

Homophobic Others

A case study in the culturalization of homonegativity within social research*

This contribution discusses a study on attitudes towards homosexuality amongst Berlin youth that found negative attitudes towards homosexuality to correlate with migration background and (Muslim) religiosity. Situating the study within recent discourses around homophobia, migration, and religion, the authors discuss the study's design, the results' interpretation and their public discussion with respect to racist biases. They argue that the study's methodology and the public perspective on its results reproduce the stereotypical image of the "homophobic Muslim migrant" that needs to be challenged within research on and activism against homonegativity.

1. Introduction

The Berlin organization ABqueer e. V. offers education and counselling on issues concerning lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. The authors work for ABqueer in a project called "teach out", conducting training and counselling for teachers and pedagogic staff. In our training sessions, participants often express uncertainties or reservations regarding the inclusion of LGBT issues in their work or how to counter homonegative¹ acts amongst staff or students. Frequently, participants articulate these reservations with respect to students and parents with a (Muslim) "migration background"², assuming that these students and their families are particularly hostile towards homosexuality and discussions about it. Such a perspective is most popular

* This contribution was originally written in English by the two researchers who both conduct training for educators in the project ABqueer (rev. by MG, corr. VL).

¹ While "homophobia" is the most popular term used in public debates and the media, we prefer the term *homonegativity* to *homophobia* because it is more inclusive of the various forms of discrimination of homosexuality on an individual, collective, institutional and structural level. In this text, we use "homophobia" only when referring to public discourse. The study discussed in this paper uses the construct "negative attitudes towards homosexuality" which we will shorten to "homonegative attitudes".

² "Migration background" is our translation of the term "Migrationshintergrund" which is widely used in Germany. It was introduced as an alternative to the term "Ausländer" (foreigner) in order to be able to speak about a non-German past of a person without refusing this person the status "German" by calling them foreigner. Usually, however, talking about people with a "migration background" refers to immigrants from Turkey or Arab countries and their descendants. Hence, like the older term (which is still in use as well), it tends to denote ethno-cultural difference, while white immigrants from Scandinavian countries, for example, are not labelled as persons with a migration background. See also Noah Sow 2008, 243f.

amongst non-migrant pedagogues who work in institutions attended by a considerable amount of socially disadvantaged students who experience poverty and racism. Although this shows that a number of social factors both on the part of the pedagogues and on the part of their students are important to consider, discussions centre around the significance of Muslim religiosity or cultural differences between “the West” and Turkey or Arab countries.

The assumption that Muslim or migrants are more homonegative than non-Muslims or non-migrants also circulates within the German LGBT scene in Berlin and in the media across all political camps. It is articulated when for instance verbal or physical attacks against homosexuals are being reported and the victim says that the perpetrators appeared non-German to them. It has also been part of the public debate about German norms and values since at least 2006.³

A study conducted by Bernd Simon (in short: Simon-Study) and published in 2008 seems to validate this thesis.⁴ Comparing the responses of school pupils with Turkish, post-USSR or no migration background, Simon found that migrant youth presented stronger homonegative attitudes than non-migrant youth, and that a Turkish migration background and Muslim religiosity correlated particularly strongly with homonegative attitudes. Another positive correlate is called “acceptance of traditional norms of masculinity”. In light of the political significance of such research, we consider it highly important to take a closer look at how these findings were produced. We present an analysis of the study by situating it in its political context and discussing the methods used by Simon to gain his data, focusing on how the study constructs homonegativity and its origins. We will show that the study’s constructions of homonegativity, migration background and religiosity are simplistic and that their operationalizations contain a number of shortcomings. Furthermore, by discussing the interpretation of the results by the researcher and public media, we will show how the construct of homophobic Muslim migrants dominated the perspective in the evaluation of the data and foreclosed alternative possibilities.

In concluding, we will argue that the Simon-Study should not be used as proof of the thesis of a higher homonegativity amongst Muslim or migrant persons or communities. The knowledge⁵ produced by this study and its reception feeds into the racialization and culturalization of homonegativity. This in turn is likely to enhance social inequalities and result in potentially counterproductive effects in the struggle against

³ At that time, the federal government of Baden-Württemberg launched guidelines for a citizenship test with questions designed to prove Muslim applicants guilty of discriminating against homosexuals and therefore not conforming with German norms and values.

⁴ See Bernd Simon 2008.

⁵ Editors’ note: this sociological concept of knowledge does not imply truth, but only that it is held to be true.

homonegativity – in particular for migrant queers and queers of colour whose existence is widely being ignored by the public discourse as well as in the design of the study.

