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'Sorry, we're homogeneous.' The Baffling Appeal of Homogeneity Concepts among Supporters of Immigrants Examples from Japan and Germany

Abstract

When an interviewee proclaims that she/he supports cultural and ethnic plurality, but then proceeds to argue that immigrants do not really fit into her/his homogeneous society, the effect is baffling. This article analyses these apparently paradoxical accounts in order to explore how and why concepts of homogeneity were being referred to. To this end, case studies of individuals engaged in civil society immigrant-support organizations are presented, based on problem-centred interviews conducted in Beppu (Japan) and Halle/Saale (Germany). By employing methods of qualitative data content analysis, this article argues that concepts of homogeneity may appeal to plurality-supporters in order to protect their ambitious self-images.

Introduction

While exploring the ways in which human societies cope with and appreciate ethnic and cultural pluralism, Michael Walzer observed that "there will always be people, in any democratic society and however well-entrenched the commitment to pluralism is, for whom some particular difference – this or that form of worship, family arrangement or dietary rule – is very hard to tolerate".[1] Walzer's statement illustrates that a commitment to plurality may sadly not suffice to ensure an individual's toleration of other individuals that she/he perceives as 'others'. Instead a problem appears. It is the apparent paradox[2] of an individual professing to be committed to a culturally plural and inclusive society, while she/he nevertheless relates affirmatively to concepts of homogeneity that stipulate and legitimize the exclusion of persons marked as ethnic and/or cultural 'others'.

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[1]   Michael Walzer, 'The Politics of Difference: «Statehood and Toleration in a Multicultural World»', *Ratio Juris*, Vol. 10, No. 2, March 1997, p. 167.

[2]   The phrasing 'apparent paradox' refers to King's argument that the paradox of an individual acting in a tolerant way towards one particular social group/practice/situation, while being intolerant of others, was not in fact a paradox. Instead Preston presented it as a problem of setting priorities for one issue that one objected less (and thus exercised toleration) over another issue to which one objected more (and thus refused toleration). Preston King, *Toleration*, London: George Allen & Unwin Limited, 1976, pp. 27–29.

One brief example might illustrate the problem: One of our interviewees, Mami Goto[3], was a vivacious, enthusiastic woman in her early 40s who lived in the southern Japanese city of Beppu. She worked as a public administration employee, and had studied and worked in New York for several years. After returning to Beppu from the U.S. in the late 1990s, Goto set up a support group for immigrants[4], particularly foreign university students and their families. She organized or supported leisure activities, and helped out when the students or their spouses were in need of a job or a new apartment. Moreover, she had run anti-discrimination panel discussions in the past to counter xenophobic fears among the older population. One might assume that Goto was supportive of an understanding of Japanese society as ethnically and culturally plural. However, minutes later she made the following statement:

> "How can Japan be not a homogeneous nation?! (…) Basically «the homogeneity stems» from our «Japanese» understanding of values. That means, we all know which is what and what is common knowledge. In Japan this common knowledge vouches for more than the public law. (…) That's why, (…) to admit something from outside, (…) something that's different, that's really tough, right?"

From Goto's point of view, more immigrants would disturb the unspoken understanding of norms and values that was apparently inbred in all Japanese. Despite supporting the non-Japanese living in Beppu, the interviewee's image of Japanese society therefore effectively excluded the participation of non-Japanese. Hence the interviewee supported ethnic and cultural plurality through her activities, and yet embraced and reiterated concepts of a homogeneous Japanese society that seemed to contradict her earlier pluralist commitments. In order to explore this problem, this article addresses the following two questions: How are exclusive national concepts being reiterated by individuals who otherwise seem supportive of multi-ethnic coexistence, and why does this happen?

Comparing individual case studies sampled in Japan and Germany offers us the opportunity to analyze the impact of different concepts of national homogeneity and different environmental frames for immigrant-support engagement. Thus the comparison may allow for explorations of the question of how commitments to plurality and concepts of homogeneity get along in different societies.

