

Code and Codex.

Collective Self-descriptions of Turkish-German teenagers in Berlin.

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The proposed paper presents some results of my PhD-research about the idols and heroes of Turkish-German teenagers in Berlin. My research is directing the focus on the previously neglected narratives of belonging and self-description among the third generation of Turkish-German teenagers. As we were interested in their interpretative negotiations of idols, we conducted several group discussions with Turkish-German pupils at different schools in Berlin.

Surprisingly, the interviewed teenagers named role models like Mother Theresa, Oskar Schindler or Atatürk. However, these idols are not used by the teenagers to identify themselves neither with Germany nor Turkey or the Turkish-German community. Moreover, they contest the existence of a consistent Turkish-German identity and besides, dismiss this as category of self-description. In contrast to the disclaiming of national categories of belonging stands the veritable “sacralization” of family – the most important point of reference among abstract categories. Hence, the question arises: Is the idealization of family a mere default notion in the absence of alternative possibilities of identification?

One possible answer to this question could lie in the meaning they ascribe to family. I am arguing that for the Turkish-German teenagers family stands for loyalty towards the Turkish-German community. By referring on Family they emblemize a codex of respectability and virtue, by which they are committed to themselves. This codex enables them to dissociate themselves from “Germans” as well from “Turkey-Turks”.

However, if the youngsters use a “codex of modesty” by which they recognize themselves as equal why do they resolutely neglect a Turkish-German identity? In the group-discussions it could be observed that the ideal of how a “modest turk” should be is answered by the teenagers in different manners. Surprisingly, they do not problematicize these concrete manifestations in a confrontative or exclusive modus. Rather, it appears that it is a taboo to deny the belonging of a person to the group of “modest Turks”, for example, if he cannot speak Turkish, has no headscarf, has a German parent or German friend. This inclusive

practice of the “codex of modesty” functions as the collective identity of Turkish-German youth in Berlin, by which they establish a Unity by diversity. Goal of this paper is to focus on methodological questions.