2. Political Context: Debates around Homophobia, Migration and Religion

Politics on homonegativity and migration or religion have been debated publicly and semi-publicly in Berlin for at least a decade now. For example, there has been an ongoing dispute since the late 1990s around a hotline for gay victims of violence, because it documents the ethnic background of perpetrators as assumed by the victims.⁶ In 2003, further discussions were triggered when the *Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany* (LSVD) denounced homonegativity amongst migrants in a press release following an attack on the trolleys of *Gays and Lesbians in Turkey* (GLADT) during the 2003 Pride March in Berlin.⁷ Later that year, a Berlin gay and lesbian magazine attracted criticism for calling upon Turkish gays and lesbians to come out to their families by using the racist phrase "Türken raus".⁸ Since then, numerous public events, workshops and conferences took place in Berlin and addressed issues of homo- and transphobia, migration, religion and racism.⁹

More broadly speaking, the theory of culture-driven differences in attitudes towards homosexuality and gender equality has been increasingly articulated in the last decade in many Western countries such as Canada, the USA, the UK, the Netherlands or Denmark. It is claimed that there is an inattention and tolerance in the West, particularly in the Left, towards violations of human rights regarding sexuality and gender when committed by migrants from Arab countries or Turkey. Multiculturalism is blamed for this shortcoming and an increased awareness of human rights violations and specific measures are called for. The suggested means include special educational programs, direct action or measures affecting the residency status.¹⁰ Gender and sexuality

⁶ For an early report on this debate see Barbara Bollwahn de Paez Casanova 1999. A particular problem is that the criteria used to determine such an ethnic background can only be racist ones, reproducing the practice of categorizing and racializing humans according to their looks or manners of speaking.

⁷ See Jennifer Petzen 2005 for a discussion of this and other events in that year.

⁸ The ambiguous phrase literally means "Turks out!" It can be read as a demand to come out of the closet, but had before been used as an order to get out of the country. See Autonomes Schwulenreferat des AStA FU Berlin (2003).

⁹ See, for example, the documentation of the first conference of Turkish gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals and transgenders in LSVD Berlin-Brandenburg 2004, and the documentation of a conference on homo- and transphobia in Senatsverwaltung 2009. This chronicle is not exhaustive. It would certainly be interesting to examine the development of these debates in greater detail.

¹⁰ In Germany, for example, it was proposed that migrants from countries where men are legally privileged over women should have to agree formally to the equality of men and women in order to maintain their residence status. Persons violating this agreement were then to be deported. This proposal gained support as well as criticism from feminist and anti-racist

inequalities also appear in justifications for the “war on terror”.¹¹

Within the debates around these issues, numerous objections have been raised (in particular by (LGBTQ) Muslim and migrant activists and organizations) against the thesis that Muslim people or those with a Turkish or Arab migration background are particularly homophobic as a result of their culture or religion:

- The understanding of Islam and the *Arab Kulturkreis*¹² as being traditionally homophobic is historically flawed. Firstly, scholarship has shown that homosexuality as linked to personal identity is typically European and did not exist until the late 19th century. Before, religious texts addressed and prohibited certain sexual practices such as anal intercourse rather than sexual desires or homosexual identities. A persecution of these acts barely took place due to the juridical demands within the Sharia that made it difficult to put someone on trial (four witnesses needed to be found). Also, there is a body of poetry in Islamic culture depicting same-sex sexuality or expressing same-sex desires. In fact, in the 19th and early 20th century, European travelers to Arab countries expressed irritation upon the lack of condemnation of homosexuality. The rise of homonegativity in countries influenced by Islam is linked to the import of the European concept of homosexuality and its legal persecution. This fact also veils the variety of interpretations of the Qur’an and the history of struggles around it. Hence, to depict Islam as a culture that is inherently homophobic and that has a history of persecuting homosexuality is an inaccurate account of Islam – one that feeds into those constructions presented by Islamic fundamentalists.¹³
- The image of Turkish and Arab people as determined by this notion of Islam is deterministic and reductionist. Arab and Turkish migrants are depicted as shaped only by one distinct set of cultural rules and as unable to reflect on them (unless aided by non-Muslim Europeans). In consequence, they are exposed to a life-long suspicion of a lack of civility, enlightenment, and secularization. Apart from the eurocentrism of this normative stance, this picture fails to acknowledge the diversity of religious and political positions held by persons with a Turkish or an Arab migration background. It also neglects the multiplicity of hybrid identities. Muslim, Turkish or Arab queers in particular are denied representation and yet another social group is constructed as heterosexual.¹⁴ A well-known exclusivity is thereby established: you are not supposed to be Muslim, Turkish or Arab *and* gay.¹⁵ Furthermore, how experiences of racism or economic disadvantages may affect religious affiliations or a disposition for violent behaviour, tend to be put aside in favour of culturalist explanations.

activists and scholars. For discussion see Mark Terkessidis 2007 and Halina Bendkowski et al. 2007.

¹¹ Jin Haritaworn et al. 2007 and 2008: they argue that sexuality has replaced gender as a criterion for “modernity” and “civilization”. See also Jennifer Petzen 2005.

¹² Often used in this context, the German word “Kulturkreis” literally translates as *cultural circle* or *district*. The linkage of this word with group, crowd, to turn/rotate, to encircle/enclose might be worth investigating.

¹³ See Georg Klauda 2008.

¹⁴ Jin Haritaworn et al. 2007 and 2008.

¹⁵ An example is the title of the LSVD project “MILES”, an abbreviation of “Centre for Migrants, Lesbians and Gays”.