Methodology and data sampling

Since the research on which this article is based focusses on the individual level, the core data used here was sampled through problem-centered interviews.[5] This individual-related

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[3]   All names of interviewees are pseudonyms.

[4]   In this article an immigrant is defined as an individual 'who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence. From the perspective of the country of departure the person will be a long-term emigrant, and from that of the country of arrival the person will be a long-term immigrant.' UNStats, 'Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration', *Statistical Papers Series M*, No. 58, Rev. 1, p. 18, http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_58rev1E.pdf (accessed 23.05.2013).

[5]   Andreas Witzel, *Verfahren der qualitativen Sozialforschung: Überblick und Alternativen* [Methods of qualitative social research: overview and alternatives], Frankfurt/ Main: Campus-Verlag, 1982.

data was supplemented by data which referred to the national or municipal environment that the interviewees lived in. It was collected from legislative texts, policy statements, demographic statistics, grey literature and selected media coverage that featured public debates on immigrant integration in Japan and Germany. Data analysis followed the suggestions made by Corbin and Strauss on qualitative content analysis.[6]

The interviews were conducted between 2008 and 2009, in the southern Japanese city of Beppu and the city of Halle (Saale) in eastern Germany, through face-to-face qualitative interviews with ten individuals. The bi-national, bi-municipal frame was chosen in order to explore individual narrations in different organizational and structural social environments. The ten interviewees were selected for their activities in civil society organizations engaging in immigrant (self-) support. Within their organizations they conducted or assisted in such activities as language classes, anti-racism campaigns, conflict-mediation and counseling. The interviewees' ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the early seventies. Their occupational status was also diverse, as the interviewees referred to themselves as housewives, administration employees or executives, social workers, university students or pensioners. Whilst three of them defined themselves as immigrants, four other individuals, despite perceiving themselves as autochthonous Japanese or Germans, stressed their possessing personal experience studying or working for several years outside Japan or Germany. The remaining three interviewees mentioned none of these situations. Religious affiliations to Islam and Buddhism were pronounced. All ten interviewees had either attained or entered tertiary education.

The interviews focused on the problems of perceiving and dealing with plurality and related conflicts. Their activities and the problems they encountered were therefore explored, as well as their strategies, motivations and ambitions in dealing with them. The interviewees' definitions of their own social status and groups they identified with, as well as of other social groups and their perception of prevalent distribution of rights and resources, were further subjects of interest. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed for content.[7]

Beppu and Halle (Saale)

The data was sampled in Beppu and Halle (Saale), two mid-sized cities situated in peripheral regions of Japan and Germany. Beppu and Halle have both witnessed sudden, recent and regionally significant influxes of foreign residents. Halle, which prior to German unification in 1990 was part of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), had only 1.4 per cent of non-German residents in 1991.[8] However, over the last 20 years the number of non-German nationals almost tripled, to 4 per cent of the city's population in 2010. Meanwhile non-German nationals comprised only 1.9 per cent of the population in the surrounding

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[6]   Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 3rd edition, London: Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008.

[7]   Corbin and Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research…*, pp. 195–228; David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, London, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1993, pp. 398–399.

[8]   Matthias Henze, *Soziologische Erklärungsansätze zur Ausländerfeindlichkeit am Beispiel einer empirischen Studie in Halle-Neustadt* [Sociological approaches to xenophobia: the case of Halle-Neustadt], 2000, http://www.soziologie.uni-halle.de/archiv/diplom/2000-henze-auslaenderfeindlichkeit.pdf (accessed 17.04.2013), p. 39.

state of Saxony-Anhalt.[9] In Beppu the trend is even stronger: whilst the percentage of non-Japanese nationals accounted for only 1.1 per cent of the city's population in 2000, their numbers more than tripled in the following 10 years to 3.6 per cent in 2010.[10] They thus surmount sevenfold the average percentage of 0.5 of non-Japanese nationals in the surrounding Oita prefecture. Beppu and Halle therefore appear to have rather recently turned into plural islands in largely mono-ethnic and mono-cultural seas. They thus offered very interesting settings for studying individual reactions towards immigration-related plurality.

