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INTERSECTIONAL CONTESTATIONS – THE MEANINGS OF INTEGRATION OF ‘MIGRANT’ PUPILS IN AUSTRIAN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how school staff in two Austrian cities negotiates the intersecting structures of inequality in which ‘migrant’ pupils are positioned in the context of Austrian education and integration policies. For our analysis, we choose an intersectional approach and conducted in-depth interviews and seven focus groups with school staff. Our results indicate a connection between inclusive forms of intersectionality and a holistic integration approach on the one hand, and a connection between exclusive intersectionality and assimilatory integration approaches on the other. Overall, our results show ambivalences in the framing of intersectionality and integration indicating open-ended negotiations of integration at Austrian schools.

Keywords: integration, migrant pupils, teachers, Austria, intersectionality

CONTESTAZIONI INTERSEZIONALI – I SIGNIFICATI DELL’INTEGRAZIONE DEGLI ALUNNI, MIGRANTI, NELLE SCUOLE AUSTRIACHE

SINTESI

Nell’articolo viene esaminato il modo in cui il personale scolastico di due città austriache supera le strutture intersecanti di disuguaglianza nelle quali gli alunni migranti sono posti nel contesto delle politiche austriache di istruzione e integrazione. Ai fini della nostra analisi abbiamo adottato un approccio intersezionale e condotto interviste approfondite e sette focus group con il personale scolastico. I nostri risultati hanno rilevato un collegamento tra forme inclusive di intersezionalità e un approccio olistico all’integrazione, da un lato, e un collegamento tra intersezionalità esclusiva e approcci all’integrazione di tipo assimilatorio, dall’altro. Nel complesso, i nostri risultati mostrano ambivalenze nell’attuazione dell’intersezionalità e integrazione che indicano gestione aperta dell’integrazione nelle scuole austriache.

Parole chiave: integrazione, alunni migranti, insegnanti, Austria, intersezionalità

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, debates on migration and integration have attracted remarkable public and political attention in Austria—particularly since the ‘*long summer of migration*’ in 2015 (Hess & Kasperek, 2017). Migration is increasingly framed as a ‘*security problem*’ (Bigo, 2002, 63) as well as a threat to ‘*law and order*’ (Bigo, 2002, 63), the economy, culture, and social cohesion. At the same time, integration is articulated as a disciplinary approach to cultural assimilation into the Austrian society.¹

In 2017, the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), formed a coalition government with the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) that lasted until its dissolution in 2019. The FPÖ was not only successful in transforming public debates on migrants, but also on migration, integration, and education policies. The integration of ‘migrant’ pupils² has long been the focal points of these debates. For example, “*Deutschförderklassen*” was a publicly contested policy that established separate, remedial German-language classes for or children whose mother tongue is not German. One argument is that all students experience a decline in learning outcomes at *Brennpunktschulen* (hotspot schools), which are characterized by predominantly ‘migrant’ pupils from socio-economically and socially disadvantaged families (Der Standard, 14. 12. 2018). This position attributes gaps in school and learning success between different schools to ‘migrant’ children’s allegedly insufficient German language skills, and blames migrant families for their ‘failed integration’ and living in a ‘parallel society’ (see Ronneberger & Tsianos, 2009; Yıldız, 2009). On one hand, these debates focus on the costs of failed integration (e.g., unemployment, criminality, Islamist radicalization) and benefits of successful integration (e.g., economic contributions of highly skilled migrants) on the other hand (Wodak, 2015, 31).

Schools are often seen as the litmus test for ‘successful’ or ‘failed’ integration, which explains the frequent reference to so-called ‘interethnic’ tensions in schools in public discourse. Only recently has Austrian teacher and Ombudsman for Values and Cultural Conflicts, Susanne Wiesinger, published a book about failed integration. She refers to threats such as ‘ghettoization’, ‘parallel societies’ societies and ‘*culture war in classrooms*’ (Wiesinger & Thies, 2018). In particular, she presents ‘Islamization’ and ‘radical Islam’ as the primary barriers to integration at schools for ‘migrant’ pupils (Wiesinger & Thies, 2018). Thus, education and the inclusion of ‘migrant’ pupils

at Austrian schools have become a highly contested battlefield of integration policies (similarly, Castles et al., 2002), while public discourse appears hostile towards migrants.

This article intervenes in these on going public debates, giving a voice to teachers and school directors and how they negotiate the meaning of integration in two Austrian cities, Vienna and Eisenstadt. In order to avoid simplified notions of ‘migrant’ pupils’ willingness or unwillingness to integrate, we demonstrate the complexity of educating and integrating such students ‘on the ground’. In contrast to assimilatory demands from some policy-makers our article assumes that integration entails a double-sided process between ‘migrant’ pupils, pupils from majority society, school representatives, and parents. However, creating accommodating conditions for such an integration process requires acknowledging the complex situations experienced by ‘migrant’ pupils. This complexity is largely grounded in intersecting positionings of ‘migrant’ pupils, including their social or class background, religion, gender, and neighborhood or district; in other words, more than just their social ‘migrants’. Disregarding and depoliticizing ‘migrant’ pupils’ experiences of intersectional discrimination or instrumentalizing their different intersecting positions might lead to an “exclusive” form of intersectionality, thereby creating a form of assimilatory pressure that reinforces the discrimination and responsabilization of ‘migrant’ pupils and their parents.

An intersectional analytical approach might therefore shed light on the complex positionings of ‘migrant’ pupils’ integration process. Therefore, our article analyzes how teachers and school directors perceive the positionings of ‘migrant’ pupils at the intersection of diverse structures of domination and discrimination, such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, parents’ socio-economic position, gender, and school location. Our article aims to show how school representatives negotiate these intersecting structures of inequality in which ‘migrant’ pupils are positioned and which integration strategies school representatives follow in daily school life.

