

## *Democracy education in the context of German “orientation courses” for migrants*

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*Zusammenfassung:* Migrants coming to Germany are obliged to take “integration courses” in order to obtain certain residence titles. In addition to the knowledge of the German language, proof of civic knowledge is required. This usually includes knowledge about the history, politics and culture of the country, or as Heinemann puts it provocatively, “it is presumed that they follow different social rules and therefore need a kind of citizen education in order to be transformed into democratic subjects” (Heinemann 2017, p. 178). This article will partly address Heinemann’s criticism using results of an empirical study conducted in summer 2018, the purpose of which was to analyze strategies and ways of communicating societal values in the context of integration courses for adult migrants. In contrast to Heinemann, this article doesn’t denounce the orientation courses as entanglement of hegemonic norms and structures, but discusses in general the need and the limits of value-promoting adult education in order to foster orientation – using the Habermasian lifeworld-system-concept. On the basis of the qualitative study, this article provides insights into the practical experiences from the point of view of the participants of the integration courses. In the following, the project will first be briefly presented in its theoretical location, then the partial results of the qualitative research study will be discussed.<sup>1</sup>

### *Concept of Integration courses*

First of all, let me address briefly the question on what concept the orientation course is based from the point of view of the responsible authority.

According to the Integration Course Ordinance (*Integrationskursverordnung*), the curriculum is determined by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* = BAMF). The courses themselves are carried out by different public and private institutions of adult and youth education on behalf and according to the specifications of the BAMF. These are e.g. the local community colleges (*Volkshochschulen*), supra-regional private providers such as the German Employees Academy (DAA), Kolping-Academies etc. The institutions that organize the courses are regularly controlled by BAMF for their organization and educational design to ensure the quality of the courses.

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) presented a concept for a nationwide integration course in 2004 (siehe BAMF 2004); three years later, a curriculum for a nationwide integration course was published (BAMF 2007), and in 2017 a readjustment took place (BAMF

2017). These documents basically follow the same principles and visions and differ only in the fact that the revised version is much more detailed and that the scope of lessons was raised from 30 first to 45, then to 60 and finally to 100. The curriculum indicates topics, goals and learning contents as well as the number of teaching units per topic or module. The significance and relevance of the orientation courses for the integration process has been explained in the following way: “Knowledge of fundamental values of society as well as knowledge of the legal system, history and culture as well as the political institutions in Germany make it easier to find one's way in the new society and create possibilities for identification“ (BAMP 2017, p. 7, translated by the author).

The proclaimed specific goals the are:

- to awaken understanding for the German state
- to develop positive evaluation of the German state
- to provide knowledge of the rights and duties as citizens and residents
- to develop ability to orientate oneself further (methodical competence)
- to empower participation in social life (agency competence)
- to acquire intercultural competence (ibid.).

The content of the orientation course comprises three modules:

- The module “Politics in Democracy” (35 hours) focuses the constitutional principles and fundamental rights in the of the Constitution as well as on the constitutional organs and political parties.
- The module “History and Responsibility” (20 hours) deals with the German past (dictatorship of National-Socialism and GDR) in order to “better understand the German and European present” and to enable “a special appreciation of the fundamental rights against the background of the national socialism and the Holocaust“ (BAMF 2017, p. 32)
- The module "People and Society" (38 hours) aims at religious and cultural tolerance, the acceptance of diverse opinions as well as gender equality.

The orientation course has to be completed with a standardized test. The pool for the “orientation test” embraces a catalog of 300 multiple-choice questions, 33 of which will be asked in the test. Technically, the test shows the ability to remember the right answers.

*Theoretical framework*

The new curriculum from 2017 proclaims the orientation courses explicitly as "value-based political education" (BAMF 2017, p. 9), which contributes to the "promotion of social participation" and enables "dealing with one's own life reality" (ibid., p. 9) The courses do so while referring to "the fundamental rights and democratic principles as a benchmark and framework for the independent judgement and individual positioning of the participants" (ibid., p. 9). If thus orientation courses have been considered as a part of political education, they have to be based on a plurality of approaches, must be life-world-oriented, controversial and offer a guiding basis for actions values-oriented. The orientation courses should consequently take into account the basic principles of German political education formulated in the so called Beutelsbach consens (1976) which are:

1. Prohibition Against Overwhelming the Participant: It is not permissible to entrap participants intellectually, by whatever means, for the sake of imparting desirable opinions and hindering them from "forming an independent judgment."
2. Treating Controversial Subjects as Controversial: Matters that are controversial in intellectual and political affairs must also be taught as controversial. If educators treat differing or alternative points of view as forgotten, suppressed, or ignored, they lay a path to indoctrination.
3. Giving Weight to the Personal Interests of Participants: Participants must be put in a position to analyze a political situation and to assess how their own personal interests are affected while also seeking ways to influence the political situation they have identified.