However, commitment to pluralism in the two cities appeared to take place in decidedly different discursive surroundings. Komai Hiroshi mentioned Beppu in his works elaborating his vision of a "Japanese-styled society of multicultural coexistence" (*nihongata tabunka kyōsei shakai*) as an internationalized environment advancing towards a "society of multicultural coexistence".[11] Thus it can be assumed that Beppu offered an environment where individual commitments to pluralism might be supported by the public mainstream without strong opposition from rivaling discourses. Meanwhile Halle, as an eastern German city, has notoriously been associated with right-wing extremism and violence against immigrants.[12] The Halle-based politician and immigrant-support activist Karamba Diaby explained that the situation had recently improved, but attributed "racist attacks [that] happen in our city from time to time" to right-wing agitators creating a xenophobic atmosphere in Sachsen-Anhalt.[13] Unlike in Beppu, public discourses advocating commitments to pluralism in Halle could be assumed to be rivaled by opposing xenophobic sentiments. The frameworks were therefore expected to allow insights into how different public discourses on pluralism and homogeneity reflected on individual perceptions, and how these reflections shaped the individuals' commitment to plurality.

Concepts of homogeneity in Japan and Germany: *tan'itsu minzoku kokka* and *deutsche Leitkultur*

Mami Goto's account of Japan as an "ethnically homogeneous nation", which derived from a common understanding on norms and values that was shared by all Japanese but by nobody else, can be traced to the popular understanding of Japan as *tan'itsu minzoku*

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[9]   *17. Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Halle (Saale)* [17th Statistical Yearbook of Halle (Saale) City], Halle: Amt für Bürgerservice, pp. 36–47.

[10]   Beppu Shiyakusho, *Heisei 24 nen Beppu-shi gaiyō* [Outline of Beppu-city in the year Heisei 24 (2012)], http://www.city.beppu.oita.jp/03gyosei/general/gaiyou/gaiyou.pdf (accessed 15.04.2013), pp. 17–18.

[11]   Komai Hiroshi, *Gurōbaruka jidai no Nihongata tabunka kyōsei shakai* [Japanese-styled society of multicultural coexistence in times of globalization], Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2006, p. 137. See also Imamura, Shohei and Ōshima, H., 'Tabunka kankyō no daigaku' [A university with a multicultural environment], in *Tabunka shakai he no michi. Kōza gurōbaruka suru Nihon to iminmondai, dai ni ban* [Paths to a multicultural society. Globalizing Japan and the Question of Immigration lectures, part 2], Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2003, pp. 77–98.

[12]   Wolfgang Dick, 'Rechtsradikale Gewalt in Ost und West' [Right-wing radical violence in East and West «Germany»], *Deutsche Welle online*, April 23, 2012, http://www.dw.de/rechtsradikale-gewalt-in-ost-und-west/a-15903160 (accessed 19.04.2013).

[13]   Jürgen Grosche, 'Integration in Halle. Verwaltung sollte Vorbild sein. Interview mit Karamba Diaby' [Immigrant integration in Halle. Public admin should act as role model. Interview with Karamba Diaby], *Clavis*, February 2012, p. 11.

kokka (an ethnically homogeneous nation). According to Kosaku Yoshino, the concept implies a "notion of racially exclusive possession of particular cultural characteristics".[14] Yoshino argued that Japanese who adhered to this notion typically linked specific 'Japanese' cultural characteristics, such as codes of conduct, moral values or consumer preferences with their association with the Japanese as a racial group defined as birth of Japanese parents. Accordingly the concept of *tan'itsu minzoku kokka* denied the possibility that individuals who were born from non-Japanese parents could ever acquire these cultural characteristics, and therefore could never become fully accepted members of Japanese society.[15] Images of the Japanese possessing racially determined unique cultural characteristics can be found in bestsellers, popular magazine articles and public speeches by government officials. It can therefore be defined as an exclusive, national concept that does not only appeal to individuals politically affiliated with the far right, but one which is shared by mainstream society. To give one example, the author of one popular bestseller pointed out: "How was this small archipelago, so poor in natural resources, able to be so eminently successful? (…) In short, it is because the national traits which the Japanese possess are so magnificent".[16] Hence Fujiwara claimed that the Japanese people possess certain unique and ethnically inherited traits that constituted the nation's greatness. The concept of the ethnically homogeneous Japanese nation therefore typically links Japan's economic success to Japanese ethnicity.[17] According to this argument, anything that compromised this ethnic homogeneity, such as immigration and the permanent settlement of immigrants in Japan, therefore also endangered the nation's success and well-being.