- The implicit or explicit construction of Germany or Europe as less homonegative, or characterized by a tradition of emancipation and tolerance, is marked by “social denial” and “historical amnesia”.¹⁶ It neglects the long history of persecution of same-sex acts and homosexuality in Europe and Christianity, the violent past of colonization by European states and the ongoing existence of homonegativity and other forms of violence. For example, it wasn’t until 2001 that in Germany same-sex partnerships were legally codified (and still not in the same way as partnerships between men and women are), not to mention the ongoing privileging and idealization of, for example, monogamous relationships within law and popular culture and the legal and medical practices around trans- and intersexuality.
- Homonegative acts by non-Muslim and non-migrant Germans are neglected and described differently. Germans appear as non-Muslim and without migration background, and as progressive and eager to fight discrimination. If Germans do take a stance against homosexuality, it gains less significant coverage in the media than the same acts by (alleged) migrants. It is presented rather as an individual specificity or as the result of belonging to a particular field, such as the religious right or male sports – we are not aware of any case in which homonegative behaviour from a German person was discussed as a result of their being German or as a result of homophobic traditions in Judeo-Christian secularized Europe.
- Earlier scholarship and political activism trying to analyze and understand homonegativity is neglected. Homonegativity must also be understood in light of (Western) norms of binary gender, (hetero)sexuality and hegemonic masculinity. Individualized accounts of homonegativity have long since been criticized as they neglect the ways in which homonegativity is inscribed in societal institutions and social structures and partly upheld by LGBT people themselves.¹⁷ The discourse on homophobic Arabs, Muslims and migrants promotes a rather simplistic view of the connections between gender, sexuality, culture and subjectivity. It dislocates homonegativity and patriarchy outside the West, respectively Western (white) bodies, while ignoring the contemporary forms in which these structures subsist in the West.

According to these criticisms, the discourse about Muslim and migrant homophobia will have negative effects on Muslim and migrant persons in Germany, as it creates stereotypical perceptions, legitimizes a restrictive regulation of migration and dehumanizes Muslim and migrant persons. It does, on the other hand, improve the position of those who adopt this stance, as it serves to prove the adherence to nationalistic values. Gay and lesbian activists presenting themselves as a means to civilize migrants gain privileges in a political context where calls for an integration of migrants according to a model of assimilation rather than democratic participation have become increasingly popular.¹⁸

¹⁶ Maria do Mar Castro Varela 2009, 14. See also Jin Haritaworn et al. 2007 and 2008.

¹⁷ See, for example, Barry D. Adam 1998.

¹⁸ See Alexander Zinn (quoted in LSVD Presseerklärung 2003) as an example. For a longer discussion of how white German mainstream gays and lesbians capitalize on their self-representation as capable of “taming the Muslim Other”, see Jennifer Petzen 2005.

These criticisms have been levelled against the LSVD on frequent occasions. The fact that the LSVD commissioned a study on factors related to homonegativity which identified migration background and religion as prominent factors can be understood as an attempt to validate the construct of homophobic migrants. The following analysis examines the extent to which the study has taken into account the criticisms mentioned.

3. *The design of the study*

The Simon-Study was commissioned as part of the pilot project "Homosexuality as an Issue in Migrant Families". 1'301 pupils at eleven Berlin secondary schools, aged 14 to 20, filled in questionnaires in 2006. The number of girls and boys participating in the study was about the same.

Simon tested the following hypotheses:

- Adolescents with a migration background (from the former USSR and from Turkey) display a stronger homonegative attitude than adolescents without a migration background.
- Religiosity and the acceptance of norms of traditional masculinity are generally positive correlates of a homonegative attitude.
- Personal contacts with homosexuals are generally negative correlates of a homonegative attitude.
- The connection between religiosity and a homonegative attitude is particularly significant among adolescents with a Turkish migration background.
- Discrimination against migrants as perceived by youth with a migration background is a positive correlate with a homonegative attitude.
- The amount of personal integration of these adolescents into German society is a negative correlate.¹⁹

Each variable was measured with one or several items (see below). Participants were requested to express their acceptance of an item by checking on a five-level scale from 0: "not correct" to 4: "absolutely correct".

The obtained data were taken to justify the following conclusions:

1. Adolescents with a migration background show a significantly stronger homonegative attitude than adolescents without a migration background.
2. There is significant evidence that religiosity and homonegativity are related. This evidence is significantly weaker among Christian youth without a migration background than among Muslim youth with a Turkish migration background.
3. In all groups of respondents²⁰, a higher acceptance of norms of traditional masculinity is related to a more homonegative attitude.

¹⁹ Bernd Simon (tr. R.S.) 2008, 89.

²⁰ The questionnaires were assigned to three groups: adolescents with Turkish background, adolescents with a migration background from a state of the former USSR and adolescents without migration background. See also paragraph 3.3 *Measuring the "migration background"*.

The three main constructs used in the study were "hostile attitudes towards homosexuality", "religiosity" and "migration background". In the following paragraphs, we will take a closer look at how they were operationalized.

3.1 *Measuring homonegative attitudes*

Focussing on "attitudes", the study uses a social psychological approach, looking at homonegativity on the level of individuals. It defines a hostile attitude towards homosexuality as a tendency to react negatively towards homosexuals and homosexuality, and this on the level of affects, cognitions and behaviour.²¹ To measure this attitude, nine items are used, comprising reactions towards gays and lesbians and towards the political necessity of further measures against the discrimination against gays and lesbians:

- 1/2 "When two gay men/lesbian women kiss on the street, I find this repulsive."²²
- 3/4 "If I knew that my neighbour was gay/lesbian, I would rather not be in contact with him/her."
- 5/6 "Gays/Lesbians often think they are better."
- 7 "If I had a child that was gay or lesbian, I would feel I had raised them wrong."
- 8 "Society does enough for gays and lesbians."
- 9 "Gays and Lesbians should have the same rights as heterosexual men and women."

