

"Organically German"?

Changing ideologies of national belonging

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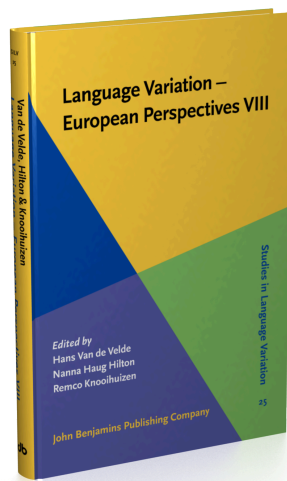
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“Organically German”?

Changing ideologies of national belonging

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This chapter examines variation in the situated meanings of the term *Biodeutsche(r)*, a term which has emerged relatively recently as a way to refer to people who are German by descent (i.e., not of migration background). This analysis shows that use of this term reflects competing discourses about the role of ethnicity in national belonging in Germany. While the origin and many uses of the term challenge the validity of ethnicity as a basis for legitimacy in German society, some of the data suggest that it has also been adopted as a supposedly neutral term to describe a segment of the German population, which supports an ethnonational ideology.

Keywords: media discourse, German, national identity, *biodeutsch*

1. Introduction

What does it mean in contemporary Germany to “be German”, and how is this category linguistically constructed? Germany has been a land of immigration for many decades, and policy changes have shifted the criteria for citizenship to include birthplace and (legal) residence as well as descent. Thus in the official sense, the criteria for being German have changed. Yet there continue to be many competing discourses about German belonging, and these discourses are reproduced in part through the choices of terms used for different social groups.

Previous research has looked at words for the Other, including *Migrations-hintergrund* (‘migration background’) (Fuller 2018a; Scarvaglieri and Zech. 2013), and the current study builds on this research to examine the use of the term *Biodeutsche(r)*. This study looks at the underlying ideological discourses which are evoked, endorsed and challenged through the different patterns of use of this term. I will gloss this term in English with the phrase ‘ethnic German’, as this is the term used in discussion about the role of descent in German belonging (see for example Aktürk 2012; Brubaker 2004; Gehring 2016).

In the following section, I present a brief overview of the concept of ethnicity and how it has played a role in German policies and public discourses related to immigration since World War II. Section 3 will provide a discussion of the discourses of belonging, following by a discussion of the previous research on labels for social groups in Section 4. After describing the methodology in Section 5, Section 6 presents the discussion of the various meanings of *Biodeutsche(r)* and the ideological implications.

2. German ethnicity, citizenship and belonging: Concepts and policies

In this section I will address how the concept of ethnicity is used in this analysis, and how it has, in recent German history, been part of national politics.

2.1 Ethnicity

The study of race and ethnicity, concepts integral to this analysis, has focused on the socially constructed nature of these concepts. That is, the categorization of phenotypic differences into discrete groups called “races” is considered to be a cultural process, not a biological reality; physical differences fall on a continuum and not in clearly demarcated categories (Gannon 2016). Thus the existence of racial groups is the result of cultural processes, not natural division, and has often been rooted in colonialism and the need to establish difference (Lin and Kubota 2013).

“Ethnicity” is similarly a cultural construct. It differs from race because it is generally used to refer to members of a group that putatively share a common history, culture, customs, and often language, aspects of group identity not inherent to the term race. However, ethnicity also implies shared bloodlines, and thus overlaps with ideas about racial categories. Ethnicity is usually the term linked to national origin, which is the focus here, in contemporary societies as well as academic discussions (Aktürk 2012; Brubaker 2009; Zelinsky 2001). Racial categories, although also sometimes seen as correlating with nations, are more typically associated with larger geographical regions and not in a one-to-one correspondence with countries of origin. I will use the term ethnicity in the rest of this chapter, as this is the term which has been adopted to talk about Germanness in academic discourse and also, in many cases, to discuss the ancestry of groups that are all racially categorized as White (Antonsich 2012; Painter 2010).

Germany is well-known for its history of ethnonational ideology, and citizenship and belonging have historically been expressed in these terms. However, such ideological positionings are never static, and this analysis seeks to understand the

discourses which circulate about the connection between ethnicity and national identity in contemporary Germany. The view of a connection between ethnicity and national identity has had consequences for citizenship regulations and immigration policy, as well as everyday interactions. The following section will provide a brief historical background about the current situation.

2.2 Immigration and citizenship

Following WWII, migration into Germany grew rapidly, especially with the *Gastarbeiter* ‘guest worker’ program which invited workers (mostly from southern Europe, former Yugoslavia, and Turkey) to come to work in Germany. Germany has become the second most popular destination for migrants in the world, following the US. In 2019, 15.9% of the population in Germany were international migrants (United Nations 2019). Statistics from 2018 show that an even higher percentage of the population, 25%, has a “migration background”, defined as someone who was not born with German citizenship or has at least one parent who was not (Statistisches Bundesamt 2019).

In the early days of the guest worker program, it was assumed that the migrant workers would neither stay in Germany nor bring their families, and there were no initial strategies to integrate or include these migrants in German society. Many did in fact stay, but subsequent generations, despite being born and raised in Germany, were not entitled to German citizenship. In contrast, another category of migrants entered the country in large numbers after German reunification in 1990 and were entitled to German citizenship upon arrival: the *Spätaussiedler* (literally ‘late settlers’), who were so-called *Volksdeutsche* (meaning of German descent, but not with German citizenship) from eastern Europe and, primarily, the former Soviet Union. Thus at this point, citizenship for immigrants was still a privilege for those deemed to have German blood (see Fuller 2019 for a more detailed discussion).

It was not until the 1990s that there were changes in naturalization policies to make acquiring German citizenship for migrants and their descendants easier. Even more significantly, in 2000 changes were made to citizenship policy to make those born and raised in Germany eligible for citizenship without the naturalization process, with some caveats (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2010). Although initially those gaining citizenship based on birthplace were not allowed dual citizenship, this restriction was lifted in 2014.