First, we briefly introduce Austrian integration and education policies, which we follow by an account of contemporary research on migration and education at Austrian schools. Next, we describe our theoretical approach to inclusive and exclusive forms of intersectionality and the methods used for the empirical study. Finally, we discuss our findings and reach conclusions about how intersectionality affects perceptions of integration at Austrian schools.

1 This article was published with the financial support of the European Union Horizon 2020 research and innovation program, grant agreement No. 822664. We thank the two reviewers for their helpful comments.

2 Using ‘migrant’ pupils with quotation marks refers to the fact that children with a migrant family background who were born in Austria are statistically counted as ‘migrant’ children in official documents and debates.

INTEGRATION AND EDUCATION POLICIES IN AUSTRIA

In the following sections, we introduce Austria's integration and education policies as well as measures that have been implemented at Austrian schools over the past decade to provide context to our study about how school staff perceive integration.

National and Legal Provisions: Policies on Integration and Migration

Austria is a country with a long tradition of immigration (Biffl & Skrivaneck, 2011, 4). Currently, every fourth person under the age of 29 has a migration background (Gruber, 2018, 9). Nevertheless, the country did not define itself as an ‘immigration country’ until recently and thus did not take measures towards the inclusion of migrants. Rather, prior to the twenty-first century, migrants were perceived as ‘guest workers’, who only stay in the country for a limited time.

In recent years, Austria has seen a major shift in migration and integration policies, resulting in a dynamic institutional landscape. In 2010, this policy area was institutionalized at the federal level through the Federal Ministry of the Interior's enactment of the “National Action Plan for Integration” (*Nationaler Aktionsplan für Integration*). The “National Action Plan” focuses on labor market integration, German language proficiency, and ‘Austrian values’ (European Commission, 2019). Additionally, the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs established a similar program in 2017 called the “Integration Act” (*Integrationsgesetz*, IA). This law asserts that asylum and subsidiary protection holders must participate in national integration measures (§ 6 IA), such as German language courses (§ 4 IA) and obligatory ‘value and orientation courses’ (§ 5 IA) that inform them about fundamental social ‘norms and values’ in Austria, such as women and men's equal rights. According to the “Integration Agreement” (*Integrationsvereinbarung*), migrants (aged 15 and older) pledge to participate in such courses. Violating these obligations leads to sanctions, such as a reduction in state benefits like demand-oriented minimum income assistance (§ 6 (2), (3) IA) (Bundesministerium für Europa, Integration und Äußeres, 2018). Thus, Austria's integration policy largely follows an assimilatory approach (Kunz, 2011) that solely focuses on cultural integration. However, it marginalizes—if not ignores—socio-economic integration, and sees integration as migrants' personal responsibility.

Education Policy and the Integration of ‘Migrant’ Pupils

Public education is a key institution that shapes mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and is therefore critical to integrating ‘migrant’ children. Austria's migration history has engendered a high degree of heterogeneity within the classroom, especially in urban centers like Vienna (Binder, 2002, 424). The number of students with a mother tongue other than German is steadily increasing: Between 2006 and 2015, this figure rose from 16 percent to 25 percent (Gruber, 2018, 16). During the 2016–2017 school year, 276,150 (25.4 percent) of the 1,130,523 pupils at all school levels spoke a mother tongue other than German, with Vienna holding the highest share (51.2 percent) in Austria (STAT, 2018, 5). Additionally, 163,843 (14.5 percent) of Austria's pupils at all school levels were ‘foreigners’³. Again, Vienna showed the greatest diversity with its 61,893 (26.3 percent) ‘foreign’ pupils (STAT, 2018, 4). In 2018, 34,437 German-born young people lived in Austria (STAT, 2018, 2), comprising the largest ‘migrant’ group in Austria (STAT, 2018, 2). Furthermore, official statistics show that Austria was home to 23,809 young people born in Afghanistan, 23,074 born in Syria, and 13,770 born in Turkey (STAT, 2018, 2).

Therefore, the “50 Action Points” (*50 Punkte-Plan*), developed in 2015 by the Austrian Expert Council for Integration at the Ministry for Europe, Integration, and International Affairs, emphasized the relevance education plays in integration. Nevertheless, ‘migrant’ children in Austria demonstrate relatively poor school performance on international tests such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS (Göbel & Buchwald, 2017, 156).

Austria's Differentiated School System

The Austrian Society for Research and Development in Education (ÖFEB) asserts that Austria's differentiated school system promotes social inequality (Der Standard, 22. 12. 2017). After four years of primary school (*Volksschule*), i.e., at the age of ten, pupils are assigned to different types of schools according to their average marks. Children with good grades can attend general secondary school (*AHS*), which lasts for eight years and culminates with the *Matura*—the standard prerequisite for university entrance. Children with lower grades must attend new middle school (*NMS*), which lasts for four years and is intended to provide vocational training opportunities. Alternately, polytechnical schools are a type of school that fills the gap between the end of lower secondary education in the 8th grade, and the end of compulsory education at the age of 15. However, admission to a particular school depends not only

3 STATISTIK AUSTRIA defines ‘foreigners’ those who have foreign citizenship.

on children’s grades, but also their place of residence (*Wohnortnähe*) and whether or not any siblings previously attended the same school.

At the Austrian primary school level, 30.8 percent of all children have a mother tongue other than German. At *NMS*, this increases to 31.8, while it is only 20.1 percent for *AHS*. Children who speak German as first language are more likely to attend *AHS* after *Volksschule* than those with a mother tongue other than German (39.6 percent compared to 25.9 percent) (ibid., 26). Notably, Austria’s education system becomes differentiated at relatively early stage: By the time children are ten years old, their university prospects are quite predictable (Bude, 2011).