The responses to these items varied, in part significantly. For example, 47% of the respondents affirmed the first item, thereby expressing a homonegative attitude, while 68% of them affirmed the last item and thus expressed a stance against the legal discrimination of homosexuals. Male respondents were significantly more inclined to present homonegative responses than female respondents. The groups' differences were also highly significant: respondents with a migration background clearly presented stronger negative views on homosexuals than respondents without migration background. The educational level of their parents could not be shown to be influential on the result.

For further discussion, we will take a closer look at the first two items measuring affective reactions towards a gay or lesbian kiss. Is it valid to conclude that someone affirming such a statement has a homonegative attitude? The respondents make a theoretical and conditional statement: if they observe a kiss between two persons of (apparently) the same sex and understand this kiss as romantic or sexual, they will feel repulsion. Whether or not this reaction is restricted to same-sex

²¹ Bernd Simon 2008, 88.

²² Bernd Simon 2008, 90f. (tr. T.V.R.). In the survey, some items were presented separately: one on gay men and one on lesbian women, drawn together here using a slash.

kisses or applies to any public display of sexuality or love, is not registered in the study. Whether or not this statement is actually true, i.e. to what extent the respondent, filling in the survey in a classroom at school, is capable and willing to envisage the situation and the emotion described in the item, is not registered either. The author does not take into account the possibility that respondents who would not be comfortable in the situation described reject this statement because they know that it is morally wrong to be against homosexuals or because "repulsive" does not describe their emotion adequately.²³

A further problem is the focus on explicitly negative reactions. More subtle and non-conscious forms of devaluing homosexuals (e.g. avoiding gay and lesbian culture) and forms of preferring or promoting heterosexuality (e.g. assuming that someone is looking for a partner of the opposite sex) are not measured. This also applies to the other items that are supposed to measure the attitudes towards homosexuals. With reference to item 7 on gay or lesbian children, we wonder whether it is legitimate to assume that a youth may be able to imagine the situation of having a child, let alone the situation of the child's coming out as gay or lesbian. What if the respondent does not plan to have a child at all? What assumptions about their future might the respondents draw from such a question: that they will have a child, that it is normal to have a child and that it is normal to have this in mind as a youth?

The items on homonegative attitudes measure what we would call explicit homonegativity. We would argue, however, that homonegativity is a complex phenomenon with multiple and interdependent forms of expression and levels of operation. It is conceivable that the group differences stated by the study vanish if more subtle forms of devaluing homosexuality and privileging heterosexuality were measured (for example a preference for heterosexual networks). It would be interesting to test this, because it might show that overt homonegativity is linked to certain (lower) social positions; that some people cannot afford overt discrimination of homosexuals and thus resort to more subtle, yet highly effective strategies to gain and maintain privileges. In any case, conceptualizing homonegativity as a multidimensional phenomenon rather than restricting it to its most explicit forms would enable a discussion about how the symbolic privileging of heterosex-

²³ For these reasons, handbooks for survey construction advise against if-clauses and suggest to describe the situation and let the respondents choose between different smileys as a representation of their emotional reaction (we thank Sarah Huch for this information). This approach is still problematic for its lack of specificity concerning the reaction. A better solution might be to suggest a range of descriptions for the emotional reaction. This would also be less suggestive than Simon's item, which does not allow for a complex and ambiguous reaction, such as being repulsed and attracted at the same time. Less suggestive still would be to let the respondents use their own words to describe their reaction. But this, of course, would require abandoning the aim of comparing groups the way Simon had been asked to do.

uality prevails in western cultures. This would open a space to discuss how various forms of homonegativity and hetero-privilege might be constitutive of each other, how for example homonegative violence is related to more subtle forms of promoting heterosexual love or the nuclear family as a cultural ideal.

Furthermore, the focus on explicit homonegativity leads to items the intentions of which can easily be guessed by respondents who have been trained to figure out and comply with social norms. Therefore, it might be argued that the group differences found at least partly represent differences in figuring out and complying with socially desired behaviour. They might also represent differences in perceiving and admitting negative reactions towards particular forms of homosexuality. The focus on homosexuals instead of homosexuality, for example, might represent a Western bias, as the concept of a "homosexual person" is part of the history of European knowledge production.²⁴

Alternatively, we might interpret the results as follows: youths in Germany excluded from the image of Germanness on the grounds of nationalism and racism have more reasons and fewer reservations to perceive and overtly express negative attitudes towards homosexuals than those youths whose national belonging is not questioned. By stating this we do not intend to legitimate attacks on homosexuals as a strategy in dealing with discrimination and social inequality or in countering Western imperialism - in fact, the study does not investigate the reasons for the correlations found, i.e. the manifold functions homonegativity as a strategy might have. Rather, we wish to provide a perspective which is different from the hegemonic understanding of homonegativity (see below) and overcomes the biases that found their way into this study. Anyway, in light of our methodological reservations, we would disagree with the claim that the study examined homonegativity in general. Rather, it concentrated on some aspects of homonegativity and partly operationalized these in ambiguous ways.

