potential of ways of living produced by mobility and represent a lived reality in everyday urban life that already exists today. New competencies are developed and social and cultural capital are accumulated through transnational links. In this way, transnational spaces become spaces for new possibilities (Schiffauer, 2006, p. 169ff). “Mobile senses of belonging” (Strasser, 2009) thus become a hybrid phenomenon that transcends borders and a biographical resource in the globalized world. These models for living, in which various global elements are reflectively merged at a local level, can be seen as a life practice that is not trying to catch up with the reality of the globalized world, but rather drives its development (Apitzsch, 1999, p. 482).

Living between or rather in different worlds, which in the context of migration has been largely presented as an internal conflict, reveals itself on closer examination to be extremely relevant and productive for people’s lives. It is an apt metaphor for the cosmopolitan sign of the times. As Regina Römhild correctly states: “Those who are sedentary are under the illusion that one must choose one territory, spatially and culturally, in order to find an answer to the question of identity.” (Römhild, 2003, p. 14).

Thus, when one views the situation from a different perspective, it becomes clear that it is precisely border biographies and ambiguous senses of belonging, usually regarded as problematic in migration discourse, that are already part of lived normality. The interviews in Istanbul clearly demonstrated: living in and across different worlds and the constant reflection on the social conditions in each function as a kind of double distance to the norms here and there and can be seen as significant biographical resources (Yildirim-Tschoepe, 2016). It is the achievement of creative synthesis that marks such post-migrant models of living – as a transtopia.

It is important to note that “in-between” is used here metaphorically and designates a certain implicit distance to the local normalities in Germany and Turkey. Those are normalities experienced as exclusionary in various different ways by the persons involved. Their life plans for the future embody this distance, termed here a kind of implicit and “subversive resistance strategy”. For that reason, this “in-between”, this distance is utilized by those persons involved in a creative manner. Thus, all the life plans for the future referred to in the paper as case examples embody this distance. Naturally they are also bound up with conflict situations. Consequently, this implicit distancing strategy has a positive impact on the life circumstances and situations of the post-migrant generation.

The post-migrant generation moves in diverse and contradictory contexts, developing ambivalent life strategies: in a space in-between transnationalisation and discrimination, “here vs. there”, “to leave or to stay”. This promotes a critical encounter with the respective local conditions. A certain double distance to the non-questioned normalities “here and there” is part of this generation’s everyday life. At the same time, it should be understood as a resistant practice, a kind of subversive political strategy.

Notes
1. Bilal’s biographical narrative is presented in somewhat greater detail, the other two more briefly.
2. In Turkish colloquial speech, German-Turkish people are referred to as “Almanci” (“Germans”). The term has pejorative connotations that the person is arrogant, pedantic and impolite, but is often used by German-Turkish people themselves in an ironic manner.
3. The concept “in-between” is used here metaphorically. It designates a certain distance to the ethnic-national normalities marking the future life plans of the individuals interviewed. The relevance of this distancing strategy was emphasized in all interviews. We call this a “subversive resistance strategy”.

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