„Islam does not belong to Germany.”

A proxy debate for an insecure national identity? An analysis of a controversial German discourse and its underlying reasons.

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I. Introduction

Some may say that the history of strained relations between Christianity and Islam goes back to their first encounter around the 7th century when Muhammad experienced his first revelation of the Quran. According to most sources, Christianity had developed seven centuries earlier, founded on the teachings of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Muslims do not accept Jesus as the son of God because they see the trinity of the father, the son and the holy spirit as a betrayal of the Oneness of God. Muslims instead acknowledge Jesus as a prophet from God, who was meant to unite and guide the Children of Israel. Many Christians see this as an affront and regard Islam as a distorted emulation of original Christian teachings. The early Muslim conquests, the crusades and the ongoing war on terror are only the three most notably bloody chapters of Christian-Muslim conflict. One may wonder about the roots of these conflicts given that both religions share many beliefs, for instance about the significance of the holy scriptures, the teachings of the prophets, the ten commandments, humanity’s predisposition towards sin and lastly, about the hope for salvation through personal effort (and, for Christians, through a little help of divine grace).

There is as much extensive literature concerning the commonalities as there is about the incompatibility of these two so called world religions. Proving the validity or futility of such statements is not the aim of this paper. Rather, I aim to explore how a minority Muslim population is perceived and treated in a country of Christian majority and tradition in the 21st century. For this purpose, I chose to examine the reasons for the negative public perception of Islam in Germany from 2010 to 2018.

In 2006, then Federal Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble initiated the first German Islamic Conference, meant to institutionally establish a dialogue between the government and the Muslim community in Germany. At the opening of the conference, Schäuble made a statement that would echo in German society and media landscape for more than a decade:

“Islam is part of Germany and Europe. Islam is part of our present and our future.”1

Politicians from across the political spectrum have come back to this sentence over the last ten years with widely differing motives. The sentence has been upheld as a triumph of politically endorsed diversity by some while being condemned as denying Christian values and

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supporting an alleged Muslim takeover of German society by others. Given my personal inclination toward endorsing Schäuble’s statement, I want to dedicate this paper to an exploration of the reasons behind its condemnation. Although, or maybe precisely because, German society has experienced increased diversification over the past decade, the antonym of the sentence, that Islam is not a part of Germany, that Islam does not belong to Germany, has received widespread support by politicians, the media and civil society. Propagation of such statements has and will continue to have great influence on the future of German society as the number of people belonging to different faiths than those accepted as traditionally German is likely to increase given the fact of global (forced) migration movements and an increasingly mobile international work force.

Despite Schäuble being the first politician to openly proclaim Islam belonging to Germany, it is former Federal President Christian Wulff who is publicly credited with initiating the debate when he – in a speech titled “Appreciate diversity – promote cohesion” - , given on October 3rd, 2010, the anniversary of German unification, stated that Islam belongs to Germany, regardless of the nation’s Judeo-Christian history. When his successor as Federal President, Joachim Gauck, was asked in 2012 to comment on Wulff’s speech, he responded that he would grant Muslims the right to belong, but not Islam. The debate was then again sparked in 2015 when Chancellor Angela Merkel quoted and agreed with Wulff in a joint press statement with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Most recently, the debate was relaunched by Federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, who made clear on his first day in office in 2018 that he does not think Islam belongs to Germany. The Interior Ministry was renamed as Federal Ministry of the Interior, for Building and Homeland Affairs (Heimat) on the day Seehofer assumed office.

While reactions to Wulff’s first statement were predominantly positive, the mood had changed by 2015 when Chancellor Merkel decided to keep Germany’s borders open for thousands of asylum-seekers in need. Reactions to Seehofer in 2018 were mixed but opinion polls show that a large amount of German society is in agreement with his views. It is this


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most recent trend that prompted me to undertake the present endeavor of setting forth a combination of different theories and studies that may assist us in understanding the reasons behind the dismissal of Islam belonging. It is my hope that an appreciation of the reasons may enable a better confrontation and possibly an overturning of these presumptions. My usage of the term “Islam” will be restricted to Islam religion and people of Muslim faith. I do not intend an examination of political Islam but will add a short definition of the term and explanation of its omission in the chapter on key concepts.

I propose that there are two main reasons for the rejection of Islam in Germany: First, Islam is perceived as a threat to national identity and secondly, it is seen as incompatible with the prevailing German cultural citizenship representation. Herbert Blumer’s group position theory of prejudice, initiated in the 1950s, will form the basis of the first argument. I will supplement his theory with two recently conducted studies, which focus on the impact of perceived group threat for the emergence of prejudice, especially toward foreign minorities. I will proceed with a discussion of Charles Taylor’s writings on collective identity, which he identifies as a combination of basic principles and certain traditions, which Islam’s presence in Germany threatens to undermine. Arjun Appadurai’s insights regarding the fear of small numbers, meaning the insecurities that minorities are capable of inciting within a majority, will finalize this section.

