

## Turkish Muslims in a German city: Entrepreneurial and residential self-determination

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### Abstract

Drawing upon a collection of oral history interviews, this paper offers an insight into entrepreneurial and residential patterns and behaviour amongst Turkish Muslims in the German city of Bremen. The academic literature has traditionally argued that Turkish migrants in Germany have been pushed into self-employment, low-quality housing and segregated neighbourhoods as a result of discrimination, and poor employment and housing opportunities. Yet the interviews reveal the extent to which Bremen's Turkish Muslims' performances and experiences have overwhelmingly been the consequences of personal choices and ambitions. For many of the city's Turkish Muslim entrepreneurs, self-employment had been a long-term objective, and they have succeeded in establishing and running their businesses in the manner they choose with regards to location and clientele, for example. Similarly, interviewees stressed the way in which they were able to shape their housing experiences by opting which districts of the city to live in and by purchasing property. On the whole, they perceive their entrepreneurial and residential practices as both consequences and mediums of success, integration and a loyalty to the city of Bremen. The findings are contextualised within the wider debate regarding the long-term legacy of Germany's post-war guest-worker system and its position as a "country of immigration".

**Keywords:** Bremen; housing; oral history; self-employment; Turkish Muslims.

### Introduction

Germany's Turkish communities have long been at the centre of vibrant political, academic and public deliberations. During the guest-worker years and the family reunification period that followed, and throughout their emergence as fixed attributes on German cities' landscapes, Turks secured a firm place in debates in a Germany that was a reluctant and hesitant country of immigration. In recent years, they have been the prime focus of discussions and reflections on integration, citizenship, multiculturalism, segregation, social cohesion and the place of Islam in Germany. On the whole, the history of Turkish migration to and subsequent settlement in Germany during the post-1960s era has conventionally been associated with economic exploitation and hardship, residential difficulties and segregation, educational underachievement, confu-

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sion, uncertainty, shortsighted political strategies and ad hoc social provisions (Herbert, 1986; Abadan-Unat, 2011). Turks have gradually come to be perceived as the ethnic minority group least likely to achieve integration into German society, and as recognizable and clear *Ausländer*.

This paper will provide an insight into the Turkish Muslim community in Bremen, a city that, apart from a few exceptions (Farwick, 2011; Hackett, 2013), has been neglected in the academic literature despite being home to a well-established and substantial Turkish population. Drawing upon a range of oral history interviews, it will expose the manner in which Bremen's Turkish Muslims have contended with and overcome the initial insecurity instilled by the overarching guest-worker framework, uncovering some of the more positive aspects of their entrepreneurial and residential patterns and behaviour. As well as investing in properties and businesses, they have progressively shaped and moulded individual neighbourhoods, and formed an engagement with the receiving society upon doing so. This paper's findings will be framed around two key points of discussion. Firstly, it will question the conventional thesis that Germany's Turkish migrants' business and housing careers have been shaped by discrimination and constraint (Kürsat-Ahlers, 1996, pp. 123-6; Pütz, 2008). Secondly, it will query the long-term legacy of Germany's post-war guest-worker paradigm on Turkish Muslims at a local level.

2 — Whilst the entrepreneurial and residential experiences and practices of Turks, and ethnic minorities more widely, in Germany have been awarded a significant level of attention in the academic literature, few works have drawn upon oral history. Instead, they have often used datasets, such as those provided by the German Socio-economic Panel (GSOEP) (Drever & Clark, 2002; Constant, Shachmurove & Zimmermann, 2007). Studies that have employed oral history interviews have tended to address other aspects of the Turkish migration process, such as political integration and ethnic identification (Dörschler, 2006; Ersanilli & Saharso, 2011). One notable exception is Patricia Ehrkamp's 2005 investigation into contemporary transnational ties and local attachments amongst Turks in Duisburg-Marxloh, which does discuss elements of both business- and neighbourhood-formation (Ehrkamp, 2005). This paper, however, will offer a grassroots insight into Turkish Muslims' entrepreneurial and residential choices and behaviour, and findings will be contextualised within a historical framework.