3.2 *Measuring religiosity*

Despite a huge body of research in the psychology and sociology of religion, the author does not define the construct "religiosity".²⁵ Presumably, it refers to the extent to which the respondents' attitudes are informed or influenced by the values and norms of a particular religion. It is measured through four items:

- (1) "Religion plays a big role in my life."
- (2) "I am a religious person."
- (3) "To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to one, true religion."
- (4) "When science and religion conflict, one should follow the religion."

²⁴ Cf. Michel Foucault 1976.

²⁵ See, for example, Hans-Georg Ziebertz / William Kay 2006.

According to Simon, the results show

1. highly significant differences in the averages of the three groups' responses,
2. a correlation between religiosity and hostile attitudes towards homosexuals.

The correlation is strongest among respondents with a Turkish migration background. As 90% of them declared to be a member of a Muslim denomination, Simon concludes that "their (Islamic) religiosity seems [...] to contain a particularly homonegative element."²⁶ As mentioned above, this has been shown to be a problematic statement considering the multifaceted history and presence of Islam. In regard to the items, doubts once again arise as to whether this interpretation is appropriate. The first item could be affirmed by an atheist who has been and/or still is in contact with strongly catholic parents and has to deal with their positions. The third and the fourth item were taken from a religious fundamentalism scale.²⁷ As the four items had a high internal consistency, it is clear that they have a common core. However, this core should be labelled "explicit attachment to a religion" rather than simply "religiosity". It is doubtful that this core operationalizes the extent to which respondents are influenced by the values of a particular religion. These authors, for example, would score low in religiosity according to this survey, although Christian values are inevitably part of our value orientations, simply because they have become part of German culture in various ways.

Again, the result needs to be reformulated: people who are willing and capable to perceive themselves as religious or as influenced by a religion and to confirm this in a study are more likely capable and willing to express a negative stance towards homosexuality within a study. Thus, the data also allow for the following reading: from all respondents, those who categorize themselves as having a Turkish migration background are those most capable and willing to perceive their feelings and are the most honest and frank about these feelings. We do not wish to argue that the responses cannot possibly be interpreted as an attitude. However, it is clear again that the formulations of the items and the interpretation of the responses stand on shaky grounds and that the results are generalized in ways not justified by the data.

3.3 *Measuring the "migration background"*

The questionnaires were assigned to three groups:

- adolescents without migration background (oM),
- adolescents with a migration background from a state of the former USSR (eU),
- adolescents with a Turkish migration background (tM).

The former USSR group comprised 200 adolescents.

²⁶ Bernd Simon 2008, 98.

²⁷ See Bob Altemeyer / Bruce Hunsberger 1992.

“Respondents assigned to the group with a migration background from a state of the former USSR were the ones who held a corresponding citizenship (possibly in addition to the German citizenship) *or* were born in one of these states *or* named exclusively one of these states when asked for their grand parents’ country of birth.”²⁸

Analogous criteria were applied to the group with a Turkish migration background, including 206 participants. The group constructed as “German without a migration background” comprised 516 adolescents, i.e. the ones

“who (according to their statements) held only the German citizenship *and* were born in Germany *and* did not have grand parents not born in Germany.”²⁹

The answers of 373 adolescents who could neither be assigned to the group without a migration background nor to one of the other two groups were therefore not taken into account. Part of this group are all those who hold German citizenship and a second one which is not Turkish nor former USSR and/or who are not born in Germany and/or who have grandparents who were born neither in Germany nor in Turkey nor in any former Soviet state.

The classification creates the impression that some Germans were more German than others. This understanding appeared in the reception of the study when *only those without a migration background* were classified as “German” and reduced to a collective of natives to whom all others are confronted as “foreigners” or “migrants”. Although generalizations may be unavoidable in a quantitative study, the labelling as “Turkish” or “from a state of the former USSR” erases the existing differences amongst those placed into these groups. For example, people labelled as Turkish include Sunnites, Alevites, other- and non-religious people, followers of the political Islam, Laïcists, right and left wing extremists, children of former “guest-workers” and children of political refugees.³⁰

As the authors of “Homophobia & Transphobia in a Society of Immigration” put it:

“To abstract persons of the most various self-identification seems especially absurd because it matters not only juridically whether someone came as ‘German resettlers from Eastern and Southern Europe’ or as a refugee to Germany. The access to the labour market and education, but also experiences of discrimination and racism are different. [...] To assume that everybody who is *somehow* concerned with Turkey or the USSR, would be *somehow identical*, is certainly part of the problem, but should not be declared a part of the solution.”³¹

²⁸ Bernd Simon (tr. R.S.) 2008, 90 (emph. in original).

²⁹ Bernd Simon (tr. R.S.) 2008, 90 (emph. in original).

³⁰ We thank Koray Yilmaz Günay for this suggestion. Most tellingly, Simon did not include the answers of two respondents who specified “Kurdistan” as their grandparents’ country of birth (Bernd Simon 2008, 90).

³¹ GADT 2009a, 12f. (tr. R.S., emph. in original).