Compared with the interviews in Beppu, the accounts of activists in Halle predominantly stressed the need for cultural assimilation for immigrants in Germany. To give one example, Francis Olea, a university student who explained to have immigrated to Germany himself, argued as follows:

> "I believe one problem here in Germany is that (…) the largest part of immigrants belongs to the Turkish population. And they've got…, let's say, a completely different culture, there's a lot of talking that they themselves don't want «social participation». And they're really closing themselves off, because of their cultural, religious and other backgrounds (…). And I believe, if they don't open up, then it's gonna be difficult."

References like Olea's may be related to the concept of *deutsche Leitkultur*, which will here be translated as "the prevailing German culture".[18] Over the past years, the concept

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[14] Yoshino Kosaku, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan. A Sociological Enquiry*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 116.

[15] Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism…*, pp. 115–121.

[16] Fujiwara Masahiko, *Kokka no hinkaku* [The Dignity of the Nation], Tokyo: Shinchō Shinsho, 2005, p. 181.

[17] See also Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism* …, pp. 86 and 182–184.

[18] The German verb *leiten* means to lead or to prevail. Stein pointed out that the term *deutsche Leitkultur* therefore implies notions of a German culture dominating others or of disqualifying individuals associated with non-German cultures as being relegated to a lower social rank. Tine Stein, 'Gibt es eine multikulturelle Leitkultur als Verfassungspatriotismus? Zur Integrationsdebatte in Deutschland' [Is there a multicultural *Leitkultur* as constitutional patriotism? On the debate on immigrant-integration in Germany], *Leviathan*, Vol. 36, No. 1, March 2008, p. 41.

has enjoyed some popularity among mainstream politicians such as Chancellor Angela Merkel and Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich. Tine Stein pointed out that proponents of the concept typically used it in public debates on immigration and immigrant integration in Germany to distance themselves from concepts of multiculturalism that they dismiss as relativist ambiguity. Instead they advocated granting political rights to immigrants only on condition that they first adopt a set of "common values and common cultural practices".[19] Stein argued that the concept of *deutsche Leitkultur* did not necessarily demand cultural assimilation, but warned: "When German or likewise European prevailing culture is portrayed as a «historically» grown cultural pattern, (…) then there is a great danger that this is understood as the illegitimate application of pressure to enforce spiritual assimilation".[20] The concept of *deutsche Leitkultur* can therefore be described as a mainstream concept that refers to an image of a culturally homogeneous German nation, and postulates cultural assimilation from immigrants in order for them to be granted acceptance in German society. Because assimilation is thus considered a precondition for social inclusion, exclusion can easily be explained as a problem caused by the inability or the unwillingness of immigrants to assimilate. Furthermore, Bauman argues that postulations of assimilation can always be considered to carry the intrinsic stigma of inequality to be applied by those dominant individuals in a society who demand assimilation from those they are determined to dominate.[21] The concept of a prevailing German culture will thus here be considered as an exclusive concept of a culturally homogeneous German society.

Two case-studies from Japan and Germany

References to concepts of homogeneity such as those quoted from the interviews with Goto and Olea were not uncommon both among interviewees in Beppu and in Halle. This was surprising since all of them were selected for their activism in civil-society immigrant support organizations. Still, concepts of homogeneity obviously appealed to them, even if they appeared to contradict their self-portrayals as individuals who were positive about ethnic and cultural plurality in their social environments. In order to take a closer look at the forms and contexts in which references to concepts of *tan'itsu minzoku kokka* or *deutsche Leitkultur* were made, two more detailed individual case-studies will be reconstructed and presented.