The Lack of a Holistic Approach to Integration

Government documents show that Austria’s education policy lacks a holistic approach to integration. The “50 Action Points” only identify German language skills as its main pillar of integration success, thus ignoring health, well-being, or social relationships (European Commission, 2019). Since German language progress is monitored through standardized tests, this approach illustrates a ‘privatization’ of integration (integration as migrants’ individual responsibility) as well as discipline and control (integration as proof of self-discipline and willingness to adapt to the majority society country). Additionally, education policies promote exclusion mechanisms, as illustrated by *Deutschförderklassen* policy to instruct ‘migrant’ children separately from regular classes (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, 2019). Since the Austrian federal government is pursuing a restrictive asylum policy in view of the increasing number of asylum applications in recent years, it can be assumed that, there will be considerably fewer pupils in *Deutschförderklassen* during the 2019–2020 school year than in the previous year. Furthermore, the country’s integration budget for schools was cut in half in 2019, which contributed to a significant decrease in the number of German-language teachers (Der Standard, 12. 03. 2018). In response to a parliamentary question, Minister of Education Iris Rauskala stated that the number of *Deutschförderklassen* pupils will drop from about 9,800 in the 2018/19 school year to 6,300. Most children as well as the greatest decline in *Deutschförderklassen* are expected in Vienna in 2019/20 (2900/ minus 2100 compared to the second semester 2018/19) (ORF, 6. 9. 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW: EDUCATION AND MIGRATION IN AUSTRIA

Research on migration and education in Austria focuses on the exclusiveness of the country’s education system and on ‘migrant’ pupils’ underrepresentation

at *AHS* and universities. *Socio-economic models* perceive educational disadvantage as a consequence of parents’ weak socio-economic preconditions (Gruber, 2018, 7), while *linguistic explanatory approaches* focus on language requirements for educational success. Language becomes particularly relevant when children possessing low first-language skills learn German as a second language (ibid.). *Psychological explanation models* highlight stereotypical judgement patterns and expectations from teachers and school principals towards pupils with ‘migrant’ biographies. Research shows that repeated experiences of negative stereotypes can lead to a short-term drop in ‘migrant’ pupils’ exam performance as well as insecurity, lack of confidence, or self-protection (ibid., 8; Göbel & Buchwald, 2017). *Educational approaches* assume that educational systems can be inclusive and exclusive in different ways, with the extent of school differentiation being one of the strongest contributing factors to educational inequality (Fareidooni, 2010, 57).

Compared internationally, Austria ranks towards the bottom when it comes to compensating for unequal starting conditions in the education system, and shows an above average level of educational inheritance (OECD, 2019). Studies investigating educational inheritance in Austria show great differences in skill acquisition between children with and without a ‘migration’ background. However, pupils’ socio-economic background must also be acknowledged as a source of unequal opportunities (ibid.). Existing research identifies a lack of adequate educational policy measures to promote the integration of ‘migrant’ pupils (Gruber, 2018, 6), with experts arguing that Austria’s especially early school differentiation is “disintegrative” (SOS-Mitmensch, 2020) and therefore not promoting ‘migrant’ children’s integration.

While we agree with these findings, we nevertheless identify that the existing literature emphasizes language, but lacks of a holistic approach to integration that incorporates an intersectional understanding of education and inclusion. Therefore, this article establishes the basis for such an approach by analyzing the practices and perceptions shared by representatives at Austrian schools.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE INTERSECTIONALITY

In the late 1970s, Western feminism was criticized as being by, about, and for white middle-class women, thereby excluding women of color or socio-economically disadvantaged women. These critiques emphasized that women experience different forms of discrimination and oppression along their gender, socio-economic status (class) and ‘race’, which

impact their personal identity formation (Zack, 2007, 193). The concept of intersectionality gained recognition in the 1980s, when Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced it to show how Black women are excluded not only from mainstream society, but also from the women’s movement.

According to Edward Said (1983), intersectionality has become a “travel theory” that has crossed almost all academic disciplines at a global scale: It traveled to “childhood studies” as a way of “*rethinking childhood in complex and heterogeneous ways*” (Konstantoni & Emejulu, 2016), while the triple oppression model of gender, ‘race’ and class creates a flexible framework for developing intersectionality as an analytical strategy (McCall, 2005), based on its “multivocality” (Hancock, 2007).

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) defined intersectionality as the intersection of axes of inequality, whereas Iris Marion Young (2005, 64) described it as different “*axes of structural social privilege and disadvantage*”. Gradually, the intersectionality model added additional axes of discrimination and oppression, such as nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and age—as well as migration status (Lenz, 2010). The various axes of inequality and discrimination must not be seen as the sum of their parts (Harris & Platten, 2019, 361). Instead, intersectionality moved beyond a “*mono-categorical perspective*” (Hill Collins, 1998), whereby research must acknowledge a “*mutually constitutive relationship among various categories of difference*” (Hancock, 2007, 252).

In order to understand how categories intersect, Leslie McCall identifies three different approaches: While the intra-categorical approach focuses on only one category, e.g. the intersection of gender and class or of ‘race’ and gender, the inter-categorical approach recognizes the interplay of a multiplicity of categories in order to document social inequalities. Meanwhile, the anti-categorical approach deconstructs categories such as gender, class, and ‘race’, and aims for a complex understanding of co-constitutive structures of inequality (McCall, 2005, 1773).

In the 1990s, Crenshaw emphasized the importance of focusing on the intersection of social identities, while simultaneously connecting these everyday, identity-specific experiences with intersecting political, structural and representative oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). Materialist approaches conceptualize intersectionality as structures of domination, pointing to the co-evolution of capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and homophobia (Sauer, 2018) “*within the context of sociohistorical and structural inequality*” (Bowleg, 2008, 321). In a similar vein, Harris and Platten (2019, 361) call for an analysis of all facets of power, privilege, and oppression.

