

**The Victimization of Turkish Migrants and
the Consequences for German Society**

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1. Preliminary Remarks

Victimology has become a main topic of research at the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony in the last few years (cf. Bilsky 1993; Pfeiffer 1993; Wetzels 1993; Bilsky, Pfeiffer, Wetzels 1993; Wetzels, Greve, Mecklenburg, Bilsky, Pfeiffer 1994). Within this field of research we developed a concept to investigate victimization experiences of migrants in Germany. In February 1994 we received a grant from the Volkswagen-Foundation which enabled us to begin with the field study. Besides the author two Turkish students of social sciences are collaborating within the project.

2. The Problem

Foreigners' delinquency is very much under public discussion in Germany. On structural considerations, however, the victimization of foreigners would be a much more obvious subject due to their generally weaker position in German society. This position mainly results from the fact that most of the migrants are not of German nationality, even not most of those born in Germany. One important reason for this situation is the fact that foreign residents who want to receive German citizenship

have to petition for release from their original nationality - often a difficult and lengthy procedure.

Taking the weaker position of foreigners for granted, we are looking at the problem from a victimological point of view. Here, we have to consider that the self- and external attribution of the victim role depends on the reference point: For example, an offender can be a victim of ill-treatment by the police. This angle may also lead us to the analysis of some forms of deviant behavior of foreigners, which would be treated as an effect of victimization though.

Victimization experiences can be particularly traumatic for foreigners especially if the reasons for the victimization are due to their belonging to a certain ethnic group. Under these circumstances the answer to the question "Why me of all people?", might be, e.g., "because I am Turkish". Such an interpretation seems to be plausible especially to those foreign residents who are living on the fringe of society due to their legal and social position. Consequently, discrimination, hostility, assaults, and other victimization experiences might lead to a general uncertainty and mistrust of the host society. Negative experiences with the authorities of social control could force this development. Besides individual coping strategies, like sticking to remigration phantasies, these circumstances could result in a rejection of the host society and a stronger orientation towards compatriots with similar experiences and problems. Consequently, a victim possibly turns to friends and acquaintances for help instead of turning to the police. The crucial problem is therefore: How do people living in a modern society react to victimization experiences, if their chance of social participation is limited by legal requirements and if the possibility to utilize the functionally differentiated part systems¹ is restricted by individual and structural factors?

Due to pragmatic reasons, the empirical realization of the concept concentrates on persons of Turkish nationality, because the Turks are the largest group of foreign residents in Germany. Another reason is the strong cultural difference between their country of origin and the German society, which facilitates an empirical investigation of the significance of the migrants' original culture. We can also demonstrate the

¹ E.g. the economic system, the political system, the educational system, the legal system, the health system.

significance of structural factors for the reaction to victimization experiences because there are many Turkish persons living under comparatively adverse legal conditions since Turkey is no member of the European Union. But there are also those who have achieved a rather favorable legal status during many years of living in Germany.