1. Gogun Taeko (Beppu)

Gogun Taeko referred to herself as an autochthonous Asian housewife. Before marrying into a family in Beppu that she described as very well-known and influential, Gogun had lived abroad for two years to study foreign languages. She organized Japanese cooking and conversation classes, which focused specifically on the needs of the spouses of foreign university students and employees. Throughout the interview, Gogun expressed compassion and sympathy for the needs of her participants, claiming that she had formed many friendships along the way. However, in the course of the interview, it turned out that she loved non-Japanese coming and going, but not staying:

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[19] Stein, 'Gibt es eine multikulturelle…', p. 35.
[20] Stein, 'Gibt es eine multikulturelle…', p. 42.
[21] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, pp. 72–73.

> "And then, when they all go back (to their home-countries), then they cry and say: 'I had so much fun!' or 'We're one family!' or 'We're friends!' or so. Well, when it comes to that point, the human heart overcomes all possible differences."

Gogun's ideal of a non-Japanese person in Beppu was therefore someone who stayed for a while, had a good time and then returned to their home country full of good memories and who would perhaps come back as a tourist one day. She explicitly did not welcome non-Japanese people settling down permanently in Beppu, explaining that they simply would not fit into her concept of Japanese society:

> "This is Japan, so (…) this is not a multiethnic country."

Consequently, non-Japanese were inevitably forced to live a life in isolation:

> "If you're living in Japan (as a foreigner) for a long time, and you want to get closer and closer to the Japanese, and then there's this irremovable wall between them and yourself, you're bound to be lonely."

Hence according to Gogun there was always a barrier between Japanese and non-Japanese that was impossible to overcome. As the barrier that isolated them was from her point of view irremovable, non-Japanese were necessarily and inevitably isolated from sustainable social participation. Table 1 illustrates the stark difference in personal well-being that Gogun attributes to the length of the immigrants' period of stay in Japan.

Table 1. Potentials of personal well-being for immigrants according to their length of stay, as attributed by Gogun

Short-term immigrants	Long-term immigrants
"When they all go back (…)."	"If you're living in Japan for a long time (…)."
"I had so much fun!"	"you want to get closer and closer to the Japanese." "there's this irremovable wall (…)."
"the human heart overcomes all possible differences."	"you're bound to be lonely."

The two interview-statements compared in the table appear as positive and negative counterparts. According to Gogun, short-term immigrants generally saw their needs fulfilled: "I *had* so much fun!" In contrast, long-term immigrants found themselves struggling for social inclusion: "You *want* to get closer and closer (…)." However, in the interviewee's account, their struggle was futile, as their need for inclusion would unavoidably come up against "this *irremovable* wall." The outcome therefore was therefore equally polarized: While the short-term immigrants' departure caused "the human heart" to act as the great emotional leveler to overcome cultural and personal differences, long-term immigrants were "*bound*" to stay put in their self-inflicted loneliness. The crucial point for Gogun was clearly the length of their period of stay. Thus short-term immigrants (and tourists) were the only non-Japanese who could be happy in Japan. According to Gogun, therefore, leaving Beppu for their countries of departure was the only way for non-Japanese to avoid social isolation and loneliness.

Another rather peculiar feature of the above-described passage is the switch of addressees. Whereas Gogun spoke of short-term immigrants referring to the participants of her cooking-classes, talking of long-term immigrants to Japan she switch to directly addressing her interviewer, who is writing these lines: "*You*'re bound to be lonely." Let us picture the interview situation. From presenting herself as a compassionate adviser to participants of her cooking circle, we can assume that Gogun was comfortable in her self-cast role of a cultural guide in things Japanese, but probably not in being interviewed. Her interviewer was a younger, Caucasian woman from Europe, who had previously lived in Oita-prefecture for various years. Although no indication of possible wishes of the interviewer to settle down in Japan was given, Gogun obviously interpreted the questions on long-term immigration as her seeking advice on staying in the country. As the interview intensified Gogun thus referred to her accustomed role as a cultural adviser more and more vigorously up to the point when she literally warned the interviewer not to settle down in Japan. To stress her point of view she cited the notion of ethnic homogeneity, from which the interviewee would always stick out. Referring to the concept of Japan as an ethnically homogeneous nation thus here served the purpose of scaring outsiders off their possible intentions of becoming more than a short-term guest in Japanese society.