Empirical studies distinguish between two forms of political intersectionality: First, “inclusive in-

tersectionality”, which is sensitive to and aware of intersectional power structures, and aims to overcome structures of domination and inequality that have led to racism, classism, patriarchy and sexism (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). Second, “exclusive intersectionality” (Siim & Mokre, 2013) risks reproducing domination and discrimination, thus excluding specific groups from society. Intersectionality is exclusive when it neglects the intersection of certain social categories. However, it can also be exclusive if the intersection of social categories is not contextualized, i.e., embedded in power structures. In its exclusive form, intersectionality is used to make power structures invisible. In this context, Sirma Bilge (2013, 407) described the un/doing of intersectionality, i.e. diluting, disciplining, and disarticulating intersecting inequalities. Another form of exclusive intersectionality arises when different structures of inequality might play off against each other. A prominent example is right-wing actors who instrumentalize the intersection of gender and religion by blaming the supposedly patriarchal attitudes of Muslim men, who are ostensibly unfit for Western societies and should therefore be excluded (Sauer, 2018, 87).

Perceptions of intersecting structures of domination and inequality influence attitudes towards ‘migrant’ pupils’ integration: While inclusive intersectionality is a precondition for perceiving integration as a two-sided process of recognition and respect for differences between the majority society and migrants, exclusive intersectionality tends to support an assimilatory approach as it disarticulates, depoliticizes or instrumentalizes intersecting structures of inequality by focusing on alleged cultural differences alone. This article analyzes how teachers and school directors perceive and frame the situation of ‘migrant’ pupils at Austrian schools—and whether from inclusive or exclusive intersectional positionings.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

To answer our research question, we conducted fieldwork in 15 Austrian schools in Vienna and Eisenstadt between October and December 2019. One key selection criterion for our school sample was the neighborhoods in which the schools are located. Our research took place at schools in socio-economically advantaged areas as well as in schools that are characterized as *Brennpunktschulen* (hot-spot schools), i.e., schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas with mostly ‘migrant’ children. We included a balanced number of *AHS* and *NMS* in our sample.

During our fieldwork, we first conducted 15 qualitative interviews with school principals about integration at schools. Second, we selected six schools

Table 1: Conducted interviews with principals and teachers in Austria.

Abbreviation/Pseudonym	Role of the Interviewed Person	Place/Date of the Interview
I1/Flora	principal (AHS)	Vienna, Sep. 9 2019
I5/Linda	principal (AHS)	Vienna, Sep. 18 2019
I6/Richard	principal (NMS)	Vienna, Sep. 25 2019
I7/Anton	principal (AHS)	Vienna, Oct. 7 2019
I8/Hugo	principal (AHS)	Vienna, Oct. 9 2019
I9/Doris	principal (NMS)	Eisenstadt, Oct. 17 2019
I10/Charlotte	principal (NMS)	Vienna, Oct. 23 2019
I11/Sabine	principal (NMS)	Vienna, Oct. 24 2019
I12/Hannes	principal (AHS)	Vienna, Oct. 24 2019
I13/Miriam	principal (NMS)	Vienna, Oct. 28 2019
S1_1/Fritz	teacher (BMS)	Vienna, Nov. 7 2019
S1_2/Susi	teacher (BMS)	Vienna, Nov. 6 2019
S1_4/Hugo	teacher (BMS)	Vienna, Nov. 4 2019
S1_6/Sissi	teacher (BMS)	Vienna, Nov. 5 2019
S1_F2/Fritz, Angela, Ingo, Hugo	focus group with teachers (BMS)	Vienna, Nov. 13 2019
S2_2/Brigitte	teacher (NMS)	Vienna, Dec. 6 2019
S2_3/Pelin	teacher (NMS)	Vienna, Dec. 6 2019
S3_2/Mara	teacher (NMS)	Vienna, Dec. 6 2019
S3_5/Jochen	Teacher (NMS)	Vienna, Dec. 9 2019
S4_4/Claire	teacher (NMS)	Vienna, Dec. 6 2019
S6_2/Levin	Teacher (AHS)	Vienna, Dec. 19 2019
S6_3/Hubert	teacher (AHS)	Vienna, Dec. 19 2019

for a more in-depth analysis. At these six schools, we scheduled 31 (semi-)structured in-depth interviews and seven focus groups with school personnel with and without migration or refugee experience. We focused on teachers and principals because they are the most important actors for implementing integration and education policies at schools. During these interviews, we asked the school representatives to discuss and elaborate upon topics of ‘migrant’ children’s integration, cultural and religious diversity, and to evaluate the policies addressing barriers to ‘migrant’ children’s integration at their school.

The interviews were transcribed and then interpreted and analyzed using a topic-centered content analysis. For reasons of data protection, the interview partners were pseudonymized⁴. In the following sections, we present our results on how teachers and

school directors perceive and negotiate the intersectional positions of their pupils.

INTERSECTIONAL CONTESTATIONS OVER THE MEANING OF INTEGRATING ‘MIGRANT’ PUPILS

In this section, we will first examine how teachers and school directors draw attention to and raise awareness about the intersecting structures of inequality experienced by ‘migrant’ pupils. This addresses inclusive forms of intersectionality and strategies for a complex and holistic integration approach. Second, we discuss forms of exclusive intersectionality in connection to an assimilatory approach. Generally, our findings show ambivalences in how intersectionality and integration are framed, which indicates ongoing negotiations of integration at Austrian schools.

⁴ The interviewees have been given acronyms and pseudonyms. A list of abbreviations and a more detailed description of the interview partners can be found in the appendix.

Inclusive Intersectionality and Holistic Integration

In this section we demonstrate how ‘migrant’ pupils’ intersectional positionings could be perceived in an inclusive way, which might therefore promote their sustainable integration process. The section is structured according to different forms of inclusive intersectionality and concludes with approaches to integration included within inclusive intersectionality frames.