The Curriculum of the orientation courses mentions the Beutelsbach consens as a basis for the didactical arrangements (BAMF 2017, p. 14).

In the traditional (self-)conception of German political adult education its task is to strengthen democracy through supporting the autonomy (*Mündigkeit*) of each individual, ability to act and the ability to judge (*Urteilsfähigkeit*) of all members of society and through offering "reflection spaces". Klaus-Peter Hufer delineates clearly the political adult education from any attempt of persuasion or taking influence: "Political education is the opposite of agitation, indoctrination and manipulation. The last-mentioned forms of political influence are about heteronomy and about compelling an opinion that is believed to be right. Contrary to this, autonomy and self-determination are and will stay the indispensable principles of political education" (Hufer 2005). Characteristically for adult education is a special perception of the role of the learner: "The top priority is the recognition of learners as subjects of their own educational process, as actors of their own political education, even if they may (and that is the pedagogically

paradoxical) have not (yet) the reflected relationship to politics or political participation” (Becker/Krüger 2018, p. 922).

The role of teachers in adult education is also clearly defined: "They should have the ability to encourage and empower people for their educational processes" (Becker/Krüger 2018, p. 923). Heinemann (who was mentioned at the beginning) argues that despite of the fact that orientation courses are obviously a part of adult education, in this case the practice of adult education resigned of its core principles:

“While the movement of adult education has historically emerged as a force that irritated hegemonic relations, encouraging workers to recognize, assert, and form their own rights, the continuing education institutions of today are struggling with danger in the course of the expansion of the neoliberal ideologies to become to accomplices of employment agencies and companies, who only turn their participants into market-compatible workers or help separate the ‘good’ migrant from the ‘bad’ ones” (Heinemann 2018, p. 81).

In the next step I will explore the question to what extent the core principles of the political adult education are taken into the educational practice of the orientation courses. I focus on the principles of the promotion of an autonomous and critical judgement, understanding of the self and the world, the ability to participate in a community and the society, and finally also the facilitation of orientation (as the courses claim to offer by its title). Hentges, who compared the concepts of integration courses for migrants in different countries points out that in the phase of introducing orientation courses in Germany, the term “orientation” was not further problematized, but adopted from the European neighboring states, which already had experience with the so-called "orientation courses ". Hentges argues that "orientation" has become an "omnipresent term" without questioning the meaning of it term, it is assumed that anyone who hears the term will have an idea of what could be the object and goal of such courses. "(Hentges 2010, p. 27). But we should ask what lies behind the term "orientation"?

Friedenthal-Haase points out the metaphorical meaning of the word “orientation”, containing the notion of “orient” – sunup. She sees there a metaphor distinctive for the understanding of education in the epoch of Enlightenment – in the sense of Light, Reason, clarity, the capacity of an individual to think and to act for herself and to overcome the darkness. “Orientation means being aware of the real conditions and circumstances. Orientation also means a mental attitude or alignment in the sense of world view.” (Friedenthal-Haase 2002, p. 69) The author indicates, however, that orientation could also mean – especially used in the context of totalitarian regimes – steering, aiming at something. As it could be seen, the term is transportable to different dimensions: orientation can be seen in terms of empowering to autonomous decisions

concerning one's own worldviews and the self-perception of oneself being in the world, but it could at the same time mean an imposing of a certain direction, guiding someone to a pre-defined goal. The question that could be posed in the context of orientation courses of migrants is: Do these courses aim more at providing the orientation in terms as empowering for thinking and acting for oneself in the process of finding one own relation to the world or in terms of steering?