Explaining that Japan was "not a multi-ethnic country," the reason for the inevitable isolation of non-Japanese was to Gogun in-bred in the national character. The concept of ethnic homogeneity that she attributed to Japanese society was therefore described as both a powerful tool that kept non-Japanese away and preserved the national character. On the other hand, Gogun portrayed it as a subtle, inalienable principle that ruled the lives of everybody living in Japan and left the individual powerless to alter the principle's effects. Social exclusion for ethnic others was therefore accounted for as an irrevocable trait of Japan's national character.

2. Jürgen Demming (Halle)

Jürgen Demming presented himself as an autochthonous, Caucasian man in his end-fifties, who held a prestigious executive position in Halle. Originally from western Germany, he had spent several years of his career living and working outside of Germany, and referred to himself proudly as an open-minded and cosmopolitan person:

> "I believe I have cast off or sufficiently compartmentalized many of these (…) unnecessary (…) cultural anxieties that impediment the «East-German» people over here when they're dealing with other cultures."

Demming volunteered as a conflict-mediator in situations which he described as "conflicts with foreigner-relations". He described himself as a powerful, unbiased trouble-shooter:

> "If there are any social wrongs, then everybody who has dealt with me will see that in such a case (…) I'm someone who doesn't have to fear anything when dealing with public administration authorities."

The interviewee therefore presents himself as a fearless protector of harassed or exploited immigrants in Halle. He refers to the city's notorious reputation for xenophobic violence, and points out that he will not be intimidated by anyone. However, the reality of his activities as a voluntary conflict-mediator appeared to cast him in a different role. Demming

went on to point out that he did not view most of the issues that were brought forward to him by non-Germans as acts of discrimination:

> "About 30% of the cases are real problems, the rest are unfounded accusations. (…) «They make these accusations» in order to cover up their own failure, what else?"

Hence the interviewee described the majority of non-Germans who sought his advice in conflict situations as individuals who had personally failed in something, and now attempted to make up for it by illegitimately putting the blame on autochthonous Germans. This is an extremely harsh accusation, especially for someone who claimed to be a fearless and unbiased trouble-shooter. In order to substantiate his allegations, Demming pointed out:

> "You've got to realize that there are many people from systems where the personal power or the personal influence of a person of official standing is many, many times bigger. And where there is this expectation that all you need to do is going to an important person, and he will write a magical letter and the problem is solved. (…) The understanding of democratic, transparent structures often is (…) not very well developed."

Demming therefore related the deceptive behavior that he blamed on his non-German clientele with systemic differences between Germany and the countries where they had lived before immigrating. According to the interviewee they were personally incapable of dealing responsibly with set-backs, because political or cultural systems in their countries of departure left them ill-equipped for living in a democratic society. When asked, how these problems could be tackled, he explained:

> "You can simply try to convey and point out that (…) they cannot simply stick to the codes of behavior in their own countries of origin."

Apart from acts of severe discrimination or exploitation, Demming explained that he perceived most conflicts between immigrants and autochthonous Germans as problems caused by personal failures on behalf of the immigrants who appealed to him. In this interview, there was thus a gap between the interviewee's expectations towards his role as a conflict-mediator and the reality that he found himself in, as illustrated in table 2.

Table 2: Expectations and actual challenges as a conflict-mediator recounted by Demming

Demming's expectations	Actual challenges perceived by Demming
"social wrongs" "real problems"	personal "failure" "unfounded accusations"
"I'm someone who doesn't have to fear anything."	"You can simply try to convey (…) that they cannot stick to «their» codes of behavior (…)."