### **Bremen: History, industry & identity**

This paper draws upon the case study of Bremen, a Hanseatic city in North-western Germany. An industrial centre since the mid-seventeenth century, Bremen has been home to an active port and a wide variety of industries including steel, wool textile, craft and food production, tobacco and cigar manufacturing and ship construction (Leohold, 1986; Power, Plöger and

Winkler, 2010). Although since the mid-1970s Bremen has become renowned for a continuous run of economic crises, including the closing of factories, shipbuilder bankruptcies and political controversies, as well as high levels of unemployment, poverty and social deprivation (Ireland, 2004, p. 87), its initial post-war emergence as a renewed trade and industrial hub led to a vast increase in its immigrant population. Whilst slightly later than was the case in areas such as Hessen and Baden Württemberg in the industrial south, Bremen attracted a significant number of guest-workers. Some of the main recruiters in the city included *AG Weser* and *Bremer Vulkan*, two shipbuilding companies, *Bremer Woll-Kämmerei*, a wool textile company, the *Klückner* steel- and metal-works, and the *Bremen-Vegesacker Fischerei-Gesellschaft* (Bremen Vegesack fishing company).

Perhaps as a result of this chronologically delayed recruitment and the fact that academic studies have tended to concentrate primarily on cities with neighbourhoods renowned for their Turkish communities, such as Berlin (Kreuzberg) and Frankfurt (Bahnhofsviertel) (Klopp, 2002; Mandel, 2008), Bremen's Turkish ethnic minority population remains largely under-researched. Yet despite this academic neglect, the city is home to a well-established and sizeable Turkish community that for the most part has its roots in the guest-worker years. Since the 1970s, family members from Turkey have joined the original guest-workers, and the city's foreign-born population increased from constituting under 2 per cent of the total population in 1968 to 6 per cent in 1978 and almost 10 per cent in 1988 (Ireland, 2004, p. 86). With regards to the Turkish community specifically, it stood at 1,673 in 1966, 16,535 in 1976 and 36,406 in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

As well as constituting a largely unexplored context in which to study entrepreneurial and residential patterns and behaviour amongst Turkish Muslims in Germany, there are other reasons for which the city of Bremen makes for a pertinent case study. Firstly, Bremen's local autonomy has long been prevalent in the devising and implementing of migration policies in that the city's government has been recognised for its early, persistent and forward-thinking attempts at promoting the integration of its Turkish population, and has traditionally taken great pride in the position of and provisions available for its migrants when compared to elsewhere in Germany (Interview with Mayor Hans Koschnick, undated; Ireland, 2004, p. 90). Secondly, it has often been claimed that Bremen is home to a particular regional identity that has deep historical roots. This presumed identity is the consequence of the city's position as an international shipping and trading centre, and its political, economic and social distinctiveness (Buse, 1993).

Furthermore, clear links have been formed between Bremen's history and its more modern role as the home of ethnic minorities. This has recently been

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<sup>1</sup> Figures provided by the *Statistisches Landesamt Bremen* (Bremen's Statistical Land Office). In 2009, Bremen's population stood at 547,685.

seen, for example, in the manner migrant businesses have been perceived as capable of building upon the city's role as an international port and foreign trade centre (Bremische Bürgerschaft Landtag 16. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 16/264). Overall, Bremen's government's approach has been one that has eagerly encouraged the integration of the city's Turkish community, often escaping the widespread criticism that has been lavished upon policy in Germany at both a national and local level (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009). This particularism has undoubtedly sculpted the environment in which Turkish Muslims' entrepreneurial and residential experiences have played out.