In any sense, orientation means a balancing act between requirements and expectations from the outer world and an individual's autonomously-derived personal and inner life, or as Friedenthal-Haase argues: "Orientation mediates between a breadth of the horizon and a clarification of personal decisions, appears as a condition of participation and codetermination, enables distance, selection of actions and synthesis capacity" (Friedenthal-Haase 2002, p. 76). Thus, orientation can be understood as a process of creating and transforming subjective and shared worldviews in an ever-changing world. To explore this sense of the concept we will refer to the Habermasian approach of lifeworld and system, developed in his theory of the communicative action.

The lifeworld can be in general conceived of as the horizon of meaning within which actors engage with each other in different (communicative) actions. For Habermas, the lifeworld is the basis of ordinary life: it is predominantly private, based on collective attitudes, but at the same time authentic and secured and developed through personal communication. The existence of the lifeworld is indispensable for our satisfaction as individuals. Lifeworld thus means a shared, culturally transmitted basic knowledge within a communication community. It contains a set of shared patterns of interpretation (Habermas 1987, p. 189). Lifeworld is a source of reliable expectations, social security and foreseeability; therefore, it builds a foundation to the feeling of having an orientation in the world.

Habermas refers the concept of the system – as the opposite to the lifeworld – while adapting some thoughts of Max Weber: systems are accordingly rationalized and build on such core principles as control, efficiency, predictability, and standardization. Habermas speaking about the domination of systems in modernity draws attention to the problem that he calls the "colonization of the lifeworld by system." The system while colonializing the lifeworld imposes at the same time anonymous, mechanical, media-driven processes of material reproduction. The authenticity of human experience and the significance of one's own resources for action are counteracted by the threats of the constant interventions of the system into the lifeworld. The results of such colonialization has its consequences: The most common are motivational crises and alienation effects that occur within the lifeworld. The loss of orientation is the next effect

of the colonizing. Then, if the certainty of one's lifeworld disappears, the individual experiences a loss in his/her sense of positioning in the world. The lifeworld is based on the constitution of the biography and identity of the subject and the constitution and transformation of society – through the process of interpersonal communication and understanding.

On the basis of this understanding-oriented action, the lifeworld for the individual is the framework in which social integration takes place. At the same time, the society determines certain abstract-functional structures of the system integration (through goal-oriented strategical communication): e.g. law, economics, politics.

The orientation course, as proclaimed in the curriculum (BAMP 2017) aims at fostering an understanding and positioning oneself in the society. According understanding implies reaching an agreement of the communication participants on the validity of a truth claim. Consent/agreement (as a result of preceding discourse) is regarded as the intersubjective recognition of the validity claim that the speaker makes (Habermas 1987, p. 184). The practice of narration supports in this case the process of understanding, for the communicative actors not only encounter each other in offering to each other beliefs, assumptions and attitudes; they give explanations for them through offering narrative insights in the events in their lifeworld. (ibid., p. 206). As a narrator, the person is encouraged to reflect on one's identity and the integrity of one's life context. The lifeworld can be thus seen twofold: as the horizon-forming context of a situation, but it forms also a foundation (in the narrator's perspective) for cognitive purposes (ibid.). It should also be said, the elements of the lifeworld can only partially be raised to consciousness and thus become an object of critical reflection. It happens only when the self-evident aspects of everyday life break up and everyday communication becomes problematic or when it comes to disturbances of social integration, for example in the course of immigration (ibid, p. 212-217). Communication is directed towards building mutual understanding, but the process of cultural transmission within the lifeworld is not purely adaptive; it is transformative by nature as different worldviews interact.

Through the application of this framework we intend to develop a helpful perspective on the question of integration and migration that enables the linking of personal and group structure on the one side and organizational and institutional structure on the other. The lifeworld concept gives suggestions for exploring how certain groups of people constitute their worlds anew after a significant crisis of migration and how (new) social systems affect their lifeworld. It can also help to understand how social and ideological systems affect the subjective-relational constitution of the feeling of orientation in the (new) environment.

To explore this question further we will look on the findings from the interviews with the refugees taking the integration respectively orientation course.