As mentioned in the above quotation, socio-economic factors such as access to the labour market, educational opportunities or the risk of poverty play an important role when comparing the situation of Germans with and without migration background. However, the only factor the study measures in this dimension is the educational level of the respondents' parents, which is then declared to be statistically insignificant.³²

A positive example for considering cultural differences and the various reasons for and expressions of homonegativity was given by researchers of the University of Amsterdam. They examined homonegative attitudes focusing on a) how and under which conditions these attitudes result in verbal physical attacks and on b) the motives of the perpetrators of anti-gay violence. The researchers identified particular triggers for anti-gay violence: peer pressure and the need to present oneself as tough and masculine and/or the fear of becoming the object of gay men's sexual desire and therefore being judged as weak and feminine. Constructed with a range of methods (a survey at secondary schools, focus group interviews with young people who are likely to resort to anti-gay violence and case studies of 52 perpetrators)³³, the Amsterdam researchers' results differ remarkably from Simon's when it comes to explaining why Muslim boys of Moroccan origin are overrepresented amongst the perpetrators:

"Perpetrators of anti-gay violence are not inspired by religious beliefs. Those perpetrators who are Muslims have only a superficial knowledge of the Koran and rarely go to mosque. The motives of the Moroccan perpetrators are almost the same as those of the indigenous Dutch perpetrators. [...] Their overrepresentation is due to the street culture in which many Moroccan boys live."³⁴

In accordance with Simon, the authors name norms of masculinity for both groups as crucial for homonegativity. However, they add important dimensions neglected by Simon, such as opinions and emotions concerning sexuality and femininity, as well as socio-economic factors:

"Four aspects of homosexuality that particularly appear to arouse annoyance, disapproval and loathing are anal sex, feminine behaviour, the visibility of homosexuality and the fear of being hit on by a gay. [...] Apart from this, socio-economic factors play an important part. Perpetrators show a remarkably low level of education, are often unemployed, and belong to problematic families. Committing acts of anti-gay violence can be an effective way to gain respect and a masculine status for those who cannot do so legally."³⁵

Judging by the lines quoted it might seem that the Amsterdam study, unlike Simon's, deals only with the most extreme and violent forms of

³² See also Birgit Rommelspacher 2007, 2.

³³ Laurens Buijs 2009, 1.

³⁴ Laurens Buijs 2009, 3.

³⁵ Laurens Buijs 2009, 2f.

homonegativity and that it is therefore inadequate to compare them on the same level. On the other hand, the Dutch researchers report both a huge discrepancy between verbal statements and actions and an alarmingly small difference between “normal adolescents” and perpetrators:

“It is remarkable that the perpetrators do not reject homosexuality on all fronts. Indeed, in many cases the perpetrators declare not to hate gays at all and realise that homosexuality is a part of Dutch society. They reject homosexuality, however, on express conditions: gays should not openly show the four aspects of the behaviour mentioned above. The perpetrators tend to copy the prevailing gay-tolerant rhetoric of Dutch society, but do not refrain from all sorts of violence as soon as homosexuality comes close to them or if gay men do not fulfil their supposed obligations. [...] A remarkable result is that there is little difference in the ways in which the different groups that we examined (secondary school students, focus group youngsters and perpetrators) think about homosexuality. Apparently, gay tolerance among secondary school students is flimsy: many of them declare to accept homosexuality, but do not show as much tolerance when asked what they think of it when it comes close to them.”³⁶

These findings support our critique of the way homonegative attitudes are measured and interpreted in the Simon-study and once more show the validity of its results to be disputable.

3.4 Other findings

Besides the variables discussed, Simon examined further correlations³⁷ and found the other investigated hypotheses confirmed: Homonegative attitudes negatively correlated with contacts with homosexuals, i.e. the less personal contacts a respondent had with homosexual people, the more negative was their attitude towards homosexuals as presented in this study.³⁸ Amongst the groups with a migration background, the perception of discrimination³⁹ correlated positively with homonegativity, and the degree of integration⁴⁰ correlated negatively with homonega-

³⁶ Laurens Buijs 2009, 2.

³⁷ In the following, we do not discuss in detail two variables, namely *life satisfaction* and *gender role congruency*, which did not turn out to be of much explanative value. For an exception see Bernd Simon 2008, fn 40.

³⁸ This was not the case, though, for the group of respondents with a former USSR migration background. – In the discussion of the results, Simon calls this variable a “tendency to avoid homosexuals” (93), although the items merely asked the respondents to declare the number of contacts they have. Considering the discourse that gay and lesbian activists have been participating in during the last decade, it is not easy to figure out on whose side a tendency of avoidance might be located.

³⁹ Measured with the following items: “Germany rather takes care of ‘their own people’ than of foreigners or migrants and their children” and “In Germany, foreigners and migrants get discriminated against, whereas other minorities receive more recognition and support”. Cf. Bernd Simon 2008, 91.

⁴⁰ Measured with five items (without justifying the different numbers of items for the different scales): “I have no problems living along the rules and values of German culture”, “I want to stay in Germany forever”, “I feel part of German society”, “Do you have many German friends” and “How much do you feel connected with Germans?” Cf. Bernd Simon 2008, 91.

