

The lies of Thilo Sarrazin

Part one

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This is the first of a two-part series.

Nearly a month has passed since *Der Spiegel* magazine and the *Bild* newspaper published extracts from Thilo Sarrazin's book, *Germany Abolishes Itself*. Since then, a full-blown campaign against Muslim immigrants has been launched, claiming that they resist integration into German society. Social problems such as high unemployment, the existence of so-called "social hot spots" and "parallel communities," and low educational attainment are blamed on the immigrants themselves.

A front-page article in a recent edition of *Der Spiegel* headlined "The State's Failure: Why Germany is Failing to Integrate" faulted the government for refusing to confront the supposed unwillingness of immigrants, particularly those from Turkey, to assimilate. The article suggested that state authorities ought to treat immigrants more harshly, instead of "mollycoddling" them as they have purportedly done in the past. This argument has since been taken up by a number of prominent politicians, including the chairman of the Social Democratic Party, Sigmar Gabriel.

The remarkable thing about the debate is that even the crudest claims in Sarrazin's book are allowed to go unrefuted. Sarrazin admitted to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper last March that he himself had invented his allegedly compelling statistics. Following the adage, "Don't believe any statistics that you yourself have not faked," he explained that if you don't have the statistics for something "you have to create ones that point in the right direction; and if no one can refute them, then you win through with your point of view."

He has been so successful in doing this that one hears incessant talk from various media and political sources about violent Muslim youth and uneducated Turks and Arabs who want to live according to Sharia law and make a good life for themselves at the public's expense. No one has seriously stood up to Sarrazin and challenged his views. However, official statistics and studies reveal a very different picture from the one presented by Sarrazin.

Heredity and intelligence

Sarrazin mixes ill-digested genetic statements claiming that intelligence is inheritable with nonsensical demographic prognoses and argues that immigrants, to use the language of Sarrazin, propagate themselves without restraint.

Sarrazin writes: "Since the mid-1970s, the pattern of generative behaviour in Germany is not only a non-Darwinian, unnatural process of selective breeding—in the sense of 'survival of the fittest'—but also a culturally determined and humanly exercised negative selection that both relatively and absolutely is rapidly eroding the only renewable raw

material that Germany has, namely, intelligence."

This paragraph not only rejects the concept that humanity can consciously appropriate and shape the environment, which renders the formula concerning the survival of the fittest inappropriate for human society, it also reveals the pseudo-biological character of Sarrazin's central thesis. In essence, Sarrazin claims that the proportion of long-established German citizens compared to immigrants will change increasingly in favour of immigrants, although the latter are distinguished by intellectual deficiencies owing to their genetic background and ethnicity. As a result of the ongoing inheritance of these deficiencies, the level of education within the German population will decline and the country's technical and scientific intelligence will deteriorate.

Let us first examine the claim that intelligence is inheritable.

This requires an understanding of how Sarrazin defines intelligence. In the relevant scientific literature there is no clear, generally accepted definition. Some researchers proceed from the existence of up to seven kinds of cognitive ability which operate to a large extent independently.

A widespread view equates intelligence with intelligence tests. But this definition is extremely limited. One leading German psychologist, Jens Asendorpf from Berlin's Humboldt University, links intelligence to higher education. Higher education, in turn, is the source of social prestige and well-paid occupations. It benefits children whose own parents have benefited from higher education and provides an intellectually stimulating environment.

Sarrazin, however, relies on studies which claim that between 30 and 80 percent of intelligence is based on the influence of genes, and suggests there is even something comparable to an intelligence gene. In fact, the link is much more complex, with the development of cognitive abilities depending on the interaction of hundreds of genes which are temporally variable and highly dependent on environmental influences.

This dependence on external influences has been confirmed by studies which recognise statistically important differences in the measurement of the intelligence of persons from industrialized countries compared to those from underdeveloped lands. Intelligence is strongly linked to the prosperity of the country in which the person grew up.

Studies of adopted children in industrial nations which compare the intelligence of children in relation to their physical and foster parents confirm increased levels of intelligence for children from middle and upper social classes, as opposed to those exposed to poverty, inadequate nutrition and social stigmatisation.

Sarrazin ignores such studies and baldly claims that intelligence is inheritable and based on racial differences. In doing so, he draws on the book *The Bell Curve* by the racists Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, who advanced the thesis at the beginning of the 1990s that blacks in the US were more affected by poverty only because they were on average genetically less intelligent than whites.

Enthusiastically praising Sarrazin's book in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the sociologist Necla Kelek also refers to Herrnstein and Murray,

but fails to mention that their thesis has long since been disproved.

Racist ideas, relating particular characteristics to genetic differences stemming from ethnic descent, were given the coup de grâce by the Human Genome Project. Craig Venter, who was mainly concerned with analysis of the human genetic sequence, observed that about 99.9 percent of the hereditary factors possessed by a human being were identical with those of all other humans. In a speech, published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 2002, he formulated his ideas thus: “We cannot determine the ethnic origin of a human being from his or her genetic code, because race and ethnic identity are based on social rather than scientific concepts.”

In an interview with the *Der Zeit* newspaper in 2008, Venter commented on claims that intelligence varied according to ethnic kinship, saying: “Those are stupid expressions of racism. I’m completely sure that differences in intelligence in no way correlate with skin colour. We humans are part of a genetic continuum.”