These changes in policy did not happen in an ideological vacuum, of course, and are also intertwined with ideas about not just the legalities of citizenship but the emotional connections to German belonging. These underlying discourses will be addressed in the next section.

3. Discourses of belonging

This analysis encompasses social constructionist and critical perspectives, looking at the ideological positionings which are produced through the use of particular terms to reference social groups. An underlying assumption is that language plays a role in the construction of social reality and thus the words that we use to label social categories represent a particular perspective which is not neutral but constitutive of social meaning (Fairclough 2009; Wodak 2011). Inherent in this process is the possibility of social change; that is, through societal discourses we can change how particular social categories are characterized. The meanings of terms are not fixed but constructed through use. Here, I focus on how the term *Biodeutsche(r)* functions to produce and reproduce social categories related to national belonging (van Dijk 2018, Wodak et al. 2009).

Yuval-Davis (2011) notes that everyday practices of belonging include multiple voices and challenges to hegemonic ideologies which allow for heterogeneity within a group; that is, an intersectional perspective on belonging is what is needed. This perspective is adopted here; in what ways does *Biodeutsche(r)* bring to life the reality of intersectional identities? I examine the multiple meanings of this term based on its usage and how traditional understandings of Germanness are both challenged and naturalized. While this term came to life to challenge ethnonational discourses, we see that it has also been co-opted to reinforce ideas about the primacy of descent in national belonging.

3.1 Discourses of ethnonational ideology

The term belonging has been defined in different ways; in this research, it is used to address how the personal emotions of attachment to place are represented in societal discourse (see Antonsich 2010). National belonging is continuously reproduced through texts and talk which establish who is included in and excluded from national groups (Billig 1995; Bonikowski 2017). Duyvendak (2011) discusses how in Europe, discourses about “feeling at home” often involve nostalgia for (putative) past ethnic homogeneity of the nation. This is a central part of one discourse which will be addressed in this analysis, the discourse of ethnonational ideology.

Yet the potential vagueness about how to define ethnicity, and specifically what it means to be “ethnic German”, complicates the discussion. Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005) note the upsurge in the focus on “autochthony”, a term from Greek which refers to “self” and “soil” – but again, the claim is vague. How many generations back does the claim to being from a particular plot of land need to go? And given shifting borders, what soil counts as German soil? The specific terms

“autochthone” and “allochthone” have not formed a significant part of the discourses of belonging in Germany, but the concepts nonetheless provide a focus on the issues at stake. As the dichotomy of *Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund* (‘people with migrant background’) and *Biodeutsche* illustrates, descent continues to be a noteworthy aspect of social categorization.

The term ethnonational discourse is used here to talk about how an essentialist category of “German” is constructed which includes descent as a primary focus (Fuller 2018a, 2019, Metzger and Özvatan 2020, Özvatan 2020; Römhild 1999). The Germanness of those seen as descendants of a homogeneous folk linked to Germany is not questioned within this discourse, and those who have other backgrounds do not belong to this category. While they may be integrated into German society, they are still labelled as “other” (e.g., *Menschen mit Migrationishintergrund, Passdeutsche*).¹ Integration, as will be discussed in the next section, is desirable and ethnic Germans provide the model of Germanness. However, integration does not make one a “true” or “pure” German within this discourse, and there are privileges granted only to those who are considered German by descent.

3.2 Integration and belonging: Discourses of exclusion and inclusion

One manifestation of the discourse about German belonging can be seen in the perpetuation, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, of what has been called the *Leitkultur* ‘guiding culture’ concept. Those who support this idea hold that there is a dominant German culture which must be preserved and into which migrants must integrate (Manz 2004; Pautz 2005). While this term has not remained central in the discourse about German integration, it was resurrected in 2018 in a speech by the German Minister of the Interior de Maizièr outlining the key elements of a German ‘guiding culture’ (Fuller 2018a). But even when this term was not used, the issue of diversity in German society and what cultural practices are considered German, or acceptable in German society, has always been integral to the discourse about migration and migration background people in Germany.

Thus, a great deal of the discourse about migration is about integration, although this was not a focus of policy until about 50 years after migration to Germany in large numbers began. In 2007 German Chancellor Merkel introduced a National Integration Plan to provide a federal framework for the implementation of integration programs. A primary focus of this was language learning (Stevenson

1. “Passport German” is a derogatory term used for people of migration background to indicate that while they may have a German passport, they are not legitimately German (see Feustel et al 2019)

and Schanze 2009), although other aspects of integration are also addressed in integration courses.²

There are many indications that in addition to these changes in policy regarding migrants, ideological changes about what it means to be German have also occurred; that is, there are competing discourses with the ethnonational discourse I mention above. One discourse which will be discussed here is what I will call a discourse of inclusion, which maintains that German belonging is based on linguistic, social, and cultural practices. Williams (2014), in her analysis of the discursive scripts produced by political elites from 2000–2010, notes a shift away from an ethnonational understanding of German identity toward more liberal attitudes about immigration and integration. While she notes that there continue to be debates about integration and the *Leitkultur*, both policy and discourses have shifted dramatically. Among the general population there have also been clear changes (Fuller 2019), but there continue to be competing discourses. Research by Williams (2013) shows that there are different ideas about what constitutes Germanness and citizenship within the migrant background population as well as within the majority. Wilpert (2013: 125–126) notes that for many people with migrant background, citizenship is viewed pragmatically, as a means to a more secure legal status; and for the majority of the population it not has given rise to more acceptance, but rather to more discourse about the inability of Muslims to integrate. Thus, while access to citizenship insures some rights, it does not guarantee acceptance and belonging. To the contrary, citizenship not based on descent opens up an opportunity for the division of German citizens into categories of those who truly belong and those who do not.