tivity. There was a difference for the two migrant groups, though: respondents with former USSR migration background were more likely to express negative views on homosexuals *the more they perceived discrimination against migrants* in Germany, while the respondents with a Turkish migration background were more likely to express homonegative views *the less they felt integrated* into German society. Simon assumes that this may be related to different stories of migration: the group with the former USSR-background has a higher percentage of youth who migrated themselves and thus experiences more discrimination, whereas the group with the Turkish background has a bigger proportion of youth born in Germany. However, considering that the respondents with a Turkish migration background scored more negative on both variables (i.e. appeared less integrated in German society and perceived more discrimination against migrants than the respondents with a former USSR migration background), it remains unclear why these groups show different correlations between these variables and homonegative attitudes. Also, the results may be caused by the way these variables were operationalized. The variable "Integration into German society" should, considering the items, rather be called "sense of belonging to and assimilation to German society/culture". The study displays an assimilationist concept of integration, i.e. one that considers the extent to which migrants become like what is imagined as German rather than how migrants are supported in negotiating different expectations and possibilities. This interpretation is supported by Simon's own result that the correlation between "integration into German society" and "life satisfaction" (respondents expressed more satisfaction with their lives the more they expressed belonging to/assimilation into German society) is statistically significant only for the respondents without migration background.⁴¹

Another variable that correlated with homonegative attitudes was "acceptance of traditional norms of masculinity".⁴² As with religiosity, this concept was not further defined and Simon does not make a theoretical reference to theories of masculinity or gender. The items were "If husband and wife both work, it is not okay if the woman earns more money than the man", "Nobody respects a man who speaks about his sorrows, fears and problems", "There are situations in which a man has to earn respect by way of his fists" and "A man not willing to counter insults with violence is a wimp". A further item ("Gender equality should not go as far as women not having respect for their men anymore") was not used in the analysis because it would have decreased the internal consistency of the scale.

⁴¹ Bernd Simon 2008, 94. One might interpret this finding as proof of the argument that integration in terms of assimilation is not satisfying for those assimilated. The researcher does not present a discussion of this.

⁴² Bernd Simon 2008, 93.

The examination of the correlations of this variable produced interesting results: While the respondents without migration background showed the weakest acceptance of traditional masculinity and those with a former USSR migration background the strongest, this was one of the most distinct factors related with homonegativity within the group *without* a migration background. Moreover, the correlation between these variables was strongest in this group. Using the logic that was applied by the researcher when interpreting the results regarding religiosity, we would have to conclude that the traditional norms of masculinity contain a particularly strong homonegative element amongst Germans without a migration background. However, this interpretation is not given in the study. This may be linked to the study's design, which was to test certain hypotheses, leading to an indifference towards further interesting results. Yet it is obvious again that the interpretation of the data is biased towards justifying the construct of "homophobic Muslim migrants".⁴³ This impression is amplified by the fact that the study did neither consider traditional norms of femininity as a relevant variable, nor the conditions under which certain concepts of masculinity are resorted to. As Jin Haritaworn argues, this evaluation

"disregards how people of colour, as well as many queers and transpeople who lack gender, class or race privilege, disproportionately have to defend themselves from violence, and are often pathologized and punished for this."⁴⁴

If all these variables are taken into account (together with religiosity), the group differences decrease considerably.⁴⁵ Moreover, some age differences become visible: the respondents labelled "with Turkish migration background" showed less homonegative attitudes the older they were, whereas for the other respondents the homonegative attitudes became stronger with higher age.⁴⁶ Without having examined this any further, Simon guesses that youths with strong homonegative attitudes may be influenced by societal mechanisms of correction; this would explain the age-related decline of the group with the strongest homonegative attitudes.⁴⁷

4. Reception

The one-page-summary of the study results, published on the internet by the LSVD and widely absorbed by an interested public, displays a

⁴³ A white non-Muslim gay activist once spelled out this rationale to Thomas Viola when, during a lesbian and gay street fair, he contentedly said that the study "verifies what we have always been saying".

⁴⁴ Haritaworn 2010, p. 141

⁴⁵ Ibid. The differences between the two groups of migrant youth even become statistically insignificant, if these variables are taken into account.

⁴⁶ Bernd Simon 2008, 94.

⁴⁷ Bernd Simon 2008, 97.

chart with the percentages of five out of nine items measuring homonegative attitudes.⁴⁸ The group of respondents is divided into "German", "former USSR" and "Turkish" and subdivided into genders. The presentation is split into two parts headed "1. Prevalence of Homonegative Attitudes" and "2. Possible Reasons for Homonegative Attitudes". In both parts, the interpretation of the data emphasizes on several occasions the homonegative attitudes amongst adolescents with a migration background and amongst the ones labelled "Turkish" in particular.⁴⁹

This presentation entails a racialization of homonegativity on the one hand and of Germanness on the other: by putting "German" on a level with "no migrant background", the citizenship status of German grandchildren of Turkish immigrants was changed without any further consideration.⁵⁰ In addition, despite the chart compiled by the LSVD presenting gender differences, it is not mentioned in any way that in almost all groups of respondents male youths express stronger homonegative attitudes than females.⁵¹

The reception in the media focused on the migrant background of the youths as the main cause of homonegativity. Within this group, those from Muslim immigrant families are the centre of the criticism. The left-liberal newspaper "die taz" writes:

"Hostility against gays and lesbians is more pronounced amongst young migrants. But: the better integrated the less prejudiced."⁵²

The Berlin tabloid newspaper *B.Z.* headlines:

"Young Berlin migrants homophobic."⁵³

The regional public television broadcaster for Berlin and Brandenburg, RBB, reports:

"Gays are increasingly becoming the object of hatred. The perpetrators: primarily adolescents with Turkish and Arab migration background."⁵⁴

Another public broadcaster, the WDR (*Westdeutscher Rundfunk*), headlines:

"Homophobic migrants?"⁵⁵

⁴⁸ LSVD 2008.