## The Research

This article draws upon 21 oral history interviews with Turkish Muslims that were carried out in Bremen in July and August 2010. Ten respondents were male, four of which were first-generation immigrants, and five and one of which were second- and third-generation respectively. Nine of the interviewees were female, with five being first-generation immigrants, three belonging to the second-generation and one to the third-generation. The remaining two interviews were conducted with married couples. One comprised a husband and wife who were both second-generation migrants. Regarding the other, the wife was a second-generation Turk who had grown up in Bremen whilst the husband had only lived in the city for a few years. The participants were contacted primarily through mosques, and Turkish and Muslim centres and organisations. After initial contact was established, snowball sampling was used in order to secure additional respondents.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes and places of employment,<sup>3</sup> and were recorded when permission was given to do so. All respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to remain anonymous.<sup>4</sup> The interviews consisted of open-ended questions that were loosely structured around the topics of employment, housing, integration, and general impressions of and experiences in Bremen.<sup>5</sup> This format allowed for a range of possible responses, and enabled the interviewees to expand on themes and subjects they deemed important.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The snowball sampling method is used widely within migration studies (Kibria, 2011). Every effort was made to ensure that respondents belonged to as many different social networks and lived in as many different areas of Bremen as possible.

<sup>3</sup> Some interviews took place in other locations, including at cafes, mosques and the university. All of the interviews were conducted in German. All quotations included in this paper have been translated into English by the author.

<sup>4</sup> Some interviewees chose to remain anonymous whilst others said that their names could be used. In the interest of consistency, all respondents have been anonymised in this paper.

<sup>5</sup> The interviewees were also invited to speak about their experiences with Bremen's education system. This material, however, lies outside the remit of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> The use of open-ended questions in interviews is a technique commonly employed in migration research (Shutika, 2011).

As is the case across Germany (Mandel, 2008, p. 92), the Turkish community in Bremen tends not to form part of mainstream middle-class society. The interviewees were primarily former guest-workers who arrived to Bremen during the 1960s and early 1970s, the majority of whom had rural origins, and the descendants thereof. As such, whilst some have middle-class aspirations and many have made vast progress with regards to their entrepreneurial and residential standings, they remain predominantly working class. All of the respondents defined themselves as Muslims, yet it must be recognised that they do not constitute one homogenous group. Some were religiously active Muslims, whilst others had simply inherited their religion, but did not practice. Yet being Muslim often constituted an important part of their identities and they defined themselves as such on some level. Whilst the interviews most certainly do not represent the views of all Turkish Muslims in Bremen, they allow the exploration of specific themes and enable the uncovering of entrepreneurial and residential experiences and behaviour within a largely unexplored geographical context.

### **Key findings: Choice, success, and integration**

An estimated 70 per cent of the European Union's self-employed Turks are in Germany and their entrepreneurialism has progressively been encouraged by local-level government policies and measures (Constant, Shachmurove & Zimmermann, 2007). Recent years have also witnessed an increase in allegations of "parallel societies", a growing recognition that home ownership can lead to higher levels of integration, and the inclusion of the housing sector in the ground-breaking 2007 National Integration Plan (Schönwälder & Sohn, 2009; Constant, Roberts & Zimmermann, 2009). Yet despite this political and popular interest, the academic literature on migrant entrepreneurship and residential practices in Germany remains underdeveloped when compared to that addressing countries like the United States and Britain (Borjas, 1986; Bolt, Özüekren & Phillips, 2010). Nevertheless, clear hypotheses have been established regarding the notions of choice, success and integration, or the lack thereof, in these areas. In both cases, the dominant argument has often been one of constraint, limited opportunities and a lack of acculturation.

Concerning entrepreneurship, whilst some studies have recognised that business-ownership amongst Turks is often an employment choice that stems from an inherent entrepreneurialism (Constant, Shachmurove & Zimmermann, 2007), many have argued that they are pushed into self-employment due to perceived discrimination in the German labour market (Constant & Zimmermann, 2006). Furthermore, although the Centre for Turkish Studies in Essen championed the argument that Turkish businesses convey a commitment to Germany, promote the emergence of a Turkish middle class, create jobs, and act as a bridge between Turks and Germans (Şen, 1991), there has

long been a widespread belief that self-employment leads to segregation and ghettoization in that businesses serve a Turkish clientele and constitute ethnic enclaves (Abadan-Unat, 1997). Regarding residential practices, whilst some works have recognised the role played by personal aspirations in Turks' housing choices (Ehrkamp, 2005), academic research has overwhelmingly revelled in claims of enforced segregation, limited residential mobility and discrimination (Gans, 1987; Kürsat-Ahlers, 1996, pp. 123-125; Stowasser, 2002, pp. 58-59). Furthermore, little attention has been awarded to the growing practice of home ownership amongst Turks, perhaps because the rental market continues to dominate the German housing sector (for one exception, see Drever and Clark, 2002).