One concept which has been used to talk about group belonging is “enoughness” (Blommaert and Varis 2015), that is, the concept that in order to be accepted as a member of a group or representative of a certain category, one must exhibit a certain number of key characteristics. This authenticity is something which is constantly being negotiated and what constitutes enoughness may change – not just over time, but also from one situation to another. In the case of German identity, we have seen that both legal criteria for citizenship and attitudes have changes somewhat since 2000, and are still in flux across interactions.

Thus, many Germans (in particular, those with migration background) must continually negotiate their belonging, and may often be positioned as the unintegrated Other. The process of Othering is a discursive process; through questions such as “Where are you from?” (Hatoss 2012) individuals are positioned as the Other, not belonging in the local space. Labels such as those discussed in this

2. see <https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/de/leben-in-deutschland/integration/integrationskurse/> for more information

research are a prime resource for Othering, because the existence of a named category contributes to its sense of legitimacy. Of course, one can still dispute that a label is appropriate, and as we will see in these data that is in some cases exactly what occurs.

Thus, exactly what set of characteristics are “enough” to make someone German is neither fixed nor finite, and determining which traits are essential is the negotiation of ethnic group membership. For those who adhere to an ethnonational ideology, descent – belonging by blood to the German people – is a key element in how Germanness has been defined (Ditlmann et al. 2011). This is a discourse of exclusion. For those who consider being German to be based on ethnicity, descent is a criterion which trumps all others; it cannot be compensated for by any amount of linguistic or social integration.

However, it should be noted that explicit reference to defining “German” in terms of blood and not cultural background has been shown to be dispreferred in many contemporary contexts, especially by young people (Fuller 2019, Moffit et al. 2018). Speaking German is often cited as part of belonging, but research has shown that language is often a necessary but not sufficient criterion; other social and cultural practices are often cited in the reproduction of inclusive ideologies, included economic participation and adhering to laws (Fuller 2019).

While potentially more inclusive, such discourses may also serve to exclude. In particular, when national origin or religion is perceived as determining cultural practices, this sets up people of certain backgrounds as unable to belong. In particular, in some discourses about integration, doing anything associated with Islam makes a person automatically not German, thus making integration and authentic German identity for Muslims by definition impossible (Fouratan et al 2014, Fuller 2018a, 2019; Holtz et al. 2013, Moffit et al. 2018).

3.3 Post-national discourse

Another discourse about German belonging is what has been called a post-national discourse, which focuses on how, with increased migration and diversity, nationality ceases to be a major focal point for self-identification (Wodak 2017). Specific to this analysis, instead of citing other criteria for Germanness, such as cultural behaviors or legal status, this discourse focuses on other aspects of identity as more important. For instance, Ezell et al.’s (2003) study of German university students shows that they tend toward a post-national identification, where Europeanness and transnational values such as human rights and social equality for all are stressed.

However, as Wodak (2017) argues, in many cases increased migration and diversity has created a backlash of ethnonational ideologies. Further, Krzyzanowski

(2010) has noted that while discourses and policies related to European identities may contribute to unity among EU citizens, it provides opportunity for both structural and discursive exclusion of migrants from outside the EU. Thus this discourse is often disputed. It is this presence of competing ideologies – ethnonationalist, inclusive, exclusive and post-nationalist – that we will address in this following analysis.

4. The term *Biodeutsche(r)*

In this analysis, I will look at the negotiating of belonging through the use of terms to denote different segments of the population in Germany. This analysis focuses on implicit meaning construction, looking at the underlying ideologies in the discourse instead of explicit discussion of the criteria for being German. However, as we will see, one significant aspect of the use of the term *Biodeutsche(r)* is that there is a lot of meta-commentary surrounding it.

Given the above-mentioned finding that many people avoid naming descent as a criteria for being German, it is of particular interest that the term I will address, *Biodeutsche(r)*, refers to exactly this criterion, and its use in these data have increased rapidly since 2015. Thus the use of this term brings into focus an attitude which is considered distasteful by some, because the development of this term calls attention to an ethnonational ideology. The complexity of these competing discourses surrounding the role of descent in determining belonging will be addressed in the subsequent analysis section.

Recent research on terms used to talk about portions of the German population show that the words for the Other serve not merely to describe but primarily to exclude. A study by Lutter (2016) investigates the changes in terminology over the years, from *Gastarbeiter* ‘guest worker’ to *Ausländer* ‘foreigner’ to the current term *Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund* ‘people with migration background’, and shows how these changes in terminology reflect changes in the status of the people denoted, but did not alter the fact that these terms served to distinguish these residents or citizens from “normal” Germans. Similar conclusions are drawn by Scarvaglieri and Zech (2013) in their corpus study of the use of the term *Migrationshintergrund* ‘migration background’, which is used to create a category of those who are not, and cannot be, authentically German.

There has been little work done on the terms used to describe Germans who do not have migration background. Indeed, these terms are often not commonly used in everyday talk. As the unmarked category in German society, Germans without migration background have been less likely, until recently, to be labelled

or to have their social characteristics discussed in mainstream discourse. Unlike the term *Migrationshintergrund*, which is an official term which has been taken up in (some) everyday language use, *Biodeutsche(r)* has no official standing and its origin is credited to a cabaret artist and an early use by the Green Party politician Cem Özdemir is described as a joking way to refer to Germans without migration background (Goldmann 2017). The goal of the term is described as making visible the privilege granted to those who are usually not labelled. In a study looking at the discussion of crime in contemporary German novels, Titarenko (2019: 34) states baldly that the term *Biodeutsch* has emerged “as a result of the tense relationship between refugees and local people”. Fuller (2019) notes that this term reflects a focus on ethnicity as the criterion for German belonging, but is remarkable in that it emerged initially as a means of mocking the majority group, and was then adopted by this group to refer to themselves. As I will argue below, the term *Biodeutsche(r)* is significant because of this development and also because its current use shows great variation and competing social meanings.