As the above-quoted passages might illuminate, the interview situation at times verged on the bizarre, when Demming on the one hand cast himself as champion of exploited immigrants and at the same time claimed they were not exploited at all, but used him cover up their own shortcomings. Again it might be helpful to reconstruct the interview situation.

Demming presented himself as a powerful, valiant and established figure, whose social status supplied him with an unassailability that he thought he deserved: "I'm someone, who doesn't have to fear anything." Moreover Demming was obviously being used to answering questions about himself and his activities as several interviews by him were found in the local media. Sitting in his office with a younger, female interviewer, also autochthonous German of the same Caucasian ethnic group might have egged him on to present himself as even more proactive and tough. The interview-situation thus can be considered a setting which Demming was accustomed to and felt no restraint from using tough, provocative and authoritative words. We can assume that he resorted to his blunt language to present himself in what he thought of as a favorable light, dominate the situation and ward off possible criticism.

Acting as a mediator in conflicts between non-Germans and Germans did not prove as courageous and challenging as Demming expected it to be. There seemed to be little demand for his fearlessness, while he apparently often felt compelled to make simple attempts at conveying the basics of what he viewed as German culture. Instead of tackling "real problems", he perceived himself being demanded to arbitrate the "unfounded accusations" of immigrants towards autochthonous Germans. Whereas he had expected himself to be alleviating the effects of "social wrongs," Demming felt he was consulted to cover up personal "failure." His perceptions cast an extremely negative light on the non-Germans who sought his advice. Demming suspected they were deceptive individuals wielding accusations of discriminations in order to make up for their personal shortcomings, and sought to substantiate this allegation by referring to the undemocratic systems in their countries of departure, which he claims left them ill-equipped to deal with structures of social mediation and decision-making in Germany. Thus Demming refers the problem to the lack of cultural assimilation on behalf of the non-Germans. In this he echoed concepts of a prevailing German culture that non-Germans were supposed to assimilate to or be excluded from.

Discussion

This article started from the observation that individuals professing to be positive about ethnic and cultural plurality at the same time affirmatively reiterated concepts of homogeneity. This raised the question of how and why these concepts were being related to. In paragraph 4, two concepts of homogeneity, *tan'itsu minzoku kokka* (ethnically homogeneous nation) and *deutsche Leitkultur* (prevailing German culture) were presented as concepts popular in public mainstream debates on immigration in Japan and Germany. It was further argued that while the concept of ethnical homogeneity in Japan stressed the uniqueness of Japanese ethnicity and implied the exclusion of ethnic others, the concept of a prevailing German culture demanded that immigrants assimilate culturally or be socially excluded. The previous paragraph presented two case studies in which these two different concepts could be traced. This paragraph focusses on the 'why': why did these concepts of homogeneity appeal to Gogun Taeko and Jürgen Demming, two individuals who professed to be committed to ethnic and cultural plurality?

Gogun resorted to homogeneity to explain something that obviously seemed legitimate to her, but was nevertheless contradictory: even though she claimed to be happy that non-Japanese people were coming to live in her hometown Beppu, she did not like them to settle down. This would normally contradict her earlier self-portrayal as an accommodating and compassionate supporter of non-Japanese. It seems noteworthy that the interviewee

draws a very ambitious portrait of herself, as acting as a compassionate cultural mediator, adviser and intercultural guide may be considered a highly demanding challenge.[22] However, Gogun argued that staying in Japan permanently made non-Japanese lonely and unhappy. Seen from her perspective, settling down permanently would endanger their well-being, whereas leaving after a short-term stay would ensure it.

However, this point of view left Gogun with another problem: without the concept of Japan as a homogeneous nation, this perception would portray herself as a person excluding the very people she was claiming to help and paint Japan as a place rife with xenophobia. The Japanese, including herself, would not want ethnic others in their midst, so they isolate them with a wall of social exclusion. However, by presenting Japan as an inherently homogeneous nation, the isolation of long-term migrants was explained to be not xenophobic, but simply unavoidable. According to the concept of homogeneity, the non-Japanese were not isolated because the Japanese did not like immigrants, but because there was no other way for them to behave. From Gogun's point of view, the concept of ethnic homogeneity thus legitimated exclusive behavior.