The oral history interviews drawn upon in this paper offer a more comprehensive and personalised account than can be attained from datasets, and go some way towards supporting the theory that Turkish migrants' entrepreneurship and residential practices have often been the consequences of consciously made choices, and have acted as evidence and conduits of success and integration. Whilst the interviewees cannot be perceived as one homogeneous group, they overwhelmingly portrayed their self-employment and residential experiences in a positive light. For example, out of the 12 respondents who ran businesses at the time of the interviews or had previously done so, 10 portrayed entrepreneurship as their employment choice, and all maintained that their businesses enabled contact with and depended on the local German population in some way. Of the 23 interviewees, only two mentioned having lived in poor-quality housing, with a third having experienced overcrowded housing conditions. All of the respondents emphasised their ability to secure properties of their choosing in their preferred areas of the city, and seven of them, including one married couple, already owned properties, whilst three others expressed an ambition to soon do so. Overall, the interviewees emphasised their ability to develop and achieve their own entrepreneurial and housing aims and aspirations. They perceived their business and housing practices and behaviour as both indicators and conduits of success, integration and a long-term commitment to Bremen, and spoke about them with a sense of pride and satisfaction.

With regards to self-employment, not only was running a business a widespread practice, but it was also one that was deemed important on a personal level. A few of the interviewees portrayed self-employment as a consequence of discrimination and a lack of opportunities in the local labour market either in reference to themselves or others,<sup>7</sup> and this is certainly the argument that has long dominated the academic literature on Turkish entrepreneurship in Germany (Pütz, 2008). Yet many others were keen to stress that their entrepreneurialism has been driven by a conscious desire to be economically independent. When asked why they had become self-employed, one interviewee

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<sup>7</sup> Interviews with two second-generation males (11 August 2010 and 17 August 2010).

stressed that it was because ‘it’s in my blood’,<sup>8</sup> whilst others cited a longing to be independent and receive good earnings as their primary motivations.<sup>9</sup>

There are a number of ways in which the establishing and running of these businesses can be perceived as having been successful. Not only did respondents not report any problems in becoming self-employed, but also their businesses have long pertained to a variety of sectors and have included restaurants, shops, a discotheque, a sales office, a construction business, and media design and dressmaking services. Furthermore, whilst it has often been argued that Turkish businesses in Germany predominantly serve the Turkish community and are firmly rooted within the Turkish enclave economy (Hillmann, 2009, p. 106), the interviewees were keen to emphasize the manner in which their businesses enabled and depended on contact with native Germans. One first-generation self-employed male, for example, had a German business partner.<sup>10</sup> Others revealed that their businesses largely served a German clientele, with one respondent proudly divulging how the restaurant he used to run was regularly frequented by the city’s football team, Werder Bremen’s, manager.<sup>11</sup> One second-generation male businessman explained that some Turkish entrepreneurs in Bremen purposely tailored their businesses in order to attract German customers. He claimed that some refused to hire Muslim women who wore headscarves because they ‘want to give a better impression to their clientele’. He had done this himself by locating his business in an affluent part of the city, and by stocking and selling high-quality products.<sup>12</sup>

Choice and success have also been present amongst Bremen’s Turkish Muslims in the housing sector. Whilst some respondents acknowledged that their families had suffered poor quality housing and overcrowding during the early years of settlement,<sup>13</sup> it is evident that Bremen’s Turkish Muslims have since shaped their own residential experiences in a number of ways. The interviewees stressed the manner in which they had traditionally been either attracted to or deterred away from individual neighbourhoods as a result of what is recognized as their Turkish or Muslim identities. There were those who had lived in the west of the city for many years and could not imagine their lives unfolding anywhere else. Some had grown up in the West of Bremen, others had worked or had children go to school there, and this remained

