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Perceptions of socioeconomic integration of middle eastern immigrants in Europe : comparing national discourses and subjective experiences

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Panel Title: Perceptions of Socioeconomic Integration of Middle Eastern Immigrants in Europe: Comparing National Discourses and Subjective Experiences

Panel Organizer:

Dalia Abdelhady, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, Sweden

Panel Discussant:

Dan-Erik Andersson, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, Sweden

Panel Description:

This panel compares the subjective understanding of success and socioeconomic mobility of immigrants from the Middle East in Europe with national discourses of integration. Despite the abundance of research on Middle Eastern migrants in Europe, not much is known about their subjective understanding of their socioeconomic positions and experience with social mobility. Much of the research looks at objective measures such as educational attainment, occupational status, and reported discrimination. Little research has investigated the ways immigrants and their children on 'define, experience, and perceive mobility and success' (Zhou et al. 2008, p. 42). This panel investigates the different narratives of incorporation as presented by official media outlets on the one hand, and the immigrant populations on the other. Looking at key factors of incorporation and social mobility including education attainment and school experiences, and occupational status and labour market experiences the papers in this panel highlight the contradictory narratives of othering and the desire to belong, failure and success, and fear and aspirations. The papers focus on case studies from Germany, France, Sweden and Denmark to provide analyses from traditional European destinations to ones that have only recently dealt with new populations among their midst. Despite their disadvantaged position, the papers show that the majority of immigrants and their children perceive of their experiences both in school and labour market as considerable success. At the same time, national discourses of incorporation and integration stress narratives of fear of Islamization and violence as grounds for exclusion and marginalization. Taken together, the papers allow us to conclude the importance of subjective experiences in understanding processes of integration and mobility among immigrants in various societies in Europe. Such subjective experiences challenge official discourses and shed light on host societies' willingness to accept new generations of immigrants.

Paper 1:

Authors: Matthew Clare and Dalia Abdelhady, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, Sweden

Title: Success vs. Marginalization in and about French Ethnic Suburbs

Abstract:

Based on in-depth interviews with 25 immigrants of North African origin in Paris, and on-line analyses of French-language newspapers, this paper compares narratives of incorporation as presented in the personal encounters and official discourses. Based on the personal interviews, North African immigrants stress their belonging to French society despite their experiences with discrimination and marginalization. French newspapers, on the other hand, portray a different type of analysis. *L'Humanité*, *le Monde*, and *le Figaro* were selected as together they encompass a wide readership and traditionally represent a diverse political spectrum. Despite their differences, the newspapers convey narratives of troubled incorporation and cultural conflict as key factors facing French society.

Paper 2:

Authors: Verena Gruber and Caner Ulug, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, Sweden

Title: "A Turk in a Porsche," do they really fit? Narratives of Incorporation of Turks in Germany

Abstract:

The observation of three different German newspapers Die Zeit, Die Frankfurter Allgemeine and Die Tageszeitung suggests that while they differ in highlighting certain aspects and political parties in the process, they all show the same pattern of covering immigration over the last ten years. Initially, integration, with special focus on the social welfare system, the German job market and needed education for immigrants, was the key theme stressing the burdens involved. However, the debate quickly shifted to the discussion of Islamization, violence and un-assimilability of Turkish migrants. The experiences of the Turkish migrants themselves reflect similar concerns, albeit differently stated. In-depth interviews with 20 Turkish migrants in Berlin show that they also perceive the cultural differences to be a factor in impeding their integration in Germany. The problem, however, does not lie in the immigrants' culture itself, but in the lack of acceptance and pluralism in German society.

Paper 3:

Author: Marie Stahlschmidt, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, Sweden

Title: Subjective vs. Objective Experiences of School Education among Turks in Denmark

Abstract:

This paper compares official national discourses of immigrant integration in Denmark with narratives of immigrant subjective experiences in the school system. Official discourses often stress objective measures of low educational attainment and poor labor market performance as illustrations of troubles faced by immigrants in the process of integrating to Danish society. Culture, seen in essential terms, is also often brought into the argument to highlight reasons for such troubled form of integration. Through in-depth interviews with Turks in Denmark, however, the paper shows a constructive view of culture as it can be drawn upon selectively to shape the immigrant experiences. Importantly, in-depth interviews show that Turkish immigrants stress a culture of mobility and success in entrepreneurship as a key factor in facilitating their integration in Danish society. Finally, through probing into school experiences, the paper highlights an important context where such conflicting narratives of incorporation intersect but also one that maintains the power of the host society in shaping the potential for success for the immigrants and their children.

Paper 4:

Author: David Jakobson, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, Sweden

Title: Turks in Sweden: Lack of Mobility or Resourceful Success?

This paper compares official discourses, both in the media and among academics, of lack of socioeconomic mobility among Turks in Sweden with the immigrants' experiences as expressed subjectively. Many scholars, policy makers and media personnel stress that many social, economic, and cultural factors impede the ability of Turkish immigrants and their children in Sweden to experience upward mobility and fully integrate to Swedish society. Through in-depth interviews, the study tries to find out about the current and past goals and ambitions of Swedish children of Turkish immigrants, focusing on how people have tried to overcome structural barriers, and what they see as the good life. The analysis shows that Turkish-Swedish youth are quite industrious, using contacts and family to get into the work market, and by that going around the biggest issue, getting a foot in to prove oneself and gaining experience that can be

used to find better jobs with bigger social status. The paper concludes by highlighting experiences of segregation and lack of acceptance from native Swedes that thwarts immigrants' hopes and aspirations.