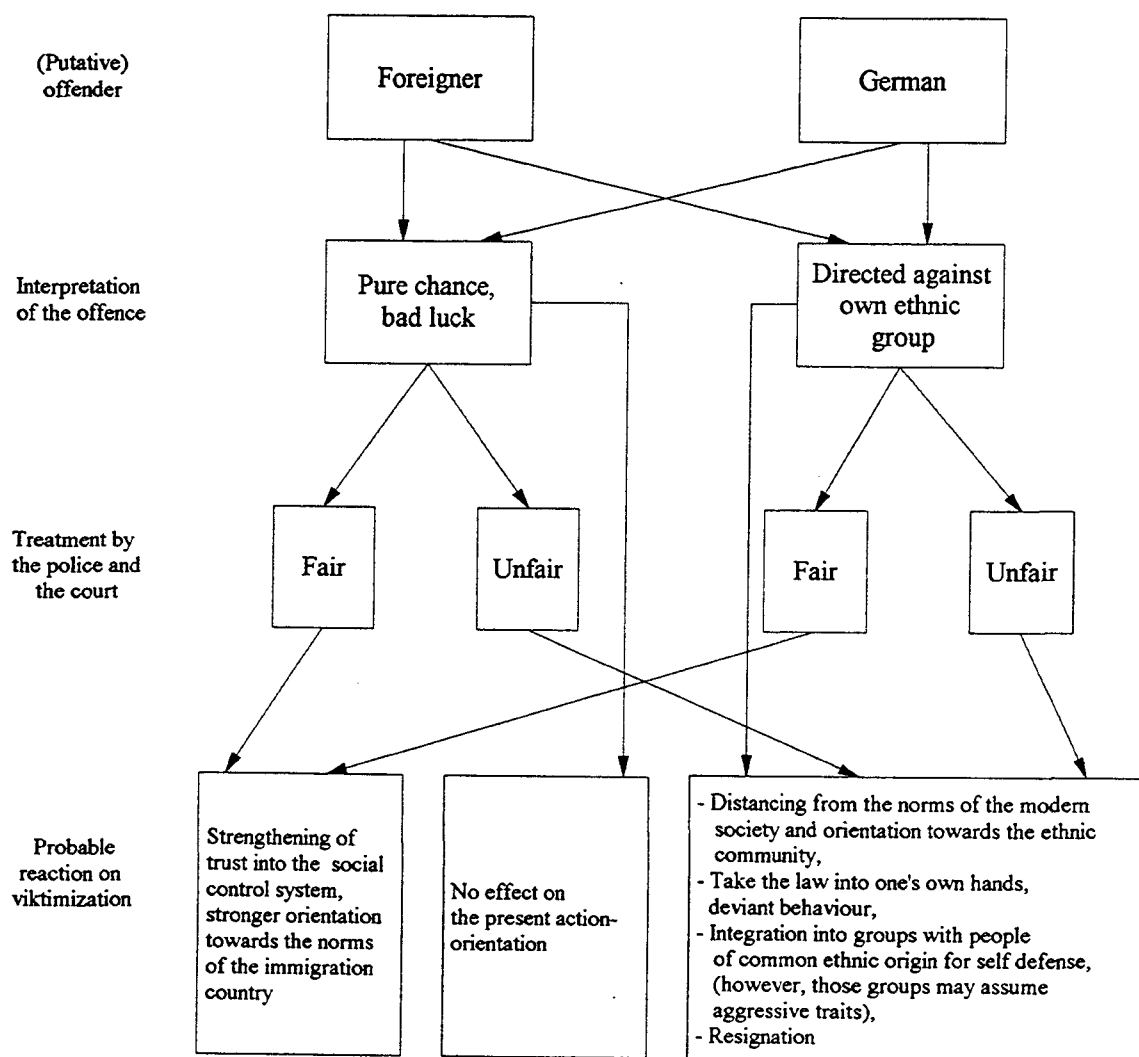
We hope to learn from a qualitative questioning of 50 Turkish persons which typical victimization experiences are being made in Germany and which of those are being estimated as especially serious. Furthermore, we are interested into those kinds of incidences which are experienced subjectively as victimizations, and, especially, which social consequences occur under which circumstances.

The evaluation of the interviews will be used to develop a structure of empirically based concepts. Through these concepts, the factors relevant for the reaction to victimization experiences are to be illustrated as adequately as possible. The determination of the frequency of victimization experiences of foreign residents and the quantitative examination of the correlations found is reserved for later research efforts.

3. The Significance of Victimization Experiences for the Action- Orientation of Migrants

Our research project will not investigate the psychological consequences of certain experiences, but the aspect that, due to social conditions, drastic experiences like victimizations may lead to different kinds of social action. The choice of the strategy of action can be influenced by different factors.