<sup>8</sup> Interview with a first-generation male (28 July 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Interviews with a first-generation male (27 July 2010) and a first-generation female (27 August 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Interview with a first-generation male (27 July 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Interviews with two first-generation males (27 and 28 July 2010), a second-generation female (19 August 2010) and a second-generation couple (29 August 2010). This argument is supported by a study conducted by the Centre for Turkish Studies, which revealed the large extent to which Bremen and Bremerhaven’s Turkish businesses’ suppliers, contractors and customers were German (Zentrum für Türkeistudien, 2001, pp. 39, 41).

<sup>12</sup> Interview with a second-generation male (11 August 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Interviews with two second-generation males (26 July 2010 and 17 August 2010) and a second-generation female (19 August 2010).

the case for many.<sup>14</sup>

The western district of Gröpelingen especially, an area renowned for its multicultural streets, mosques, ethnic minority shops and restaurants, and migrant centres and organisations, has long been perceived as Bremen's Turkish hub. Having been home to the city's industrial harbour and numerous companies that employed Turkish workers during the *Gastarbeiter* years, namely the AG Weser shipbuilding company and the *Klückner* steel- and metal-works, there were many interviewees who felt a strong sense of attachment to this city quarter in particular. For example, when asked why it was important to remain in Gröpelingen, one second-generation female respondent replied: "This is home for me because I grew up here. I went to school here. I have my family here...I would not want to move to another area of the city...I'm active in a mosque so it's practical for me to get there and, because I grew up here, I know many local people. I know a lot of Germans...When I go to another area of the city, I feel like a stranger."<sup>15</sup>

Others had chosen to live in different areas away from the heart of Bremen's Turkish community. One couple listed the availability of better quality and more modern housing stock as one of their reasons for having done so.<sup>16</sup> Yet many saw themselves as being a "different type" of Turkish Muslim to those who lived in Gröpelingen and thus had purposefully distanced themselves from this district, opting instead for areas like Osterholz in the east or for neighbourhoods in or near the city centre.<sup>17</sup> For example, when comparing herself to Turkish Muslims in Gröpelingen, one second-generation female interviewee argued that 'my world is different'.<sup>18</sup> For the most part, the neighbourhood was more important to the interviewees than individual properties, and was seen as both a representation and extension of their own identities.<sup>19</sup>

As well as determinedly choosing their areas of residence, some respondents have succeeded in becoming owner-occupiers. When asked why they had decided to purchase property in Bremen, many mentioned that it had been an important step for them for a number of reasons. It had enabled them to live in close proximity to family, to achieve a sense of independence and many

<sup>14</sup> Interview with a third-generation male (23 August 2010) and a first-generation female (25 August 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Interview with a second-generation female (5 August 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a second-generation couple (29 August 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Interviews with a first-generation male (27 July 2010), a first-generation male (28 July 2010) and a second-generation couple (29 August 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Interview with a second-generation female (15 July 2010).

<sup>19</sup> It has been argued elsewhere that local attachment and place play a fundamental role in identity representation and construction amongst Turkish Muslims in Germany (Ehrkamp, 2007). Yet studies have tended to concentrate on neighbourhoods renowned for their sizeable Turkish populations. More research is needed on neighbourhoods that are not ethnic and religious minority centres.



believed that it made long-term financial sense.<sup>20</sup> Some identified home ownership as a sign of commitment to their local surroundings and Germany more widely. For example, one first-generation female stated: ‘I want to live in Germany. That was the deciding factor for me.’<sup>21</sup> At the time of the interviews, others still had ambitions of owning property, one of the reasons given for which was to become a landlord through the renting out of rooms.<sup>22</sup> On the whole, respondents were overwhelmingly content with their residential standings. They had long been able to shape their own housing experiences and manipulate the housing market to serve their own interests, and were confident that they would continue to do so.