⁴⁹ E.g. "Homophobic attitudes are much more prevalent amongst pupils with a migration background than in the German comparison group. They are particularly strong among male adolescents of Turkish origin." (LSVD 2008, 1).

⁵⁰ Andreas Hieronymus 2009, 35f. This alienation is actually perceived as such by the people labelled "Turkish": According to a study conducted in Hamburg, only 13% of the local Muslim population think they are being perceived as Germans while, according to their self-perception, 52% have a strong sense of belonging to Germany (ibid., 40).

⁵¹ See LSVD 2008.

⁵² Antje Lang-Lendorf (tr. R. S.) 2007.

⁵³ *B.Z.* online (tr. R. S.) 2007.

⁵⁴ Katrin Aue (tr. R. S.) 2008.

⁵⁵ Kerstin Fohrn 2007 (tr. R.S.). For a criticism of this programme, its construction of a "Muslim or gay binary" and the use of the term "migrant" as synonymous with Turks, Arabs and other "dark Muslims", see Noah Sow 2008, 244.

affirming the statement and denying the question mark with reference to the study's results presented in the following programme which is called "Cosmo TV. The integration programme of the WDR". It is clear in these cases that the terms *migrants*, *Turks* and *Arabs* function within a racist discourse that stigmatizes Muslims as intolerant, aggressive, violent and homophobic and portrays the German majority as liberal, progressive and civilized.⁵⁶

5. Conclusion

- The results of Simon's study are doubtful, as the study did not (always) measure what it claims to measure. Homonegativity is reduced to explicit forms, and the two variables that were found to have the strongest correlations with homonegative attitudes – religiosity and acceptance of traditional masculinity – were not theoretically well founded.
- A significant share of responses was not considered in the analysis, because they did not fall into Simon's categories, which display a homogenizing binary of "us" Germans and "them" foreigners.
- The study does not investigate the respondents' understanding and experience of homosexuals, religion or migration, yet it makes claims about the impact of these factors. Correlations are turned into causes, although the study did not investigate the latter. Religiosity and acceptance of traditional norms of masculinity are presented as characteristics located within individuals, without discussing the societal or historical conditions that might produce or validate them.
- A major deficit is the study's negligence of socio-economic factors, in particular of class and race privilege.⁵⁷ This is difficult to investigate because such factors may not be consciously experienced or explicitly told by respondents – it would require them to acknowledge painful experiences of powerlessness and violence. Yet, considering the voices that have pointed towards the relations between experiences of violence and own tendencies to resort to violence (while other strategies may be unavailable or not promising), such a perspective needs to be taken into account.
- In the public debate, a selective attention to the results gives the impression that all migrant youth had given more homonegative responses than all non-migrant youth – which is not supported by the data.
- The public discussion of Simon's study uses racialized stereotypes and serves nationalistic clichés. Average values are turned into a general suspicion that thwarts political and pedagogical work and leads to the repetition of racist discrimination.

Simon's study and the ways in which it is presented in public endorse – regardless of the researcher's or the LSVD's intentions – racist, cul-

⁵⁶ For a critique of the Berlin public debate about "the homophobic migrant" see also the article "Kreuzberg als Chiffre" by GLADT e. V. 2009b. For an analysis of a report by the German newspaper "Süddeutsche Zeitung" on Simon's findings, see Jin Haritaworn 2010.

⁵⁷ See Jin Haritaworn 2010.

turalist, islamophobic and nationalist discourses that deny the reality of racist and homonegative discrimination and social inequality in Germany. The methods are, as Haritaworn puts it, "categorically performative of the very 'homophobic Muslim' subject which they claim to objectively describe".⁵⁸ Such knowledge (re)produces a dichotomy between a civilized, enlightened and tolerant Germany and corresponding (non-migrant, non-Muslim) German citizens on the one side and a violent, traditional and intolerant Islamic and Arab world with corresponding migrants (who are not LGBT) who appear to be the last obstacle on the way to sexual freedom. Ambiguities and multiple identities do not exist within this picture and rather get erased methodologically and rhetorically.⁵⁹

The study contributes to the improvement of the positions of some homosexuals by providing and securing privileges for those who are economically and culturally advantaged enough to access them and whose inclusion supports imperialist politics and the legitimization of social inequality. This way, politics are reduced to single issue politics, neglecting the complex interweaving of privileges and disadvantages and the interlocking and interdependency of social categories and relations of power, thus obstructing emancipatory projects.⁶⁰

Certainly, we need research into homonegativity that takes into account the meaning of cultural difference or that constructs ideal types for the sake of a differentiated understanding of the various forms homonegativity can take and of the manifold strategies that are needed to combat it. However, such research requires a self-critical analysis of contemporary gender and sexual regulations and an awareness of the political implications that some questions imply. As long as homogenization and reductions dominate, social hierarchies will remain.

⁵⁸ Jin Haritaworn 2010, 141.

⁵⁹ A further example of this is that the sexual orientation of the respondents was not taken into account in data collection and interpretation. This reproduces the ongoing invisibility of LGBT and queer lives at school.

⁶⁰ See Lisa Duggan 2003 and Jin Haritaworn et al. 2007 and 2008 for critiques of single issue politics.

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