Fig. 1: Possible Reactions of Foreign Residents on Victimization



No matter whether the offender belongs to the host society or whether the offence is interpreted either as a coincidence or an assault against the own ethnic group - positive experiences with police, prosecutor, and court would certainly increase the

trust in these authorities. Trust in the subsystems of a society and especially in the legal system is of special importance because it facilitates the choice of an individualistic strategy of action which does not depend on the belonging to a certain group (cf. Luhmann 1973, S. 52ff.). A certain independence of personal relations and loyalties is only possible if the individual can claim sanctions of the state to carry through his/her legitimate interests.

Consequently, negative experiences with the authorities of social control could lead to an increasing rejection of the host society and an orientation towards groups of the own ethnic origin as a reaction to victimization experiences. Under these circumstances the victims might come to the conclusion that the state is not willing or able to protect the interests of their particular ethnic group. This development may also result from a lacking contact with the authorities because of individual incompetence, mistrust or an inferior social status. In this context, assaults from Germans or other ethnic groups are likely to be repulsed or sanctioned by joint action and not with the help of the police or court. Legally, however, many forms of arbitrary law are criminal offences.

Furthermore, such group formations, which originally intended to carry through own rights and interests, can develop towards an aggressive nature and induce deviant behavior. It is also possible that the individual feels as though he/she is living in hostile surroundings and reacts suspiciously to the authorities of the host society, but for some reasons does not want to or cannot get in touch with an ethnic group. Under these circumstances, victimization experiences may lead to individual forms of deviant behavior or resignation, despair, and psychological problems.

If foreign residents believe that Germans - as individuals or as representatives of the authorities - violate their rights because of their belonging to a certain ethnic group, the distinction between "we" and "the others" may become central; this may even go up to the point that the behavior depends completely on the group the interaction partner belongs to. The questions, e.g., "who is right?", "who tells the truth?", or "can this be justified economically?" would then be subordinate to the group affiliation. In this context, it is rather improbable that the police, prosecutor or courts are called in when it comes to conflicts or offences within an ethnic group. This situation, though, could induce the break down of the public authority and could be abused by criminal

members of the ethnic group. That way, members of a Turkish street gang could sell stolen goods quite openly in a Turkish neighbourhood because they do not have to reckon on somebody calling the police.

Even if the victim is mainly sceptical about the authorities of social control, he/she may also experience the offence as a coincidence which could have happened to everybody. Under these circumstances, a change of negative or positive attitudes towards the host society is not to be expected. If the distance towards the authorities of social control is abused by criminal members of the own ethnic group, however, the victim could try to regain control of the situation by turning to state authorities. Whether that would lead to a stronger orientation towards the host society would depend mainly on the victim's experiences with police, prosecutor and court.

Up to this point, all possible reactions presented here have been understood mainly as effects of direct victimization. However, they may also result from victimizations experienced by friends or family/household members which influence own experiences and behavior (vgl. Skogan/Maxfield 1981, S. 168; Boers 1991, S. 78f.). The attitude of a Turkish juvenile, e.g., towards German society is likely to be influenced by the fact that his brother has been beaten up by Germans hostile to foreigners.

The rejection of the host society as a reaction to victimization experiences and the adoption of an ethnic angle ("We Turks are discriminated anyhow") can lead to the formation of ethnic subcultures or to a stronger commitment to an already existing subculture. Taking for granted that in modern societies there is no common system of values but a variety of different life styles, deviations from cultural standards alone are basically not problematic. Even the internal integration of ethnic groups may not only be regarded in a negative way, because these groups facilitate e.g. exchanging information about the society and help utilizing the functionally differentiated part systems of modern society.

In this respect, the theories on subcultures presently known are not specific enough since they scarcely distinguish between problematic and unproblematic aspects of subcultures (e.g. Whyte 1955; Cohen/Short 1968; Miller 1968, Yablonski 1973). We therefore have to analyze the conditions for the development of a subculture's problematic attitude towards society as a whole. Yinger (1960, S. 629) proposes to call a

group whose normative system contains a conflict with society "contraculture". It is still uncertain, however, under which structural conditions the conflict would gain such a central importance.