#### *Date collection*

It will be necessary to start with some methodological remarks to data collection: The method of qualitative research used was that of the semi-structured interview with participants of the orientation courses. Semi-structured interviews as used in our research project rest upon a basic schedule, in question form, of areas to be covered in the interview. The schedule guides the interview, but permits various input from the subject to come up naturally and in any order. This schedule ensures that basically the same information is obtained from all subjects: their expectations for the course, perceptions about what they learned and disappointments about what they hoped but did not learn, the perception of German democracy, the role of the teacher in their learning process, the consideration of their own experience during the learning process, their perception of their roles as learners, the teacher-learner relationship. The interviews took place in August 2018.<sup>2</sup> In total, eleven former participants were questioned about their experience in the orientation courses. The interviews were conducted in a well-established adult education institution of Mittelfranken, a region in Bavaria, Germany. During the interviews, if wished by participants, a translator was available so that the answers could be given in their native language and were afterwards translated into German. The interviewees were guaranteed that all their answers would remain anonymous. They were also reassured that the research doesn't aim at evaluation of the educational institution or even their own achievement during the course, but at learning from their personal perceptions and experience made during the course. The obtained empirical data provides information about the participants' expectations of and experience during the orientation courses, and about searching and finding points of personal orientation in the new society while learning the content proposed by a state authority. Furthermore, the data collected can be used to describe the effects of the orientation course in terms of gaining and interpreting knowledge about German history and politics and finding individual and shared strategies of social integration.

The analysis of the interviews was based on the following questions: What concept of democracy do the interview partners have and how did the orientation course contribute to the formation of this concept? How deeply did the participants feel a connection between the content of the orientation courses and their own lifeworlds? How and to what extent did the participants feel supported in their capacity to autonomous critical thinking and acting in the new democratic society?

The leading research questions refer to the nature of educational processes: Is civic education, as part of which the integration course is considered to be, designed in the sense of its genuine principles of autonomy, empowerment, participation and critical reflection, or is a societal narrative is transmitted through uncritical takeover of information?

An approach to these questions takes place on the micro-level, analyzing the pedagogical relationships between course instructors and participants as well as the learning contents and formats from the subjective perspective of the participants. Specifically, it asks how learning processes have been considered and described - as orientation in the sense of empowerment and self-discovery, or rather as orientation in the sense of steering and controlling from one side and subjection to rules from the other. The present article presents partial results of the collected data. Selected were those results pertaining to participants' images of democracy, the role of the teacher and the learner's own role, as well as the involvement of participants' experiences in their so-called "orientation" to Germany.

In the following, only a part of the overall project will be presented. Three exemplary areas of adult learning will be focused more precisely: (1) how the interviewees described the democratic values as learned in the course, (2) how interviewees felt their (life-)stories and individual perspectives were acknowledged and respected in the course, and (3) how interviewees were encouraged to develop their own capacity to think and act autonomously.

### *Findings and discussion*

#### *(1) Democratic values*

The claim of the orientation course is a fundamentally democratic one: civic/political education should be made accessible for all – for citizens, residents, migrants, etc. This is based on an underlying assumption that in principle everyone should be able to participate in the process of maintaining and shaping democratic society. The implementation of this *raison d'être* of the orientation courses is however less promising. Furthermore, the desired education for all has been done at the expense of voluntary participation as one of the core principles of political adult education. Orientation courses have in the most cases compulsory character because non-participation can be sanctioned through administrative decisions concerning one's own prospects of stay in Germany. The interviewees emphasize that participation in the orientation course is often considered to be a prerequisite for a permission to stay in the country. From the interviews, it became also clear that the primary motivation for a course was the language acquisition. According to their responses, interviewees felt insecure in their language competence and have great difficulties familiarizing themselves with the vocabulary of the legal



system, history and culture of the Federal Republic of Germany, to understand the political, historical and cultural contexts and to be able to operate with abstract categories in German language. Speaking about their notion of democracy, the interview partners often mention keywords “freedom of speech, equality, laws” without explaining them further. In part, however, the impression arises that the participants in the courses have memorized certain slogans or key words. The question to be put here is if the democratic principles as taught in the course were recognized by the participants as useful tools for their navigating through the new environment and a point of reference that could provide them a feeling of increased ability to deal with their new society. Hassam points out that the orientation course was for him “useless”:

“I have not learned anything in his course at all, but I have only luck [to pass the test, TK]. I didn’t learn about politics in my country, so I won’t learn about it in this country. What I care are the rules: What I can do and what I can’t.” (Hassam, # 00: 01: 50 #)