5. Methodology: Media data

Discourses about immigration and integration are reproduced in the media, meaning that they both represent and shape ideologies about national belonging. This analysis represents an exploratory examination of how the term *Biodeutsche(r)* is used in the press, and what societal discourses are represented in its use.

The data for this research were collected through a Nexis Uni search for the term *Biodeutsch* carried out in the summer of 2019, resulting in a corpus with 299 articles which used the term. The search was limited to German-language articles in German newspapers. This analysis does not look at how this term is part of the socio-political profile of individual newspapers, but rather provides a broader, more general view of the use of this terms in the press. Duplicate articles and adjectival uses of the word were eliminated; thus the numbers discussed here represent only articles in which this word was used as a noun. The uses were coded in terms of categories of meaning which emerged from the data. The counts given for each term are of the number of newspaper articles in which these terms appeared, as there were no instances of different meanings of the word occurring within a single article.

The term *Biodeutsche(r)* first appears in this corpus in 2008, when there are two articles which use the term. It occurs infrequently in these newspapers until the mid-2010s, when its use suddenly skyrockets, as can be seen in Figure 1. Because these data were collected before the end of 2019, the number for that year is not included. It must be noted that these numbers are simply a raw count of how many

articles used the term; because the corpus was collected by a search for the term, the data cannot be presented as occurrences per number of printed words. Thus this graph provides us with only a very simple fact: this term has become, since 2015, a common way of denoting a group of people. The question under investigation is, what ideologies about German belonging are reproduced through these uses?

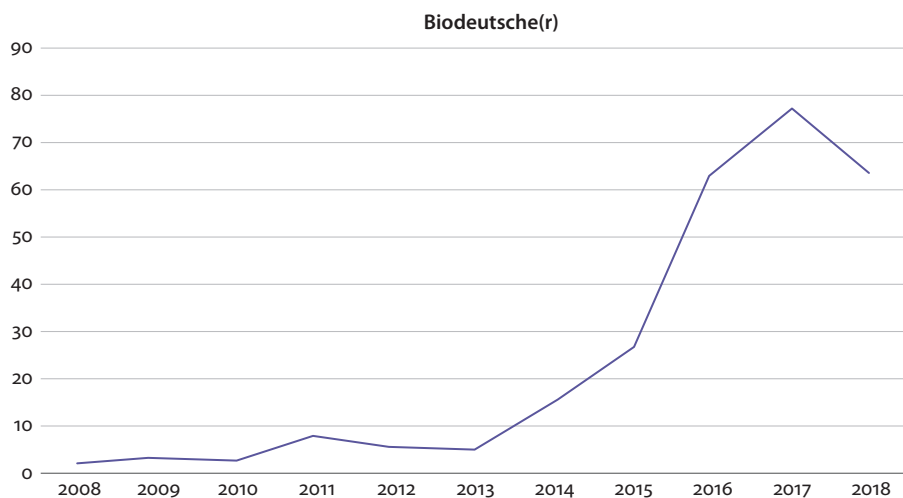


Figure 1. Trajectory of the use of *Biodeutsche(r)*

6. Overview of term and its meanings

There were 299 articles in this dataset which used the term *Biodeutsche(r)* as a noun. Categories of meaning were not pre-determined but emerged through the analysis of the data with the focus on ethnonational versus inclusive ideologies about belonging in Germany. The result of this was four social meanings, which could be further divided into two discourses: an ethnonational discourse, and a counter discourse which reveals a critical stance toward the validity of ethnic criteria for categorization of members of German society.

Within the examples which showed a critical stance, the first category is the use of this term to denote members of a privileged group. This clearly builds on the original intent of this term, to make privilege explicit. These examples show a recognition of inequality of experience based on whether one is categorized as having migrant background or falling into the unmarked category of *Biodeutsch*. In most of these examples, there is an implied if not explicit criticism of this inequality and the inherent discrimination involved. The second type of use of the term within the

counter discourse examples goes a step further, and in these instances the validity of the term is openly questioned. These two types of usage work against ethnonational ideologies about belonging in Germany.

In contrast to these two categories of meaning, there are two additional categories which do other ideological work. There are six instances of claims of reverse discrimination, that is, that it is *Biodeutsche(r)*, and not those of migrant background, who experience prejudice in Germany society. These comments represent the acceptance of this term and thus fall into line with the last category, which are examples in which the term *Biodeutsche(r)* is used in a putatively neutral way to refer to what is treated as an objective social category. The distribution of these meanings can be seen in Figure 2.

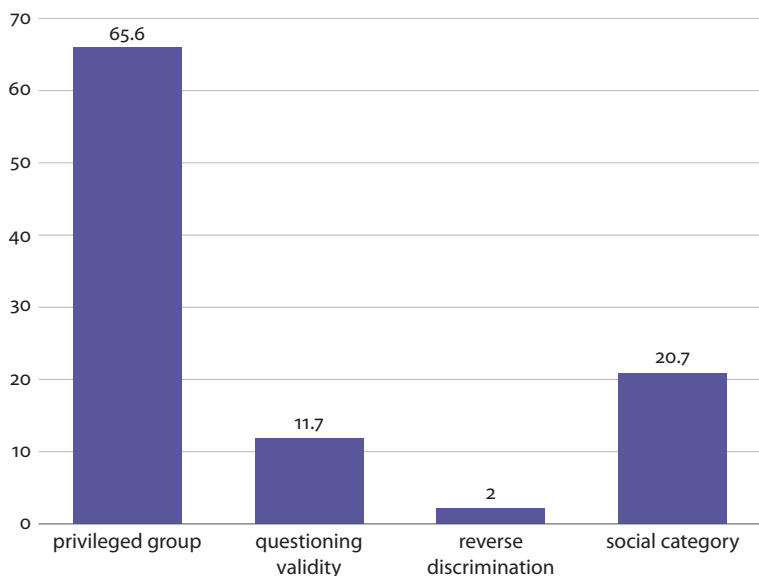


Figure 2. Percentages of categories of meaning for *Biodeutsche(r)* ($n = 299$)