We propose to start from the assumption that the internal integration of ethnic groups can ensure access to social goods including values like trust, solidarity and aid (cf. Elwert 1984, S. 53). It is a possibility to solve the problem of social participation. However, social participation which is managed by personal relations and loyalties is likely to imply a certain structure of values, norms, and other expectations. If consequently the solidarity with persons of the same ethnic origin dominates legal, political or economical considerations, a subculture could arise which, due to its distance to the social part systems, would probably develop a problematic attitude towards the host society as a whole, i.e. such groups could develop and cultivate unacceptable behavior patterns.

4. Definition of the Term "Victim"

At this point it is important to define what we mean by victimization experiences. There are two reasons why we should not restrict ourselves to legal norms: In the first place we can only evaluate the significance of victimization experiences relevant under criminal law properly if other victimization experiences are also registered. Secondly, the latter kind of experiences can be of crucial importance with regard to the rejection of the host society (cf. Sessar 1993; Fattah 1992). Therefore we picked up a suggestion of Sellin (1938, S. 28f.) and refer to intersubjectively shared group norms (Sellin: conduct norms) and not only to legal norms. The social phenomenon that Sellin calls conduct norms is quite similar to what Weber (1976, S. 17) names a convention which maintenance is guaranteed by the chance, that deviant behaviour will cause (relative) common disapproval. The difference between legal norms and conduct norms or conventional norms is that deviant behaviour is not sanctioned by a specialized control system in the latter case.

Hence we will speak of a victimization if a normative expectation, legitimized by law or conduct norms [conventions], is disappointed and if this occurrence is referred to as a negative event caused by the social environment (i.e. an individual human actor or a social system).

Example 1: According to this definition, the experience of a Turkish adolescent, who is not getting a traineeship although he was as good at school as his German classmates is called a victimization. The commonly shared principle is the normative expectation of equal opportunities. In this case, the infringement of this principle is attributed to social organizations. However, it will be hardly possible for the adolescent to utilize the legal authorities for the enforcement of the principle of equal opportunities.

Example 2: A structurally quite similar situation is the dismissal of a foreign worker during a recession while his less qualified German colleagues remain employed. However, in this case the victim can go to the labour court to claim his rights.

Example 3: However, a violation of the norms of the criminal law takes place, if for instance a German right-wing extremist burns down the car of a Turk. Under these circumstances a report to the police should be sufficient to initiate the restoration of the violated norms.