The intersection of migration, belonging, self-esteem and political participation

Some school representatives describe successful integration as occurring when no child is subject to discrimination on the basis of their nationality, ethnicity, religion, or gender. Richard, for instance, emphasizes that children who “*feel that ‘I can’t get a job because I look different or have a different religion’*” (I6/Richard) are excluded rather than integrated. Other teachers draw attention to the intersectional discrimination experiences of ‘migrant’ pupils, which they believe reinforce disintegration. These respondents acknowledged that discrimination does not only occur at school, but also in other areas of society, such as the labor market (I6/Richard; S1_F2/Fritz; Angela, Ingo, Hugo; S1_6/Sissi).

Miriam, a school principal, stresses that those rejected by society because of their skin color or religion “*must organize with others who also share this experience*” (I13/Miriam). She continues, “*if I keep telling someone that he is a migrant, a foreigner, he will withdraw into his community*” (ibid.). Her justification suggests that ‘migrant’ children’s experiences of exclusion could lead to ‘ghettoization’ or ‘parallel societies’. Thus, she is aware that children’s integration is not impeded by nationality, ethnicity, or religion alone, but by the exclusive structures of the Austrian society. This line of reasoning shows awareness for the complexity of intersecting structures that shape ‘migrant’ pupils’ multiple positionings.

While Miriam’s framing accounts for different experiences of exclusion along intersecting positionings as obstacles to successful integration. Others stress that the recognition and appreciation of migrant pupils’ different cultural identities, perspectives and interests are essential for integration. Recognizing diversity, Richard argues, fosters ‘migrant’ children’s sense of belonging and thus encourages active participation and integration (I6/Richard). This resonates with some school representatives’ opinion that successful integration rests on a sense of belonging to the society regardless of origin, language, religion, or the way they look (I6/Richard; I11/Sabine; I12/Hannes). One teacher, Hugo, emphasizes that “*statistical figures on citizenship or place of birth provide an incomplete*

picture of the realities” in terms of one’s sense of belonging. Thus, ‘migrant’ children’s self-definitions, he proposes, are a better indicator for belonging and self-esteem (S1_4/Hugo).

Political participation is likewise seen as a central element of integration. One school director demands that “*the city administration and all institutions must accept them as they are*” (I6/Richard). Hence, he understands integration as a two-way-process and, in particular, as a process of promoting children’s self-esteem: If ‘migrants’ are and feel accepted, they also participate in society (ibid.).

These examples show how the school staff’s reflections on integration reflect an inclusive approach to intersectionality that considers pupils’ multiple positions besides nationality, migration or ethnicity. They consider the pupils’ opinions, experiences, social as well as political sense of belonging, and participation as important elements of either integration or segregation.

Intersections of migration, class, place of residence and school type

Some of the interviewed school representatives emphasize that the socio-economic background of ‘migrant’ pupils’ parents or families plays a strong role in integration. They stress that a lack of resources at home, e.g., a desk, a quiet or own room or necessary equipment such as a computer are important factors that affect integration. Interviewees saw poor poor learning infrastructure at home and a high number of family members in a small apartment as determinants of the segregation for these children (S1_6/Sissi; S1_F2/Fritz; Angela, Ingo, Hugo). Some interviewees also claim that the success of ‘migrant’ children at school depends on the support received from their parents. This, in turn, depends on the parents’ economic and time resources. Some teachers consider these factors as more relevant to integration and educational mobility than being a ‘migrant’ (I10/Charlotte; I11/Sabine; I12/Hannes; S1_6/Sissi).

Other school representatives assert that parents with a higher level of education and a better socio-economic position are often able to mobilize more support for their children due to their better knowledge of the school system and stronger German language skills. To these teachers, the educational and—especially—class background of ‘migrant’ parents constructs one of the main obstacles to future educational success for this group of pupils.

Another discriminatory condition that some school representatives draw upon is the spatial dimension of residence. Some Viennese districts are mainly populated by migrants and people with poor economic resources. Some school principals emphasize that the socio-demographic characteristics of the pupils’

respective residential areas are reflected in the school composition due to the *Wohnortnähe* principle (I6/Richard; I8/Hugo). More than 50 percent of pupils at these schools have a mother tongue that is not German, regardless of whether the school is an *NMS* or *AHS* (I5/Linda; I8/Hugo; I10/Charlotte; I11/Sabine). Nevertheless, most ‘migrant’ pupils attend the *NMS*, as they are located in neighborhoods where most Viennese laborers and ‘migrants’ live (I6/Richard; I8/Hugo). Thus, socio-economic status and *Wohnortnähe* impose the main obstacles to ‘migrant’ pupils’ higher education (I5/Linda; I6/Richard; I8/Hugo; I9/Doris).

Moreover, the interviewed school staff frames the dual *AHS* and *NMS* school system as one that perpetuates social and educational inequality and impedes the integration of ‘migrant’ pupils. These teachers also criticize how primary school grades are decisive for further school outcomes. Charlotte, an *NMS* school principal, claims that “a marginal percentage goes to another secondary school after leaving the *NMS*”, but only attend *Polytechnic Schools* until they are 15 years old (I10/Charlotte), while *AHS* pupils follow the path towards a university education. She argues that this dual school system segregates children, which not only affects the children’s lives, but also the stigmatization of schools and school types.

Inclusive approach to integration

As shown above, some of the interviewed school staff express a sensitivity for the intersecting positionings of ‘migrant’ pupils that affect their integration process. These school representatives articulate criticisms of integration as assimilation (S2_3/Pelin) and stress that ‘migrant’ pupils’ social and political participation are central pillars of integration. Integration, moreover, should be based on mutual recognition, respect, appreciation, and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, some school representatives consider the intersections of migration, socio-economic or class background, place of familial residence, and the school type and the Austrian school system to be of particular relevance for the integration process. Thus, quite a few interviewees perceive multiple of structures of inequality as interacting with and reinforcing ‘migrant’ pupils’ exclusion. Hence, our study shows that some teachers display an inclusive approach to intersectionality. However, in the following, we will illustrate respondents’ exclusive ways of framing intersections in ‘migrant’ pupils’ lives.