6.1 *Biodeutsche(r)*: Challenging ethnonational ideology

As discussed above, *Biodeutsche(r)* appears to have begun its life with the goal of mocking entitlement in Germany society based on descent. Thus both of the first two uses of the term in the categories of referencing a privileged group and questioning the validity of categorization through ethnicity fit with this original stance. As can be seen in Figure 2, the most common use in these data ($n = 196$, 65.6%) was to refer to a privileged group in society.

In Example (1), we see an explicit reference to and critique of this privilege in the last lines. This example is part of an article in which the then state integration secretary Zülfiye Kaykin, a person with migration background, has been criticized for pursuing integration strategies that putatively are common practice among politicians without migration background; thus the critic here is the there are different standards for *Biodeutsche* than for people with migration background.

- (1) *Müsste Frau Kaykin aber den Hut nehmen wegen einer Integrationsstrategie, die auch von den meisten Integrationspolitikern ohne türkische Wurzeln verfolgt wird, wäre das Echo in der Migrantengemeinde wiederum absehbar: Was „Biodeutsche“ dürfen, darf eine Kaykin noch lange nicht. Wer kann das wollen?*
(Die Welt am Sonntag, November 6, 2011)

‘If Ms. Kaykin has to quit because of an integration strategy that is also pursued by most integration politicians without Turkish roots, the echo in the migrant community would again be foreseeable: What “Biodeutsche” are allowed to do, is far from allowed a Kaykin. Who could want that?’

The same problematization of the people with migrant backgrounds being penalized for the same actions that can be done without consequences by *Biodeutsche* can be seen in Example (2), in which there is reference to the “right” of *Biodeutsche* to loiter or hang out in the park, with the implication that if Africans do this in Berlin, this will be seen as engaging in suspicious activity. This example is illustrative of the ambiguity of the social work which this term does in such examples. Although it reproduces the category of ethnic Germans, it also notes the inherent discrimination in uncritical acceptance of this social category as meaningful in terms of cultural behavior.

- (2) *Im nahen Görlitzer Park versucht man seit einiger Zeit schon die Interessen der verschiedenen Stadtbewohner unter einen Hut zu kriegen, was in der Frage gipfeln kann, ob Afrikaner genauso wie Biodeutsche das Recht aufs Rumlungern im Park haben.*
(taz, die tageszeitung, 5 July 2014)
‘In nearby Görlitzer Park, attempts have been made for some time to reconcile the interests of the various city dwellers, which can culminate in the question of whether Africans, like *Biodeutsche*, have the right to loiter in the park.’

A stronger challenge to ethnonational ideologies is found in the second category, which contains examples which challenge the legitimacy of categorizing people according to descent. These examples comprise only 11.7% ($n = 35$) of the total uses, but they are significant because they are criticisms of the term itself, not simply of discrimination against people of migration background. In some cases, this critique is very explicit and is the focus of the text, as show in (3) and (4). In (3), we see

mention of *Biodeutscher* as a nomination for the *Unwort des Jahres* (literally, the ‘un-word of the year’, meaning ‘worst word of the year’) in 2016, a clear condemnation of the use of this word. In (4) we see an excerpt of an opinion piece which directly questions whether the word *Biodeutscher* should be used. The article reports on the critique of this word by the German president Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who said, in an event where he had invited people of Turkish background, *Es gibt keine halben oder ganzen, es gibt keine Bio- oder Passdeutschen* (‘There are not halves or whole, there are no bio- or passport Germans’). In the article, this is referred to as a *Plädoyer gegen Deutsche erster oder zweiter Klasse* (‘plea again [the concept of] first and second class Germans’). The article goes on to spell out their critique of this word, linking it to Nazi ideals.

- (3) ... Für das “Unwort des Jahres 2016” sind bisher Wörter wie “**Biodeutscher**”, “*Flüchtlingsobergrenze*” oder “*Umvolkung*” als Vorschläge eingereicht worden, (Solinter Morgenpost, 27 October 2016)
 ‘For the worst word of the year 2016 the words “*Biodeutscher*”, “refugee upper limit” and “ethnic replacement”³ have been submitted as suggestions.’
- (4) Fangen wir bei Steinmeiers Erwähnung des “*Biodeutschen*” an. Es ist tatsächlich ein dummes Wort, weil es scheinbar ironisch mit dem Label “*Bio*” spielt, sich jedoch nur lässig verdruckst am Rande des eigentlich abgelehnten Rassismus bewegt. “**Biodeutsch**” impliziert die Vorstellung einer von genetischen Veränderungen “reinen” deutschen Abstammung. Die Nazis hätten dazu gesagt: das Ideal vom “*arischem Blut*”. (Der Tagesspiegel 28 August 2018)
 ‘Let’s start with Steinmeier’s mention of the “*Biodeutschen*”. It is actually a stupid word, because it seems to play ironically with the label “*Bio*”, but is actually only borders on a racism which has been rejected. “*Biodeutsch*” implies the idea of a “pure” German descent from genetic changes. The Nazis would have said: the ideal of “*Aryan blood*”.’

Finally, in (5) we see another newspaper noting that this word appears frequently, but mostly in the context of questioning whether it is a good word. The *tageszeitung*, unlike the writer for the *Tagesspiegel* in the last example, does not make a definitive conclusion, but illustrates that the meta-discourse about this word is more the norm than the exception.

