

Ethnic withdrawal in older age? – Analysing the construction of older immigrants in German ageing, health, and care discourses

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Older immigrants in an ageing society

Ongoing demographic change has reshaped the age structures of migrant populations and has led to a growing percentage of older migrants¹. In 2018, people with a migration background² constituted 11.5% of the German population aged 65 years and above; the vast majority, more than 96% were first-generation immigrants (Statistisches Bundesamt 2019). Accordingly, older immigrants have gradually received more attention in politics, social work, health care and gerontological research in the last two decades. While the term „older immigrant” includes all first-, second- or third-generation migrants, it is predominantly used to refer to people aged 65 years and above who migrated to Germany for work and are now growing old in place. The focus, thereby, has been on topics of demographic change, specifically health risks, long-term care, socioeconomic aspects and the potentials of active/healthy ageing (Baykara-Krumme et al. 2012).

Discourse analyses indicate that older people are generally addressed collectively, are referred to as dependant and vulnerable, and are simultaneously framed as active agers who contribute to society in media, policy and political discourses (Fealy et al. 2012; Foster/Walker 2015; Phelan 2018). Furthermore, policy and research on older immigrants have been criticised for an emphasis on ethnicity and vulnerability, which results in generalisations based on the ethnic difference in older age (Hahn 2011; Torres 2006). These existing discourses pose the question of how older immigrants and their social, health and care-related needs are constructed on the macro/meso level. Thus, this project investigates discourses on older immigrants in Germany, specifically the construction of culture and ethnicity, health and care needs, and available services on the political, institutional and organisational level.

Opposing ageing discourses in media and research

In general, the demographic change has resulted in concerns regarding the welfare of the society and, in particular, the well-being of the older population. Care, health issues, and socioeconomic factors in older age are major challenges for an ageing society. A prominent response to these challenges has been the promotion of active ageing through global (World Health Organization), European (Foster/Walker 2015), and German (Denninger et al. 2014) policies and ageing discourses. While there are various definitions of active, healthy, productive or successful ageing, a common theme is a promotion of activity and (social) productivity

1 The growing percentage of older migrants includes people who migrate in older age and people who have grown old in their destination country.

2 According to the German Federal Statistical Office „A person has a migrant background if they themselves or at least one parent did not acquire German citizenship by birth” (Statistisches Bundesamt 2019: 4).