There is a vague understanding of democracy, especially since participants often have no experience of living in a democratic society and in a democratic culture; they call the timing of the orientation course too early. Samira for instance argues it would be important to have an experience of living in a democratic society in order to be able to form an opinion and a personal reference based on this experience, as well as to participate in the discussions. Samira describes her attitude towards democracy as that of “accepting”. The reason she gives is: “I accept it because it a right form of life. It’s clear for everyone, yes, here, it’s a democratic country. And all should accept it and do exactly what should [be done] (Samira, # 00: 06: 29 #). As she was asked about the controversies and debated during the course, she indicates there were no discussions, because everyone “accepted the democracy how it is here, nobody puts it into question” (Samira, # 00: 09: 46 #). She adds however: “But it should be also said that you cannot know if someone has a critical opinion. Because one doesn’t speak about it, one can be still coined“ (Samira, # 00: 10: 00 #). The sentence suggests the inner censorship that some participants still have as reminiscence of living under the fear of being persecuted for the expression of their opinions. This problem should be addressed during the orientation courses through fostering the ability to conduct a dialogue, to gain skills not only how to express an opinion and to develop a personal narration, but also how to argue and evaluate the arguments of others. The incapacity of conducting a dialogue, a deliberation seems to be a product of life in a totalitarian society (Kloubert 2015).

The interviews reveal some important dimensions of democracy. Several interviewees refer repeatedly to need to follow the “rules”. Samira describes her interest at the orientation courses

as a desire to know the rules of the society she lives in now. Samira accentuates her unwillingness to deal with the process of law-making, it would be useful to know “who makes and rules and how”; significant for her is “that the rules work”. She describes her astonishment by the fact that the laws in Germany are accepted and followed by everyone. Her experience in Syria was different:

"In our country, we (laughs) write [laws, TK], but we don't care [about them]. For me it was important to know that everyone respect the law, the law is not just a piece of paper, but that everyone is equal before the law and that the people in a democracy really accept this" (Samira). The “acceptance of the rules” of the society are in the interviews often equated with integration. Adam argues: “I feel like I can be a part of the society, I came here, I see how the rules and the laws are, and I have to follow them” (Adam, # 00: 08: 51 #). The orientation course, speaking with Adam, should “teach” the migrants what is "German" and what norms of living together are applicable in Germany.

From the interviews we can conclude that the participants perceive that the acceptance of the rules is equated with integration, whereas the questioning of the rules leads to exclusion from society by the interviewees.

## *(2) Lifeworld and personal narratives*

Taking into account the experience and the lifeworld of the participants implies didactical arrangements that allow sufficient space and time to express and discuss different, even controversial perspectives and which support a multi-perspective, pluralistic, individual formation of opinion. A frontal transfer of knowledge and reciting of the constitutional principles would promote a superficial learning of content, rather than helping students deeply relate to and understand the desired topics. The question if there was enough space to talk about and to discuss personal experience was in several cases denied by the interviewees:

“Yes, we should say something [about personal experience], but not too long, because [there was only] little time, one mustn't speak too much (laughs), but we were allowed to, yes, to discuss a bit.” (Samira, # 00: 00: 53 #)

In the interviews it becomes clear that the reference to and reflecting on one's own life experiences were addressed only marginally at best. This marginality is not only the result of the pedagogical design of the course or of a personal choice of the teachers. The interviewees stated at several points that the teachers certainly asked questions about their previous experience. However, the participants regard their experience as insufficient or inadequate to have (appropriate) opinions about life in a democracy. The reference to one's own culture is

more anecdotal or is being told as a "cultural peculiarity": The presentation of different "ethnic traditions" was finished by the teacher with a description of the "German model":

"Yes, Yes, in the course was allowed to say their [one's own, TK] opinion, what has with us in the past, what happens to us in the home country. Sometimes our teachers maybe corrected that: you've done that in your home and it's OK, but here in Germany we have to do so and do that; that's the right thing. (Samira, # 00: 01: 58 #).

The orientation course seems to provide participants with a declarative knowledge, comparable to that of the school curriculum: the most important historical events will be memorized as well as state institution and structures. To the question: What did you learn, Abbas answers:

"The name of party, when it was started, when did the war start, when did the war end, when Berlin Wall [was erected, TK], and which federal cities were for example with Americans, with France and so (Abbas, # 00: 05: 46 #).