3. While the details of this term are beyond the scope of this analysis, it is a term that is focused on fear of migrants taking over Germany; for more commentary on this in the media, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umvolkung>.

- (5) *In einem unterhaltsamen Text über das Deutschsein schreibt Autor Daniel Haas: Ich meine die richtig, richtig Deutschen, Biodeutsche sagt die taz, glaube ich, dazu....*

Biodeutsch sagt also die taz? Tatsächlich? Tatsächlich! Der Blick ins Archiv verrät: Alle paar Wochen taucht das Wort mal in einem Text auf. Allerdings meistens genau deshalb, weil sich jemand fragt, ob es eigentlich ein gutes Wort ist. Ist es ein gutes Wort? Die taz sagt dazu: Wir wissen es nicht.

(taz, die tageszeitung 16 August 2018)

'In an entertaining text about being German, author Daniel Haas writes: I mean the proper, proper Germans, *Biodeutsche*, as the taz refers to them I think.... So bio-German says the taz? Indeed? Indeed! A look at the archive reveals that the word appears in a text every few weeks. However, mostly precisely because someone wonders whether it is actually a good word. Is it a good word? The taz says: We don't know.'

There are further examples of this which are less direct and explicit in their critique of this term. In (6), we see an example where the ability to speak German without an accent – implicitly, an index of belonging in Germany – is found in someone with a migration background. This challenges the idea that those who are not *Biodeutsch* do not share important cultural practices, such as speaking German natively, with *Biodeutsche*, and potentially questions whether being or not being *biodeutsch* is a valid category. In (7), loyalty to German sovereignty, and not ethnicity, is framed as the important criterion for belonging, again raising the question of what the social significance is of the category of *Biodeutsche(r)*.

- (6) Özgür "Ötze" Cebe ist kein "Biodeutscher", spricht aber akzentfreies Deutsch.

(Kölnische Rundschau, 23 October 2015)

'Özgür Ötze Cebe is not a *Biodeutscher*, but speaks German without an accent'

- (7) *Ein Xavier Naidoo mit Migrationshintergrund, der zu Deutschland steht und seine Souveränität verteidigt, gehört hundert Mal mehr zum deutschen Volk als die Biodeutsche Claudia Roth, die jeden Tag schlecht über Deutschland redet!*

(Berliner Zeitung, Oct. 11, 2014)

'A Xavier Naidoo with migration background, who stands by Germany and defends its sovereignty, is a hundred times more German than the *Biodeutsche* Claudia Roth, who speaks badly about Germany every day!'

In addition to these rather straightforward commentaries on the term *Biodeutsche(r)*, there are many instances of this term used in a playful, humorous key. One function of humor is cultural critique (Driessen 2015); the topics of humor are never randomly chosen but are issues of social relevance in the time and place where the joke is made (Kuipers 2008). Relevant for this analysis is the role of humor in

creating a focus on cultural assumptions to put them under scrutiny (Gilbert 2004; Procházka 2019).

In this case, mocking the term *Biodeutsche(r)* provides the opportunity to address the basic understanding, and even the reason for the existence, of this term. Joking about what something is called is one way of questioning the existing power structures. Further, humor can be used to mock holders of certain views. Rossing (2012) discusses how Stephen Colbert uses humor to mock those who claim to live in a postracial society; similarly, humor in this study is used to point out how the term *Biodeutsche(r)* is an indication of the lack of a postnational ideology.

One way in which this term is mocked is by drawing on the use of *bio* in German to mean “organic”, especially for food; this is a classic type of linguistic humor, a pun, which relies on the different meanings of this morpheme (Attardo 2008). This occurs in some of the articles which include a discussion of the meaning of the term, as in (8), as well in instances where social categories are discussed, as in (9). The example in (8) begins with a word play and ends with pointed sarcasm indicating how stupid the writer finds this term; similarly, in (9), the cabaret artist Özgür Cebe jokingly draws a parallel between organically grown or genetically modified produce and ethnic or migration background Germans to focus on the absurdity of this distinction for human beings.

- (8) *Sind Biodeutsche so etwas wie Biokartoffeln? Auf besonderer Scholle gewachsen? Ist “biodeutsch” dann eine Art Gütesiegel? Im Gegensatz zu normalen Deutschen, die an die Käfighaltung gewöhnt sind? Oder hat nur jemand in eurer Biohirnmasse zulange herumgerührt? Ach deshalb!* (taz, die tageszeitung, 2 May 2005)
 ‘Are *Biodeutsche* something like organic potatoes? Grown on a special farmland? Is *biodeutsch* then a kind of seal of approval? In contrast to normal Germans, who are used to being kept in cages? Or has someone been stirring around too long in your bio-brain mass? Oh, that’s why!’
- (9) (From an interview with cabaret artist Özgür Cebe) “*Born in the BRD*” [name of his program] *ist ein Bekenntnis zu diesem Land. Ich gelte ja nicht als “Biodeutscher”, sondern wohl eher als “Monsantodeutscher”. Trotzdem bin ich aber nun mal Deutscher.* (Stuttgarter Zeitung, 15 April 2017)
 “‘Born in the Federal Republic of Germany’ is a profession of loyalty to this country. I don’t count as a “*Biodeutscher*”, but rather as a “*Monsantodeutscher*”. Nevertheless I am German.’

The mocking tone which accompanies the use of the term *Biodeutsche(r)* is not only found in jokes about organic food; there are also frequent comments which seem to be intended to amuse which do not mock the form of the term but the meaning. These examples imply that the distinction between ethnic Germans and those with

migration background is irrelevant. In (10), reference is made to a German politician who is known for a book about how Germany is being ruined by unintegrated immigrants; here the writer counters this with a claim that the people in their city with migration background are integrated because they are just as unhappy as the *Biodeutschen*, thus making a mockery of the concept of integration.