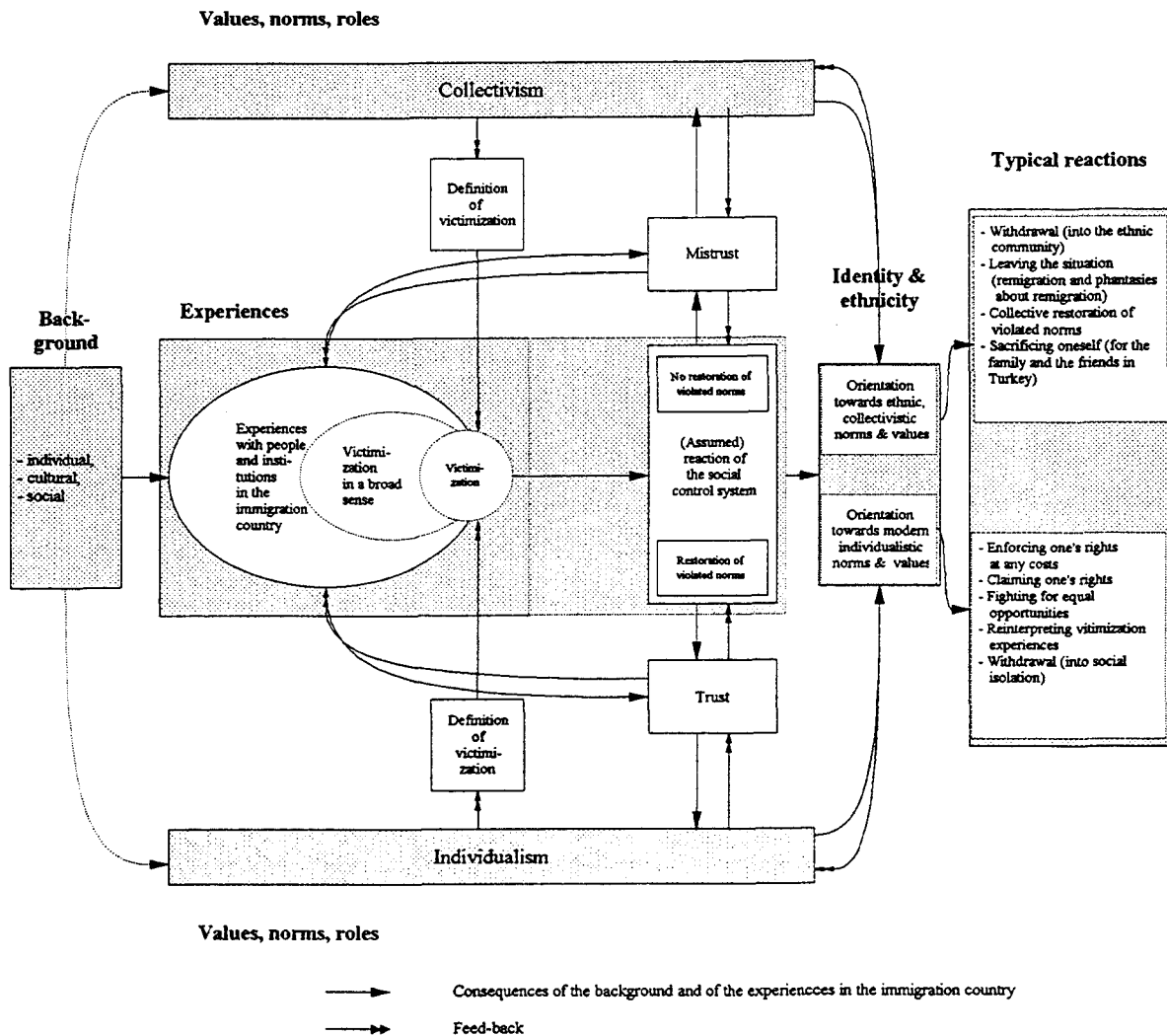
For the interviews we ~~have~~ done so far, this rather wide range of our victim-concept has proven very suitable. A first analysis shows, that especially everyday victimizations which usually are ~~not~~ reported to the police are very important for the assumption of an ethnic perspective. Such victimizations are for example insulting remarks like "Turks have a bad ~~smell~~", "Turks don't know what soap is"² or humiliating acts like using the familiar "du" instead of the polite "Sie" in conversations with Turkish people. However, from ~~en~~ an ethnic angle even neutral acts are often interpreted as directed against the ~~own~~ ethnic group. The resulting feeling of being treated badly everywhere and from ~~every~~one can result into a feeling of mistrust against Germans and German authorities which again influences the interpretation of experiences.

² With regard to the imputation of uncleanliness in the relationship between the established and the outsiders see Elias 1990, S. 22f.

5. Preliminary Conception of an Empirically Grounded Theory

For our aim to construct a theory of the social consequences of victimization experiences of ethnic minorities we refer to the grounded theory method developed by Glaser und Strauss (1977) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). However, unlike Glaser and Strauss we believe that a purely inductive procedure is impossible for methodological reasons. Therefore our project is based upon a relatively elaborated theoretical framework. As a consequence of the analysis of our empirical data this theoretical framework is continuously changed and further developed. Figure 2 presents the actual state of the theory.

Fig. 2: Victimization and Action-Orientation in Modern Societies



At the time being we have realized about half of the interviews. Therefore, in the following I can only formulate some empirically founded hypothesis which have to be tested and integrated into an empirically saturated theory at a later time (cf. Strauss/ Corbin 1990, S. 187f.).