Samira doesn't want to know much about the history. The goal of the orientation courses to provide justification and explanation for the "rules" or principles of living together in the German society seems not plausible to her:

"About the past it was too much. I think no one cares about the history. Better would be the questions about the present, how to live now in Germany. Shouldn't we understand better, what's going on in Germany now?" (Samira, 1:241).

Abbas says however, he was interested in all the contents of the orientation course, but at the same time he claims to be an exception. He searched for information about the democracy in Germany already in his home country, and was also politically active as a Kurd in Iraq. Abbas emphasizes that the orientation course doesn't provide the participants an orientation in everyday life: "It helps to understand big things, but only for those who inform themselves [additionally, TK]. More time is needed for everyday orientation" (Abbas, # 00: 37: 24 #).

Reference to the participants' lifeworlds demands a special sensibility on the part of the teachers, but also on the part of the authors of the curriculum as well. The curriculum of the orientation course prescribes a discussion about the German past, especially about the period of dictatorship of national socialism. In some interviews the participants speak about difficulties dealing with German history. These difficulties emerge not (only) from the lacking of points of connection, but from the personal experience of living in a dictatorial state and personal trauma that arose from this experience. Speaking about persecution and murdering seems to some participants to be a re-traumatization. Samira states, she searches for re-orientation in a new democratic state, a possibility to find a new way of living together "a life in peace and democracy". The intensive dealing with German totalitarian past doesn't seem useful for her:

“A lot of foreigners like me come from Afghanistan, Iran, Syria and we have still a war there. We do not like [speaking, TK] about dictatorship, reading again and again, we [feel] reminded [of the cruelties]. That makes us sick, (laughs) I would say”.

Abbas shared similar observations: „You know, my family still live under dictatorship. I cannot speak about it in the classroom [...] The military dictatorship isn't a past for us. It is different for us as for normal people” (Abbas, # 00: 21: 05 #)

Migration is associated in many cases with the feeling of losing control over one's own life and the loss of one's own lifeworld. The need for orientation is understandably immense in this situation. Also understandable is the need to find a guideline and to have a list of rules in hand. This can be described as a basal orientation, but if no other is developed beyond that, the orientation course clearly falls short. In a further stage, orientation means finding one's own way of shaping rules, developing communicative strategies for deliberation and for argumentative defense of one's own lifeworld. Orientation means thus developing a participatory perspective (perspective of an actor), - in contrast to the role of a spectator. The task of the teacher in an orientation course should therefore be to gradually make himself superfluous as an intermediary and to make the learners participants and co-creators of the new lifeworlds. Teaching in the sense of instruction might be in very limited cases helpful for the basic need for security immediately after the immigration, but it ultimately has nothing to do with orientation.

The interviewees were explicitly asked if they experienced any kind of directing of the participants or channeling of the discussions through a teacher during the course. This question was denied in every interview. At the same time, from the interviews we can conclude that in some cases values and norms as required in the curriculum have been taught in a more frontal rather than discursive way. Thus, the elements of deliberation that are important for understanding and acting seem to be marginal. Dialogue about the underlying societal values seems, however, to be in bigger parts replaced by reciting and learning the exam questions by heart. The core point of political education is that not (only) the content matters, but also the way of dealing with it. Political adult education with its aims at fostering democracy create learning environment through to learn skills how to communicate and to deliberate, but also while practicing it to develop habits of deliberation. It is pointless the teach in frontal way, the participants need to emulate how to live a deliberative democracy and participate through discourse and action.