Exclusive Intersectionality and Assimilatory Integration

This section demonstrates forms, neglect, non-contextualization and instrumentalization of inter-

sectional views towards ‘migrant’ pupils, which risk excluding or marginalizing these children, while also contributing to an assimilatory integration approach.

Gender versus religion and culture

Some teachers and school directors stress that some ‘migrant’ children lack respect for women, female teachers, and gender equality. In reference to her experiences with male Muslim pupils, one teacher states, “we female teachers should be respected in the same way as men”. She continues that “in Austria, we don’t believe that a man can dictate to a woman what she should wear” (S1_2/Susi) and raises the debate about Islamic headscarves in Austrian schools.⁵ She therefore expresses the specific need to ‘discipline’ male Muslim pupils so that they respect female teachers’ authority. She voiced her anger by asserting, “we as Austrians cannot tolerate everything” (S1_2/Susi). Another teacher supports this view by claiming that integration is proven by “shaking hands with women even if you are a Muslim man” (S6_3/Hubert). One teacher who characterizes her school as consisting “almost exclusively of pupils with a migration background” (S1_2/Susi) emphasizes the need for monitoring and testing whether ‘migrant’ pupil behavior is “compatible with our Austrian values and laws” (ibid.). Similarly, one teacher, Jochen, points out that Muslim children or their parents do not accept certain subjects such as sex education or the theory of evolution in biology lessons (S3_5/Jochen).

Through these framings, the school staff particularly constructs images of male Muslim pupils, who allegedly reproduce patriarchal gender relations and disrespect equality between women and men, which is labelled as a core “Austrian value” (I6/Richard). School representatives negotiate diversity as a problem of ‘cultural’ and ‘religious’ discrepancies between a ‘We’—the Austrians—and ‘them’—male Muslims, constructed as ‘Others’. This argumentation highlights the alleged incompatibility between Austrian values and ‘the’ values of Islam as the main obstacle to integration.

We interpret this narrative as an exclusive intersectional approach, because school representatives instrumentalize the intersecting structures of religion, culture and gender in order to show that the presumably ‘backward’ religion (Islam) and traditional culture (of Muslim communities) crystalizes around gender relations: Patriarchal Muslim boys disrespect gender equality. In this framing, school representatives play off gender and religion against each other alongside the push for assimilation instead of considering the difficult positionings of ‘migrant’ boys

⁵ In May 2019, the ÖVP-FPÖ government coalition passed a ban on Islamic headscarves at elementary schools (Die Presse, 08. 05. 2019).

or young men in Austrian society. This framing, thus, risks exacerbating ‘migrant’ pupils’ experiences of discrimination, as well as stigmatizing and excluding this group of pupils.

Migration versus class

We observed that some school staff do not recognize ‘migrant’ pupils’ different intersecting positionings within the Austrian society and school system. According to most school staff, *Brennpunktschulen* are characterized as schools with many children who hold ‘migration backgrounds’, and who are from families with a lower socio-economic background (S1_2/Susi; S1_6/Sissi). In this regard, Susi argues that classes or schools with many ‘migrant’ pupils tend to lead to ‘cultural’ conflicts (S1_2/Susi). This narrative perceives ‘migrant’ pupils as responsible for ‘cultural’ tensions, which reinforce learning disparities among pupils. This, in turn, allegedly leads to a decline in the level of all pupils’ learning outcomes, which reflects poorly on the school’s image (S1_2/Susi). Similarly, another AHS teacher, Claire, blames ‘diversity’ for inducing her school’s ‘bad image’ and demands a better ‘mixing’ in schools. In her opinion, this stigmatization as *Brennpunktschule* is the reason why children have low self-confidence and believe they have limited opportunities for academic or professional success (S4_4/Claire).

Claire’s reasoning represents an exclusive intersectional approach to integration, because the school representatives instrumentalize intersecting structures in a doubled sense: First, the intersecting inequalities of being a ‘migrant’ and from a socio-economic deprived class are seen as a ‘danger’ or risk to all pupils’ good educational performance and school reputations. Second, their framing combines the status of being a ‘migrant’ with having a poor socio-economic background, and therefore plays these inequality structures off against each other. Thus, ‘migrant’ pupils from lower class families are held responsible for the ‘bad’ educational future prospects of all pupils at ‘stigmatized’ schools, which ignores Austrian education system’s structural deficiencies and class selectivity. This deepens the stigmatization towards and exclusion of ‘migrant’ pupils. Additionally, these teachers tend to present diversity as a problem that needs to be solved by culturally assimilating ‘migrant’ pupils into the Austrian society.

Nationality, ethnicity, migration, and the disarticulation of multiple disadvantages

In our interview material, we identified how teachers characterize so-called ‘guest workers’ – particularly from Turkey and Ex-Yugoslavia as well as their descendants – as demonstrating “*stagnant*

integration deficits” (S1_2/Susi). Susi, for instance, emphasizes that ‘migrant’ children who are born and/or raised in Austria “*still stick to their or parents’ countries of origin*” (ibid.). This, she argues, is the main obstacle to integration. However, she attributes this to “*both the guest workers and the Austrian state, who presumed that [the guest workers] would leave and stay only temporarily in Austria*” (ibid.). In her opinion, this is why the integration of guest workers and their descendants has failed (ibid.). Moreover, she argues that this situation is worsened because integration policies currently “*only concentrate on the integration of refugees*” and exclude integration measures for second- and third-generation ‘migrant’ pupils. In contrast to guest workers, some teachers, such as Hugo, construct refugees as “*being able to integrate faster*” (S1_4/Hugo).