It is astounding, but not accidental, that racist concepts are able to establish themselves in science via the backdoor of genetics, and then, via Sarrazin, enter the public arena. The educational researcher and psychologist Heiner Rindermann, together with Detlef Rost, in a long contribution to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* remarked that Sarrazin’s theses “by and large accord with the findings of modern psychological research.”

However, Rindermann himself is one of those researchers who regularly rehashes racist theories about the different genetic make-ups of different ethnic groups. In a radio broadcast on *Deutschlandradio Kultur* in 2007 he ranted about the “different intelligence levels of different peoples” and genetic differences “among races.”

Sarrazin was able to buttress his scientifically refuted theories by relying on the arguments of reactionary scientists.

Birth rates and immigration

Another aspect of Sarrazin’s thesis that needs to be critically examined is the claim that Muslim immigrants typically produce a large number of children, and that Germany is increasingly turning into an Islamic country because more and more immigrants are pouring into the country, allegedly owing to their unlimited right of entry.

Sarrazin himself writes that there is no scientifically reliable method for predicting “reproductive behaviour and immigration over several generations with any certainty.” But this is exactly what he does—with the sole aim of stirring up resentment and spreading hysteria.

The truth is that no flood of immigration into Germany is currently underway, and the balance of migration over the last two years has been negative. In 2008 and 2009, more people emigrated from Germany than immigrated into the country, and that was also the case for immigrants from Turkey.

In 2009, about 30,000 people left Turkey for Germany, but over the same period 40,000 immigrants returned to Turkey. Some demographers are calling for a loosening of immigration restrictions to moderate the demographic change.

The claim that immigrants from Turkey have a higher rate of reproduction is also unsustainable. “Women from the second generation of migrants have adopted almost the same reproductive behaviour as German women,” explained sociologist Nadja Milewski in a recent study.

The study showed that with respect to both women from Turkey and German women, higher educational qualifications led to women having children later in life. Milewski accounted for this by arguing that women with a higher level of education more often became employed and thus

postponed having children.

This suggests that ethnic background as such plays virtually no role in reproductive behaviour. Milewski concludes that, “Immigrant women do not, as widely supposed, have more children than German women.”

Thus, Sarrazin’s absurd claims evaporate into thin air.

But what about the assertion that immigrants from Turkey and other Muslim countries exhibit great deficiencies when it comes to integrating into German society?

Current research into immigrant behaviour has jettisoned concepts such as ethnic groupings and nationalities. Immigrants from various regions of the world are much too heterogeneous to make it meaningful to combine them into national groups. In regard to integration, moreover, far more important than ethnic background are the opportunities for integration bound up with such factors as a social background, age, gender, skin colour, educational level and legal status.

It makes a difference whether an immigrant is highly qualified and can expect a well-paid job in the host country, or whether he or she has had to escape persecution and is traumatised, is treated only on sufferance, is not entitled to a secure right to remain in the country and receives no work permit.

A recurring theme advanced by Sarrazin and his apologists is the poor school performance of immigrant children from Turkey. The educational achievement of these children compared to children without an immigrant background, is, in fact, considerably lower. But these differences have nothing to do with the religious or ethnic background of the children concerned.

The immigration research scientist Klaus Bade explained to the *Spiegel Online* web site, “Statistics about educational achievement, unaccompanied by adequate consideration of social backgrounds, (provide) nothing in the way of reliable information.”

Gesa Ramm and his colleagues have analysed the socio-economic background of children in detail. Although their findings were only very inadequately summarised in the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study, they showed that ethnic background became irrelevant when social background was included as a factor in explaining differences in mathematical ability. In other words, an inferior social background is, for the most part, responsible for the weak performance of children with an immigrant background, and such children share this fate with German children who grow up in similar social conditions. Social disadvantages, leading to poorer educational achievement, also contribute to fewer opportunities in the labour market.

Sarrazin is also operating with false statistics when he claims that 33.9 percent of Muslim immigrants derive their income from gainful employment, compared to 43 percent for the population without an immigration background. The actual figures are 36 percent for Turkish immigrants and nearly 45 percent for all male Muslim immigrants.

What really emerges from the statistics, if they are objectively interpreted, is the lower rate of female employment among Muslim immigrants, which is mainly attributable to the limited schooling and lack of job training experienced by first-generation Turkish Gastarbeiter (foreign workers). Moreover, these statistics do not take into account the large number of family members who help out in small immigrant family businesses.

If immigrants who have had job training are taken into account, the differences between immigrants and people without an immigration background disappear completely. It is true that immigrants are to be found more frequently in jobs requiring less qualified workers. On the other hand, the self-employment rate of immigrants—in contrast to what Sarrazin says—is above-average. Even female immigrants from Turkey are more often self-employed than women without an immigrant background, according to an immigration report from the German government. Klaus Bade, therefore, comes to the conclusion that Muslims “are just as well or

poorly integrated into working life as other immigrants.”

Sarrazin’s claims regarding the dependency of immigrant families on welfare payments are also false. An official report published in 2009 states that just 12.9 percent of Muslim immigrants are dependent on welfare payments.

The number of recipients of the German state’s miserly Hartz IV payments is higher among Muslim immigrants, but this figure itself is a reflection of the enormous hurdles confronting immigrant workers seeking to find gainful employment. Many immigrants are denied the residency permits which are necessary for them to find work in the first place.

To be continued.



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