### *(3) Autonomy and agency*

The orientation course offers a broad knowledge about the principles and laws of German society. At the same time, “learning about rules” is conducted in a manner of tacitly accepting of them. In the orientation course, the process of discursive, deliberate establishing and changing of the “rules” seems not to be focused on. Adam points out that he does not feel competent or authorized to criticize the rules in Germany: “We had to keep the rules in Germany, we could not interfere or say they are not good or so” (Adam, # 00: 09: 00 #). Abbas argues in a similar way:

“It is difficult to [disagree] when the refugees come from Syria, Iraq or Iran. Because in Syria / Iraq is war and Iran is a dictatorship regime which is worse than a war (laughs) and thus I cannot say like ‘yes, in my home it is at any point better than in Germany’”. (Abbas, # 00: 24: 38 #)

Adam describes a situation where the teacher of the orientation course did not allow the discussion about laws and regulations, justifying it by the fact that “she is not a specialist in the laws or political parties” (Adam, # 00: 12: 44 #). Adam continues: “She just gave us sheets with the multiple-choice-questions [which will be a part of the final test, TK] and read them loudly in front of the class”. The passage points to the question of the qualification of the teachers of the orientation courses: besides the competencies of teaching German as a foreign language and andragogical competencies they have to be able to discuss (from different perspectives) the questions of constitution, political institutions, history, human and national rights, election systems, etc. These would require a constant and intensive professional further education for the teachers themselves (which is not foreseen by the BAMF).

As already mentioned above, political adult education aims at “critical reflection, at a positioning that first of all take a distance to and critical assessment of the traditional patterns, and at the controversial discourse.” (Becker/Krüger 2018, p. 924). Orientation in the orientation courses, as was shown, is, however, strictly linked to learning and complying with norms, rules and laws. Participation in society is associated memorizing an appropriate behavior in the new society. The awareness that laws are the product of a long deliberation of a society and can be changed in a discursive process is nowhere to be seen. The predominant attitude is as follows: We are not good enough to talk about democracy or to criticize democracy because we could not build democracy in our countries of origin. That's why we came here and are willing and ready to adopt your democracy.

In an interview, it is pointed out that the orientation courses initially had a disorienting effect. One participant indicates that awareness of the complexity of life in Germany has come through the orientation course. Fatima describes her experience:

“I thought the life here in Germany [would, TK] be easier. Then, when I took this orientation course, I knew, it was not easy at all. You have to do a lot of things, a lot ... to achieve your goals [...]. I also see people do not get the money here so easily, they have to work a lot. They don't see their families or children so much if they want to live better. (*laughs*)” (Fatima, # 00: 13: 01 #).

Recognizing the complexity of the world can be stated as a learning result of a positive nature. The question remains, and future research should inquire into, how participants deal with this complexity. Is the complexity overwhelming and cause feelings of helplessness or powerlessness? Or, does it wake curiosity and prompt them to search for ways and tools of dealing with it?

From the several interviews it can be concluded that democratic values such as freedom of expression and equality as well as participation are often strikingly repeated but not understood as an instrument for one's own actions and own life-style. The goal of empowerment laid down in the curriculum cannot be found in any interview. The transmitted knowledge is therefore not action-enabling orientation knowledge, but merely factual information. The focus has been thus laid on the acquisition of facts while ignoring a critical examination of social conditions; additional emphasis is put on the memorizing the multiple-choice questions for the final test. Some participants mentioned their hesitation to engage critically in the controversial dialogues within the classroom. Besides the subjectively perceived incompetence as described above there is an inner censorship as result of living under the dictatorship that apparently plays a role. Even if free opinion and political and civic engagement are generally unregulated and even encouraged in Germany, it might be a habitual attitude of several participants not to interfere into political discussions and not to talk about politics: “Because we are in Syria always far from politics, ... because I cannot speak badly about politics without punishment, so maybe in Germany we don't. Maybe one year later or two years yes, that's difficult (Abbas, # 00: 24: 12 #) Nahla explains her reluctance towards political action and discussion: “At home we shouldn't even think [for ourselves, TK]. The government does it.” (Nahla, # 00: 09: 12 #)

*Summary: Orientation courses as contribution to what kind of orientation?*

To return to the conception of the lifeworld and system it should be noticed that integration into a society cannot take place solely on the premises of understanding-oriented action, that is to say in the level of the lifeworld. The members of a socio-cultural lifeworld undertake also the goal-oriented strategical action, thus using the logic of the system. The functional connections and logics of the system obviously play a role in the process of orientation a new society. The