As the Turkish people living in Germany are a very heterogeneous group considering their individual, socioeconomic and cultural background, one could suspect that there were no structural similarities in the interpretation of victimization experiences. Therefore we have applied the method of theoretical sampling (cf. Strauss/ Corbin 1990, S. 176ff.) to reflect this heterogeneity. As a result some of our interviewees who migrated from Turkey were living in big cities like Istanbul or Aydin, others were living in small villages like Corum or Mezre. Some of these migrants speak good German, others speak no German at all. However, many Turkish people are grown up in Germany and their parents confronted them either with traditional or with modern norms and values. Partly, our interviewees accept traditional and religious norms and values for themselves, partly they refer to modern and individualistic norms and values. The economic situation of our interviewees is also very different and the educational level reaches from slightly above illiteracy up to an university degree. However, after an analysis of our first interviews we have reached the conclusion that contrary to the above supposition there are similarities in the reaction to victimization experiences. We believe that these similarities can only be explained by the situation of the Turkish people in German society. Therefore our first hypothesis is, that under the same structural constraints migrants with different backgrounds show typical similarities in the interpretation of and in the reaction to victimization experiences.

Of course the horizon of possible experiences and action choices is determined largely by the opportunities of social participation. Kaufmann and Rosewitz (1983, S. 42ff.) distinguish four dimensions of social participation:

- *status*, particularly legal status and of special importance for immigrants: residence law and labour law;
- resources, especially financial resources;
- opportunities, meaning the opportunities in one's social and physical environment
- *competences*, especially teachable competences and of special importance for immigrants in Germany: knowledge of German.

Apart from the opportunities of social participation the horizon of potential experiences is of course dependent upon the structure of norms and values that the individual is referring to. However, the opportunities of social participation and the structure of norms and values are interrelated. Depending on whether one tries the solution of problems by personal contacts or legitimate claims to the welfare state (vgl. Luhmann 1983) two different orientation-structures can be identified. In the classical German sociology they were called *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*³ but in contemporary research the terms collectivism/ individualism are more common (cf. Triandis, Hui, McCusker 1990). Generally our interviewees attribute collectivistic norms and values to Turkish people (i.e. sociability, mutual help and support, hospitability, honesty), whereas Germans are associated with individualistic norms and values (i.e. achievement, efficiency, getting one's way, social security). This may result from the fact that the solution of problems with the help of close friends or relatives is usually bound to inner-ethnic relations whereas the utilization of the authorities is nearly always involving Germans. The norm- and value-orientation of the individual is often shifting between those two poles and can swing to either side due to the past and actual experiences. We assume that bad opportunities of social participation strengthen the importance of personal relations and lead to an emphasis of collectivistic norms and values, whereas good opportunities of social participation weaken the importance of personal relations and lead to an emphasis of individualistic norms and values.

Independent of the opportunities of social participation nearly all of our interviewees were victimized in the broad sense of our definition. These victimizations include discriminations, insults and humiliations which the interviewees experienced themselves or which were experienced by family members or close friends. For example one woman reports:

C: "Hmm. Well, the first time I got in touch with it was when I went to the bank with my mother. I already knew the difference between 'du' and 'Sie' and whom you call 'du' and 'Sie'. Well, I was doing the translation and so and suddenly the clerk started to address my mother with 'du', although he didn't know her and although he was addressing everyone else with 'Sie'. That's why I was going crazy and I was thinking, well, does he know my mother personally or why is he addressing her with 'du'?"

³ The concepts were developed by Tönnies and first published in 1887 (1979), strongly criticized by König 1955 and reinterpreted by Parsons 1951. For the reinterpretation of Parsons see also Habermas 1985, S. 333f. Recently the term *Gemeinschaft* has become quite popular in German sociology for the description of ethnic communities (vgl. Esser 1980, S. 119ff.; Esser 1988; Kreckel 1989; Elwert 1989, S. 454f.).