- (10) *Sarrazin hat nicht recht, die Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund in unserer Stadt sind voll integriert. Sie sind genauso mies gelaunt wie die Biodeutschen.*

(taz, die tageszeitung, 11 April 2012)

‘Sarrazin was wrong, people with migration background in our city are fully integrated. They are just as grumpy as the *Biodeutschen*.’

In (11), the topic is football, a domain in which there has been a great deal of discussion about players with migration background (Fuller 2018b; Gehring 2016). In this example, the writer translates the euphemism *deutsch im klassischen Sinne* ‘German in the classic sense’ with *Biodeutsche(r)*, and also attributes this remark to a right-wing politician who is given the fictitious title of “Director of the Genetics Department”. The clear implication here is that the focus on the ethnicity of the players is discrimination. The ridiculousness and irrelevance of ethnicity is emphasized as the writer goes on to ask if one cheers more loudly for an “ethnic German goal”, and if this triggers nostalgia for the days when the players all had stereotypically German names. This use of *Biodeutsche*, both as a noun and an adjective, clearly seeks to portray concerns about ethnicity as not only distasteful but ludicrous.

- (11) *Kann es etwa sein, dass die nationale Bewegung die EM schlicht boykottiert, weil die Nationalelf, wie ihr Abteilungsleiter Genetik, Alexander Gauland, bemängelte, “nicht mehr deutsch im klassischen Sinne” ist, was auf Deutsch übrigens heißt, dass ihm zu wenig Biodeutsche mitspielen? ... Mich würde etwa interessieren, ob man als völkischer Deutscher bei einem biodeutschen Tor, beispielsweise von Bastian Schweinsteiger, doppelt so laut schreit wie bei einem Mustafi- oder Özil-Tor. ... Im frenetischen Jubel über das Tor des in jeder Hinsicht weißen Mannes Schweinsteiger dürfte jedenfalls auch Sehnsucht nach jener Zeit gesteckt haben, als Nationalteams noch nicht “La Mannschaft” hießen und ausschließlich aus Seppis, Bertis, Ullis, Horsts, Rudis und Karlheinzten bestanden.*

(Der Spiegel, 18 June 2016)

‘Could it be that the national movement is simply boycotting the European Championship because the national team, as its Director of Genetics, Alexander Gauland, criticized, is “no longer German in the classical sense”, which in German means, by the way, that not enough *Biodeutsche* are playing ... I would be interested to know whether you cheer twice as loud as a nationalist German at a *biodeutsch* goal by, for example, Bastian Schweinsteiger, than at a goal by

Mustafi or Özil. ... In the frenetic jubilation over the goal of the by all standards white man Schweinsteiger there would also have been longing for that time when national teams were not yet “La team” and consisted only of Sepps, Bertis, Ullis, Horsts, Rudis and Karlheinzes.’

These examples, which span the entire period of use of this term, follow in the spirit of the origins of the term: it was coined to mock those it named, used ironically to make fun of the idea that blood was more important than culture. In these usages, this term calls attention to the wrongness of what it names. As noted in the above-mentioned *Spiegel* article from 2017: *Die abschließende Antwort auf die Existenzfrage aller “Biodeutschen” lautet deshalb: Euch gibt es nicht. Diskriminierung, weil sich Menschen für “biodeutsch” halten, leider schon.* (‘The final answer to the question of the existence of all “Biodeutschen” is therefore: You do not exist. Discrimination because people consider themselves “biodeutsch” unfortunately does.’) In the next section, we will discuss the uses of this term which support an ethnonational ideology and thus are part of this discrimination.

6.2 Missing the joke: Reclaiming *Biodeutsche(r)*

Reclaiming a term means to take what has been intended as an insult and to embrace it as a marker of ingroup solidarity. This has arguably occurred with the term “queer”, both within and outside of academic circles (McConnel-Ginet 2002; Rand 2014); instead of indexing a negative social category, it is adopted as a positive term to describe the self. Usually, of course, this process occurs when a word is used as a slur to refer to a minority group; with *Biodeutsche(r)*, there is the added twist of this term being used to mock the majority group, or at least certain ideologies associated with members of that group. The reclaiming of this term is evidenced in the use for the self, as noted in Fuller (2019: 184). (This self-reference is also, for what it’s worth, part of the description of the term on Wikipedia; see <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biodeutsch>.)

While the above examples are a counter narrative which critiques a social hierarchy which privileges ethnic Germans, the examples of ethnonational discourse either refute this privilege or ignore it. One small group of uses claim reverse discrimination, that is, oppression of members of the majority group (i.e., *Biodeutsche*). Of the six instances (2%) which have this meaning in these data, four, as in (10), discuss the term itself as derogatory and its use as discrimination against ethnic Germans, claiming that this is a growing trend in German society. The other two claim other types of discrimination against ethnic Germans in German society, such as that ethnic Germans are considered racist for social commentary that is accepted from those with migration background. While this use of the term locates

the problem of discrimination as working against the ethnic majority, it nonetheless portrays ethnic stereotyping as discrimination.

- (12) *Populäre Schmähbegriffe sind der "Biodeutsche" und Variationen aus "Alman" und "Kartoffel". Vor allem die "TAZ", die sonst jede Diskriminierung geißelt, liebt dieses Vokabular. "Kartoffeln" seien "ignorant, geschichtsverdrossen und besserwisserisch", schrieb eine Kolumnistin im vergangenen Herbst. Der Text war kein Ausrutscher.*

(Neue Zürcher Zeitung (Internationale Ausgabe), 20 July 2018)

'Popular insulting terms are the "*Biodeutsche*" and variations from "*Alman*"⁴ and "*potato*". Above all, the "*TAZ*", which otherwise disparages all discrimination, loves this vocabulary. "*Potatoes*" are "ignorant, history-obsessed and know-it-all," a columnist wrote last autumn. The text was not a single occurrence.'