On the one hand, this argumentation shows an exclusive form of the intersectional approach through how it instrumentalizes the overlapping structures of class, nationality, ethnicity and migration to explain differences in integration processes. On the other hand, it also shows how other social structures of inequality that can have a negative impact on the integration process are ignored, such as different migrants’ poor socio-economic situations.

Another framing includes blaming and stigmatizing parents and families for ‘migrant’ pupils’ failure to integrate due to their alleged linguistic and cultural deficits. These deficits are described as a lack of knowledge about German language and Austrian school system, as well as a lack of education. Some teachers in our sample stressed that it is not only the parents’ ‘low’ educational background that negatively affects their children. Rather, interviewees particularly noted ‘migrant’ parents’ allegedly low appreciation for education and lack of motivation towards supporting their children’s education (I9/Doris). One school principal, Doris, highlights that family support is the most important indicator of a pupil’s school and integration success (ibid.). She points to differences in parents’ motivations for migrating, which determine children’s school success. Doris describes “*Hungarian parents*” as an example of those who ostensibly migrated for educational reasons and are therefore very motivated to help their children achieve a better education (ibid.). Conversely, she stressed that “*Turkish parents*”, even if they are “*wealthy*”, do not care about their children’s education (ibid.). In her opinion, this shows how Turks may have a lower priority for education (ibid.).

This narrative reflects the intersection of nationality, class, and education. However, it represents another ideal of exclusive intersectionality, because Doris categorizes ‘migrant’ pupils’ integration ‘success’ or ‘failure’ through her attention to

the different nationalities and migration histories of adults, while disarticulating other structural inequalities such as access to education, or opportunities to involve of parents at schools. In doing so, the school representative hierarchizes groups of children, their parents and families by their alleged national or ethnic backgrounds that may have a negative impact how pupils interact socially in everyday school life and impede the educational success or failure and future prospects of the children. Hence, exclusive intersectional approach arguably depoliticizes integration by ignoring and instrumentalizing intersecting structures of inequality.

Likewise, some teachers consider good German language skills as a precondition for ‘migrant’ children’s participation in daily learning processes, school routines and their understanding of bureaucratic processes and the legal system. One teacher, Brigitte, expresses her perception of integration as being able to *“get along with the school system and following a common set of rules”* (S2_2/Brigitte). Fritz describes integration as the knowledge of *“dealing with bureaucracy and legal system”* (S1_1/Fritz). Ultimately, this focus on ethnicity and language only addresses exclusive framings of intersectionality.

Assimilatory approach to integration

The neglect, disarticulation, non-contextualization and instrumentalization of intersectionality arguably promotes ethnicized, culturalist, sexist and nationalistic explanations for differences in pupils’ integration processes. This approach links integration failure to violating alleged ‘core Austrian values’ such as gender equality by specific groups of ‘migrant’ pupils. Thus, school representatives discursively embed pupils mainly in their families’, nationality, ethnicity, religion or ‘culture’, rather than in structures such as language or educational barriers in the Austrian school system, as well as parents’ discouragement from communicating with school representatives or education policies. This reinforces how the individualization of overlapping social inequalities invisibilize the fact that they are co-constitutive power structures. Therefore, these framings suggest that, on the one hand, the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of ‘migrant’ pupils’ integration is limited to their positioning as ‘migrants’ and, thus, disarticulates other structural inequalities in the educational system. On the other hand, this perception of exclusive intersectionality promotes the responsabilization of ‘migrant’ pupils’ integration by making ‘migrant’ parents responsible for their children’s alleged ‘failure’ to integrate. Individualization and responsabilization represent and support an assimilatory approach, as it highlights only one pathway to integration, i.e., adapting to the Austrian society. This reinforces the dualistic distinction of ‘We’—the Austrians—versus ‘them’—the migrants.

Nevertheless, our material also shows grey areas and ambivalences in negotiating ‘migrant’ children’s intersecting positionings at schools. However, we found that while some school staff appear to initially hold inclusive views, they appear somewhat exclusive after critical examination.

Ambivalences of Negotiating Intersectionality and Integration

In our research, we refer to ambivalences as narratives and frames that the interviewees use to either explicitly disarticulate differences between pupils and imply universalities; or, by evoking certain intersecting structures of inequality that are open to both inclusive and exclusive forms, i.e. to integration and exclusion.

An example of exclusive forms of how teachers negotiate intersectionality is the conscious or explicit disarticulation of children’s intersectional experiences of discrimination. In practice, some teachers strive for equality among all pupils regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, or socio-economic background. As Angela affirms, *“we treat them primarily as children and pupils”* (S1_F2/Fritz, Angela, Ingo, Hugo). Many teachers emphasize their primary role as educators who do *not* discriminate between pupils according to their national, ethnic, religious, gender or socio-economic background. This, they claim, ensures the equality of all pupils (I6/Richard; I10/Charlotte). In this regard, some school staff stress the need to highlight common and shared experiences; as Levin states, *“integration means when people with different stories share a life together”* and *“do not exclude, but respect differences”* (S6_2/Levin). This perspective includes the inclusive argument that pupils desire to be recognized and treated as children. However, our study shows that this perspective represents an ambivalent approach to intersectionality. While it attempts to promote equality among pupils by disarticulating their different and intersectional experiences of discrimination and inequality, it tends to reproduce—unintentionally—social inequality and exclusion experienced by ‘migrant’ pupils deletion of ‘due to their migration status’.

Furthermore, the respondents identify problems with the ‘two-tier school system’ comprised of the *AHS* and *NMS*, which results in most “migrant children ending up in *NMS*” (I1/Flora). *NMS*, Susi claims, is *“nothing special to cope with the stigma of being a migrant”* (S1_2/Susi) or with any experiences of discrimination, *“as almost every pupil is a migrant”* (ibid.). Given the large share of migrants, therefore, Anton is not aware of any *“discrimination towards pupils”* at *NMS* (I7/Anton; I11/Sabine). Conversely, some teachers and school directors perceive diversity arising from migration, gender, class, and religion as a form of enrichment (I7/Anton). However, they simultaneously neglect differences concerning power structures, the unequal distribution of economic resources or access to education.