### Conclusion

It is not the intention of this paper to claim that Bremen’s Turkish Muslims’ entrepreneurial and residential experiences have escaped constraint and discrimination. Indeed there have certainly been incidents of both, examples of which were discussed by some of the interviewees. Yet it is clear that these instances have long been overshadowed by a sense of choice, ambition and success to an extent that cannot simply be dismissed as what could perhaps otherwise be misinterpreted as a desire on behalf of the interviewees to overplay their parts in determining their own business and housing patterns and behavior. It is evident that Turkish Muslims in Bremen have traditionally displayed a higher degree of self-determination and ambition in their entrepreneurial and housing performances than tends to be recognised for Turks in Germany as a whole. This might be the consequence of the city’s particular historical characteristics, its local authority’s proactivity with regards to migrant communities or its regional identity. Although the effects of these attributes prove impossible to measure, the interviewees certainly felt that their local surroundings provided them with opportunities that were not available to Turks in Germany more widely. They identified locality as an important factor, with many referring to themselves as “Bremer” and depicting the city as a distinguished location that had allowed them to thrive.<sup>23</sup>

This local distinctiveness questions the extent to which Germany’s post-war national immigration framework has had a lasting legacy at a city level. As was the case throughout West Germany, Bremen’s post-war guest-worker history was one involving recruitment offices, medical examinations and temporary contacts, and was renowned for isolation, confusion, prejudice, racism

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<sup>20</sup> Interviews with a second-generation female (5 August 2010), two first-generation females (25 and 27 August 2010) and a second-generation couple (29 August 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Interview with a first-generation female (19 August 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Interview with a second-generation male (11 August 2010).

<sup>23</sup> This was stressed by many of the interviewees. For example, interviews with two second-generation males (26 July 2010 and 13 August 2010), a first-generation female (25 August 2010) and a third-generation female (17 August 2010).

and the everyday experiences of working for a company where one was considered nothing more than a temporary supply of manpower. Scholars have repeatedly emphasized the fact that, by their very nature, *Gastarbeiter* were expected to be temporary residents in a Germany that was “not a country of immigration”, and whose labour importation scheme was shaped by short-term policies, unpreparedness and a neglect of future implications, which has had negative consequences on Turks’ employment and housing performances (Castles, 1992, p. 42; Fetzter & Soper, 2005, pp. 100-101). Indeed, Germany is frequently perceived as a nation that has only recently come to terms with its position as a “country of immigration” as a result of its reformed citizenship laws, its immigration law of 2005 and the unprecedented level of attention awarded to integration by Angela Merkel’s government. Its Turkish Muslims remain at the centre of a frenzied debate regarding social cohesion and polarization, extremism and radicalization, and the alleged crisis of multiculturalism.

Yet this paper’s historical approach and methodology expose how, irrespective of national-level political mandate and popular deliberation, entrepreneurial and residential experiences amongst Turkish Muslims in Bremen have long been both consequences and conduits of success, integration and a feeling of loyalty to their local German surroundings. In other words, the otherwise largely unexplored local context of Bremen offers a positive deviation from the traditional national immigration narrative in that it appears as though migrant choice and ambition soon surpassed the initial constraints of the guest-worker paradigm. This paper’s scope and findings are timely in a number of ways. On an academic level, they support the recent, and increasingly prominent, call for scholarship to move beyond ‘methodological nationalism’, and do more to recognise the relationship that exists between migrants and the cities in which they live, as well as the role the local level can play in the migration process (Ireland, 2004; Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009; Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2011). Furthermore, after decades of uncertainty and denial, Germany appears to have finally reached a political consensus on immigration and integration, with Muslim migrant communities in particular, as well as the employment and housing sectors, being awarded a significant level of attention. An enhanced understanding of individual migrant communities’ entrepreneurial and residential patterns, behaviour and development certainly has the potential to inform these deliberations in a nation that continues to refine its 21<sup>st</sup>-century focus on integration.

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