Similarly, Demming also referred to concepts of a prevailing German culture to explain the contradictions he encountered while volunteering as a conflict mediator. Drawing an ambitious self-image matching Gogun's, he presented himself as an unbiased troubleshooter protecting non-Germans from brutal acts of discrimination. However, in mediating conflicts between immigrants and autochthonous Germans, he found himself feeling that only 30 per cent of the cases brought forward to him were "real problems," whereas he dismissed the remaining 70 per cent as "unfounded accusations." It seems noteworthy that despite referring to himself as an unbiased troubleshooter, reflections on his own, rather privileged status as a middle-aged, Caucasian male in a prestigious professional position were notably absent from his interview-account. Instead Demming referred to his cosmopolitan lifestyle to point out that this prevented him from being biased in any way. He therefore eschewed self-reflections upon the privilege he enjoyed, which would have been essential to moderate social conflicts in a duly sensitive and helpful way.

Arguing that 70 per cent of his non-German clientele were frauds can be assumed to have posed a problem for Demming. Suspecting that the majority of ethnic or cultural 'others' act irresponsibly and deceptively does after all conflict with claiming an unbiased attitude for oneself. However, the interviewee related the individual immigrants' behavior to the 'undemocratic' structures in their countries of departure and their inability to assimilate culturally since arriving in Germany. His particular point of view, which was pointedly devoid of critical self-reflection, was thus legitimated by invoking the concept of a "prevailing German culture," which immigrants were obliged to adapt to or rightfully face social exclusion. Demming therefore reiterated concepts of a prevailing German culture in order to legitimize the exclusion of non-Germans, caused by the limitations of his ability to meet with the challenges of his position as a conflict-mediator.

Conclusion

Gogun and Demming both showed individual limitations to their motivations to act inclusively towards immigrants. Gogun expected non-Japanese to return to their countries

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[22] Bauman, *Modernity* …, pp. 56–61

of origin after a couple of years. Demming refused to assist the majority of immigrants who sought his assistance in conflicts with the autochthonous population, because he suspected their claims were in fact caused by unwillingness or an inability to assimilate. These limitations conflicted with their very ambitious self-images, in which they 'valiantly' or 'compassionately' supported people they considered ethnic others. Therefore their limitations in acting inclusively did not simply curtail their civil society activities, but in fact compromised the very images and expectations that the two interviewees had of themselves. In order to avoid a deconstruction of self-images and a frustration of expectations, they related to concepts of homogeneity. The appeal that concepts like *tan'itsu minzoku kokka* or *deutsche Leitkultur* had for the two interviewees was therefore fuelled by the highly ambitious images they drew of themselves and their inability to reflect critically on these ambitions. We might therefore draw a final conclusion: If an individual's commitment to ethnic and cultural plurality collides with highly ambitious self-images, the individual might end up reiterating concepts of homogeneity just in order to legitimate her/his actions without giving up on personal ambitions. Hence even for individuals professing their support of multi-ethnic coexistence, concepts of exclusive homogeneity can provide apt tools for them to protect their ambitious self-images.

Concepts of homogeneity are powerful symbolic constructions that legitimate in- and exclusion within a society. If individuals active in immigrant-support organizations are reiterating them, this is bound to be particularly problematic. By invoking concepts of homogeneity, they deny immigrants who need help the assistance they are supposed to provide. Individuals who are engaging themselves in civil-society immigrant-support organizations can furthermore be considered role models for the autochthonous population to emulate inclusive behavior towards individuals or groups considered as others.[23] If these 'immigrant supporters' thus affirmatively relate to concepts of homogeneity, they further spread the notion that however hard immigrants tried, their rights to fully participate in the society they live in would always be in doubt or in fact unattainable. They thus fail to be supportive, and instead act as symbolically powerful proponents of social exclusion. The case studies consequently stress the importance for individuals committed to plurality by supporting immigrants to balance their ambition with critical self-reflection.

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[23] Bauman, *Modernity...*, p. 57.