This omission risks re-enforcing intersecting structures of inequality instead of actively overcoming these inequalities.

In addition, some interviewed teachers acknowledge the differences between how ‘migrant’ pupils experience integration processes in the general Austrian society and at schools. They highlight the contrasting realities of schools and the broader society. While some schools are predominantly attended by ‘migrant’ children, Austrian society is classified as ‘less migrant’ and ‘more white’, as Susi claims (S1_2/Susi). She explains that *“they are met with so much rejection in the outside world that we do not even notice that they are already so used to it”* (S1_F2/ Fritz, Angela, Ingo, Hugo). According to some teachers, ‘migrant’ pupils feel part of the diverse school community and therefore do not feel discriminated against or excluded, since they supposedly feel like they are among peers (S1_2/Susi). Teachers and school principals distinguish pupils’ experiences at school from their exposure to racism in the labor market and *“in the outside world”* (S1_F2/Fritz; Angela, Ingo, Hugo). This frame, again, represents an ambivalent approach to intersectionality: On the one hand, it offers a more holistic and inclusive approach to the children’s integration of children by not limiting the integration process to schools, and rather locating their experiences of discrimination in the labor market or in other social interactions outside of school life. This reflects a more long-term and sustainable outlook on the integration process. On the other hand, this perspective neglects intersectional experiences of discrimination against ‘migrant’ children by focusing exclusively on categories of nationality, ethnicity and migration as presumed, automatic ‘assets’ that support their inclusion into the school community and class.

In addition, many school representatives implied that ‘successful’ integration is apparent if ‘migrant’ children show a sense of belonging to the school community and society, regardless of origin, language, religion or their appearance (I6/Richard; I11/Sabine; I12/Hannes). While this shows sensitivity to intersecting inequalities experienced by pupils, it disarticulates and ignores how these inequalities play into the process of belonging.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research illustrates migration and integration as a site of contention at Austrian schools. We observed that many teachers and school directors generally aim to support ‘migrant’ pupils, and make strong efforts to avoid discriminating against these pupils because of

their migration status. However, some school representatives only focus on nationality, ethnicity and migration, while concurrently ignoring and de-contextualizing other inequalities, such as socio-economic disparities, educational differences, school location, Austria’s highly differentiated school system, exclusive structures in the majority society, and exclusive mechanisms of integration and education policies.

Additionally, the universalistic or equality-oriented approach applied by some school staff also risks being exclusive, as it fails to seriously consider the intersectionality of manifold structures of inequality that shape the lives of ‘migrant’ children. Furthermore, some school representatives instrumentalize intersectional positionings of ‘migrant’ pupils by playing different inequality structures off against each other, e.g. gender versus religion. Neglecting, non-contextualizing and instrumentalizing social categories, i.e. framings that we label as ‘exclusive intersectionality’, thus reinforce the individualization of overlapping social inequalities by rendering invisible how they co-constitute power structures. Therefore, this line of reasoning makes ‘migrant’ pupils, their families, and communities responsible for their deletion of successful. Arguably, some school staffs’ views of individualization and responsabilization therefore represent and endorse an assimilatory approach to integration. Our results support the perspective that exclusive intersectional approaches are mainly associated with integration concepts grounded in the assimilatory model.

However, our research also shows that school representatives take into account pupils’ different intersectional positionings at the intersection of ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, parental socio-economic positioning, and school location. Hence, these perceptions represent an inclusive form of intersectionality that promotes a holistic view and, therefore, an inclusive conceptualization of integration.

Ultimately, we conclude the way integration is negotiated at Austrian schools is quite ambivalent: On the one hand, teachers and principals see their pupils’ integration as a disciplinary approach to cultural assimilation. On the other hand, many respondents perceived integration as a two-way process and as a process of inclusion, which needs specific educational measures as well as a transformation of the Austrian society towards inclusiveness. We propose that an inclusive intersectional approach is necessary to understand the complexity of the integration process experienced by ‘migrant’ children and to promote a holistic evaluation to their integration holistic and sustainable evaluation.

INTERSEKCIONALNA NASPROTJA – POMEN INTEGRACIJE UČENCEV, PRISELJENCEV, V AVSTRIJSKE ŠOLE

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POVZETEK

V članku analiziramo, kako šolsko osebje v dveh avstrijskih mestih ureja umeščenost učencev priseljencev na presečišču najrazličnejših struktur dominacije in neenakosti, povezanih denimo z državljanstvom, narodnostno pripadnostjo, veroizpovedjo, spolom, družbenoekonomskim položajem staršev ter lokacijo šole. Naš cilj je bil preučiti, kako šolsko osebje dojema raznolikost učencev v luči avstrijske izobraževalne in integracijske politike, s tem pa pokazati na kompleksnost izobraževanja in integracije učencev priseljencev. V raziskavi smo uporabili intersekcionalni pristop ter opravili poglobljene intervjuje in oblikovali sedem fokusnih skupin s šolskim osebjem. Rezultati so nakazali povezavo na eni strani med vključujočimi oblikami intersekcionalnosti in celovitim pristopom k integraciji, na drugi strani pa med izključevalno intersekcionalnostjo in pristopom asimilacijske integracije. V splošnem rezultati ne kažejo enoznačne formulacije intersekcionalnosti in integracije, kar napeljuje na sklep, da je urejanje integracije v Avstriji odprto vprašanje. Članek nakazuje, da je vključujoč intersekcionalni pristop nujen za razumevanje kompleksnosti procesa integracije otrok priseljencev, kot tudi za spodbujanje celovitega pogleda na njihovo integracijo.

Ključne besede: integracija, učenci priseljenci, učitelji, Avstrija, intersekcionalnost

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