A much smaller number of experiences are victimizations which involve the violation of the criminal law and which were reported to the police or could have been reported to the police. A very drastic case is the story of Mr. D.:

"... we went home by car and I stopped at the traffic lights, because they were red. Then a car stopped next to us, it was double tracked, then he cries, pulls down the pane and cries 'bloody foreigners' and, and. He knew I was Turkish, says 'bloody Turks' and so on. I swallowed it until he pulled down the pane, he says, 'come down, come out' he says 'I'll do that and that with you'. And then I pulled down the pane and say, boy, you know, you are crazy in your head, I say. That you are shaving your head and run around here, you are not human for me, you must start thinking decently a bit, what you are talking. And then I stopped at a bus stop because I wanted him to pass me and then I was afraid that they throw something out of the car. They stopped and then I went out and, without saying a word, got such a large bottle of beer trown at my eye and then I passed away. Because, I didn't see that, he had it behind him, and then I passed away and everything was full of blood."

But even drastic experiences like the one reported above can be interpreted in different ways. Therefore we state: An individualistic norm- and value-orientation supports an affectively neutral interpretation of victimizations and a tendency to view victimizations as 'bad luck' whereas a collectivistic norm- and value-orientation supports an affective interpretation of victimizations and a tendency to view victimizations as attacks against the ethnic community.

In this context we suppose that "normally" the integration process will lead to an adaptation of the central norms and values of the immigration country. However, victimizations and negative experiences with the social control system concerning the restoration of violated norms can stop or even reverse this process. The consequences of the resulting distrust against the host society can be a grouping together of people of (alleged) common descent and an orientation towards a collectivistic norm- and value-structure. We assume that especially those people who have been victimized and who have made negative experiences with the social control system tend to orient themselves towards a collectivistic norm- and value-structure.

Typical reactions following victimizations depend not only on the norm- and value-orientation but also on other factors which are still left to be analysed. Our first impression is that under conditions of a collectivistic orientation four different reaction-types can be distinguished:

1. Avoiding contacts with individual members or with the authorities of the host society and turning towards persons of one's own ethnic affiliation,
2. demarcation against the host society by maintaining the intention of remigration or by maintaining phantasies about remigration,
3. restoration of violated norms by collective actions,
4. orientation towards social networks in Turkey and devaluation of the present life and the actual circumstances of living in Germany.

Under conditions of an individualistic orientation, we differentiate between five ways of reaction at the moment:

1. The pursuing of fictitious or real legal claims at any costs,
2. the utilization of the authorities to reach one's personal goals,
3. the improvement of the situation for all foreign residents by political activities,
4. the reinterpretation of victimization experiences which were previously seen as specific for the own ethnic group,
5. the individual withdrawal towards social isolation.

6. Possible Consequences for the German Society and Political Implications

Under certain circumstances victimizations can strengthen the importance of ethnic self-attributions and can foster the construction of collectivistic norm- and value-systems. On its own, this is no social problem because ethnic communities can fulfill important functions in a modern society as long as they restrict themselves to subsidiary tasks, i.e., help foreign citizens to improve their opportunities of social participation.

However, from the point of view of the host country ethnic communities can become a social problem if they present themselves as an alternative to the functionally differentiated part systems of modern society, e.g., if religious or cultural norms are enforced in an ethnic community which are incompatible with legal norms. Such a development can challenge the dominance of functional differentiation and can lead to a resegmentation of the society along ethnic boundaries which can cause many severe conflicts.

Although it is too early to speak about political implications at the time being there are two often mentioned demands which seem to me quite obvious:

1. the introduction of the dual citizenship in Germany and
2. the employment of foreign residents in the functionally differentiated part systems of the society to facilitate their utilization.

Both demands refer to the improvement of the opportunities of social participation which would at the same time enable foreign residents to follow their interests individually. Equal rights and equal opportunities for foreign residents in Germany would be a safeguard against race riots which up to now we know only from other countries.

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