lifeworld is dependent on formal systems (money, power, etc.); a decoupling, a denial of formal systems, is not possible. Thus, orientation courses need to address both: the logic and the structure of the system, but it also needs to acknowledge the experiences and the interpretation patterns from the lifeworld of the participants. From the interviews can be concluded that the emphasis of the orientation courses has been laid so far on the system and the regulation logic of the system. The lifeworlds of the participants need to be addressed in a more explicit way through promoting the ability to tell personal stories, through creating safe learning spaces and the culture of recognition of personal experience, opinions and beliefs – in order to fulfil what the orientation courses promise in their very title. It can be concluded that the courses currently place an emphasis on offering orientation for the role of the spectator of the system, but not for the role of the actor in the new disclosed lifeworld. The foreign lifeworlds (e.g. that of the “German citizens”), perceived from the perspective of the spectator, i. e. from the outside perspective, will always seem to be a system – a system of required actions and reactions, a system of rules to be learned and memorized. It is important in the sense of fostering integration and providing political education to strengthen the structures of the lifeworld in which the communications take place, and to promote the rational practice against the constraints of the systems. If orientation courses only address the systems, the effect will be that participants will feel alienation and lack of identification and motivation. The participants stay as spectators of the system. The indispensable means of truly participating in the system was and is dialogue, a communicative action that enables the students to discover how the ambiguities present in the system (democracy) can be approached, understood and handled. This would lead to a balanced system/lifeworld integration, where the system leaves room for the individual lifeworlds and the lifeworlds help the system to evolve and to improve. The system involved in the construction of meaning can be then understood as a legitimate guide rather than as a coercive element.

Heinemann, quoted at the beginning of this paper, is to be agreed in the sense that within the framework of the orientation courses the rules of the local society are taught so that the participants are expected just to accept them. The questioning and critical reflection on the alleged "normalities" and of "German tradition" does not take place. Thus, the process of forming one's own opinion and promoting one's ability to act can hardly take place. The way the courses are currently conducted, they only serve to support and reproduce the current system; they do not promote the development of independent and politically-active thinkers. The education course can be understood in the words of Freire as domesticating education, meaning adapting to the system. Subjection to norms and laws is interpreted as democracy.

Education aiming at autonomy and agency is not described by the participants. Democracy is learned in rigid categories as a finished product. Democracy as a project or as a “construction site” should be communicated so that the participants see the opportunity to introduce themselves and understand the potential for improvement as an invitation to participate. The questioning of rules is, however, communicated as inadmissible in the interviews.

Heinemann asks the question "Where are rooms in which the human and not the test quota remains at the center of pedagogical considerations?" (Heinemann 2018, p. 89) An appeal to the discipline of adult education that Heinemann expresses in her study is: "Re-occupy Education" (Heinemann 2018, p. 90). That means the need for adult education in general and for political adult education in particular to return to its basic principle: fostering the individual's autonomy and critical thinking, capacity to act, ability to perceive and to evaluate the plurality of perspectives, as well as see the correspondence between the personal interest and political participation in different forms.

The question that can still arise in this context is whether adult education can be value-promoting without prompting learners to give up their own principles. One option would be to denounce such value-oriented courses as a hegemonic, postcolonial practice and “undemocratic institution”, as Heinemann demands (Heinemann 2017, p. 192). Another option would be to see integration as a twofold process in terms of the tension between the system and the lifeworld. At the same time the task of adult education remains to search for ways to realize the goals set out in the curriculum at the micro level in such a manner that a dialogue, capacity for judgment, autonomy, plurality and controversy can actually be experienced in the courses themselves. A pure knowledge-based mediation (and multiple-choice testing of content) obviously cannot provide it. Adult education that remains true to its own core principle has to distance itself from the attempts of coercion, indoctrination, imposition or even shaping, conversion and persuasion: “If orientation and reorientation are discussed in the horizon of an adult education worthy of its name, then only in the sense of free self-activity and self-determination of the adult learner and of possible support for him by adult education” (Friedenthal-Haase 2002, p. 79f.)

The orientation in the orientation courses takes place against the backdrop of enormous pressure of passing the final exam. A possible didactic recommendation, which can be derived from this study, would be an abolition of the existing form of examination. A documentation of the learning process in form of portfolio, in which the principles of democracy are reflected against the background of the personal experience and narration, thoughts and expectations as well as questions and irritations would be closer to the proclaimed goals of the orientation course. From



the didactical point of view, it might make sense to create collection of cases coming from the experiences of the participants that can be treated discursively. A realistic goal setting in the curriculum itself would also be needed.

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