The final type of use ignores ideas of privilege and discrimination altogether; these examples occur in these data only since 2014, and thus represent a shift in stance toward this term. In these 35 usages (11.7%), the term was used to denote a social category, usually in combination with other named social categories, as in (13). Used in this way, as part of a list of social groups, it is portrayed as a neutral term which simply denotes a group in society determined by objective criteria, such as age group. Being an ethnic German is simply one category within a diverse society and the criteria for belonging are accepted as clear and concrete. It is this use, I argue, which is the most socially dangerous as it naturalizes the category of "ethnic German". These uses normalize this division as a factual aspect of diversity in Germany as opposed to a socially constructed social category. In both (13) and (14), the writers are trying to describe population diversity, and contrast *Biodeutsche(r)* with immigrant/migrants.

- (13) *Das Publikum ist gemischt, es geht bei 15 los, aber auch 50-Jährige kommen, Einwandererkinder, Biodeutsche. Sie spricht Jungs an wie Mädchen....*

(Die Zeit, 13 March 2014)

'The audience is mixed, it starts at 15 but 50-year-olds also come. Immigrant children, *Biodeutsche*. She appeals to boys as well as girls'

- (14) *....Männer und Frauen, Reiche und Arme, Rechte, Linke, Pazifisten und Nichtpazifisten, Migranten und Biodeutsche, Ungläubige und Gläubige welcher Religion auch immer.*

(Frankfurter Rundschau 28 January 2015)

'...men and women, rich and poor, right, left, pacifists and non-pacifists, migration and *Biodeutsche*, non-believers and believers of whatever religion.'

4. This is the word for 'German' in Turkish.

These examples do not assign characteristics to *Biodeutschen* – or members of other groups – but there are some instances where this term is not only used as if it is an accepted term which denotes an objective category, but also serves to construct the Other. In (15), although there is an explicit claim that descent (i.e., being a *Biodeutscher*) is not necessary to belong in Germany, there is nonetheless a clear contrast made: the *Biodeutscher*, who belong, and the Muslim, who must prove his patriotism.

- (15) *Sinnvoll allerdings bleibt die Frage: Wollen die Muslime zu Deutschland gehören? Wer sie bejaht, der muss nicht Biodeutscher sein oder sich nur noch von Eisbein und Sauerkraut ernähren. Er muss Verfassungspatriot werden, muss gleichsam das Grundgesetz neben dem Koran auf dem Nachttisch liegen haben.*

(Bilanz.de, 28 November 2018)

‘However, the question remains: Do Muslims want to belong to Germany? Whoever answers in the affirmative does not have to be a *Biodeutscher* or eat only ham hock and sauerkraut. They must become constitutional patriots, must have as it were the Constitution next to the Koran on the bedside table’

The category of *Biodeutsche* is also constructed, in a few instances, with reference to cultural knowledge – that is, the lack of knowledge about things which are not German. One example discusses how a *Biodeutscher* would not know what the *Zuckerfest* is (literally ‘sugar festival’, the German term for the celebration at the end of Ramadan; in Turkish this festival is called *Seker Bayrami*, in Arabic *Eid al-Fitr*). In another example, a comment is made that arabesque music is being played, which is described as unfamiliar to most *Biodeutsche*.

Thus the category of *Biodeutsche* as being knowledgeable about German cultural practices is implied, and there is implicit construction of the Other, the non-*Biodeutsche*, who participate in foreign cultural practices.

7. Discussion and conclusion

As this is a preliminary overview of a term which has not been previously studied, there are a number of limitations to this research. This analysis only shows us the public faces of these terms, but not the ways they are used in other contexts: in verbal communication, or in unmoderated online fora, unedited tweets, chats or personal messages. Further, another aspect of variation within the corpus which is not addressed is the different newspapers and also different types of articles within a newspaper; certainly patterns would emerge dependent on the intended readership of the press and the section of the newspaper. This a very fertile avenue for future

research, as the use of the term in different venues is part of the construction of the identity of the newspaper as well as part of a broader ideological development in society, but alas beyond the scope of this analysis.

However, we do gain some insights into the competing discourses about Germanness through looking at this overview of the use of these terms in newspaper data. First, the origin of the term as intended to mock certain stances about German belonging can be seen in the presence of this type of use throughout the data. The term is primarily used to call out privilege and challenge the relevance of ethnicity as an important criteria in social categories in German society.

The data after 2014 show the development of other uses of this term, namely as a simple reference, which entails the acceptance of ethnicity as an important features when describing people in Germany. This reproduced an ethnonational ideology. It is important to note that such usages are in the minority in these data, however, and the vast majority of the uses mark this term as problematic, ridiculous, or at least a word for which the meaning must be negotiated. It is used to directly critique discrimination in German society as well as implicitly mock the focus on ethnicity as an important aspect of German identity.

In short, what this analysis shows is variation in the uses of this term which is linked to competing discourses. There has been some normalization of the term *Biodeutsche(r)*, in the sense that it has been adopted for use by some as if this social category needs no explanation. However, the need to use the term – and the use has skyrocketed in the past five years – is a sign of the need to depict and challenge ethnonational ideologies, and this is done in various ways. There are direct challenges to the word as well as joking uses. While in some cases it is the ethnic Germans themselves who are made fun of, overwhelmingly it is the idea that ethnic Germans are more legitimately German which is held up for ridicule. The question that remains is whether future uses will expand on the supposedly neutral use of the term *Biodeutsche(r)*, or if the mocking tone is evidence of a challenge to ethnonational ideologies will persevere.

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