The second argument proposes that German citizenship is a form of cultural citizenship with which Islam is incompatible. Cultural citizenship is a relatively new sociological concept, but it may be suitable to explore the predicament of Muslim belonging in Germany. While cultural citizenship tends to be regarded as more inclusive as an ethnic citizenship representation, Arjan Reijerse et al. argue that cultural citizenship may harbor equally robust and exclusive tendencies. Samuel Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations, although at times painfully simplistic in its political depictions, will prove useful in order to understand the strong dismissal of Islam as not compatible with Western principles such as democracy and gender equality. José Casanova will add to this second line of argumentation by pointing to the mistaken equation of secularism with modernity, which necessarily exposes religion and its followers (especially of a religion previously foreign) as primitive and unfit for inclusion to the modern German state.

One can argue that this distorted picture of Islam is owed in part to politicians and the media being understood as what Walter Lippman has coined “authentic messengers”. If these messengers portray the whole of Islam negatively and do not differentiate between religious and political Islam, public opinion will be influenced accordingly. The omnipresence of the debate about Islam belonging as well as its undifferentiated nature consequently increase public anxieties regarding Islam and have led many to adopt the oversimplified conclusion that an acceptance of Islam as a part of Germany equals the endorsement of authoritarianism and (questionable) political influence from Muslim countries in German politics. In order to better understand the emergence of such opinions, regardless of whether they are held privately or endorsed in public, I will intertwine their exploration with a discourse analysis of prominent statements that have shaped the public discussion about Islam belonging. The constant resurgence of the debate as well as the sudden insistence on a German Leitkultur\(^5\) demonstrate the ambiguity and fragility of both German national identity and German cultural citizenship.

The aim of exploring these two lines of argument is to show how negative propagations of belonging within a nation state may lead to a deterioration of political and civil stability. Denying minorities their right to belong may lead to a decline in social cohesion – which is what the denial of belonging claims to protect. Tragically, the rejection of Islam by the majority may itself prove to be the greatest obstacle to the integration demanded by the same people. Saying that Islam does not belong to Germany may thus be a self-fulfilling prophecy of the most negative kind.

As a way forward, I will conclude with reflections on the necessity of embracing an inclusive construction of German belonging. I will, once more, build on the works of José Casanova and Charles Taylor to draw a different picture of secularism, one that embraces and defends religious pluralism. Judith Butler’s concept of cohabitation will add an objective yet emotional appeal to rethink our feelings of ownership over national territory and explains how the denial of belonging can be understood as a denial of a basic human right.

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\(^5\) Mostly translated as “guiding culture”. Explorations of the term will follow in the chapter on key concepts and in the section on cultural citizenship.
II. **Method and Theoretical Framework**

This paper will discuss and combine different theories and hypotheses that may help in understanding the denial of Islam belonging to Germany. The two core explanatory frameworks, threatened national identity and cultural citizenship representations, will be examined by applying theories introduced by Herbert Blumer, Charles Taylor, Arjun Appadurai, and Reijerse et al., Samuel Huntington and José Casanova respectively. The final addition of Judith Butler’s theory will prove the imperative for a critical revaluation of belonging in a globalized world. My intent in choosing this collection of theories is to reflect the myriad of intertwined reasons that cause the emergence of ostracizing sentiments and behavior toward those foreign to us. I am certain that many people who hold the view that Islam does not belong to Germany are themselves unaware of why they feel so strongly about this issue. I (want to) believe that most of them are not racist but are experiencing xenophobic feelings, meaning “a fear of the stranger.”

All selected authors provide different angles into understanding this fear and its implications for the collective of the nation state. Only in their combination can they do justice to the social construction of reality and only in combination can they unfold their true explanatory power.

For this reason, I chose social constructionist theory and a transformative worldview as the framework for my exploration. Social constructionism addresses the foundations of societal beliefs that are taken-for-granted and accepted as reality, such as Islam simply not belonging, i.e. being unfit for inclusion to Germany. The social constructionist understands such attitudes as a product of a historical process of interaction between groups of people, reinforced or negated depending on the interest of dominant social groups. A look at how politicians have framed the debate about Islam belonging will help in exposing these interests. Following this social constructionist approach, I aim to examine the jointly constructed meanings and attitudes people hold toward Islam and its right to belong to Germany and more specifically, which reasoning lies behind them. This approach will allow me to highlight how the way a society forms its reality is a product of history and at the same time written anew with each social interaction.

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Adopting a social constructionist viewpoint will also enable me to better understand how feelings toward Islam are often not fact-based but instead built on shared assumptions, which are communicated and taken up through media discourse and are at some point understood as truths instead of opinions. Social constructionism will be valuable for both lines of argument because it can explain how feelings of a national threat as well as feelings of cultural incompatibility may be constructed as reality, regardless of the lack of factual evidence. Weaving prominent utterances of Islam not belonging to Germany into the analysis will offer the opportunity to directly apply the discussed theories to public discourse occurrences, consequently leading to a better understanding of the political and social context in which Islam incompatibility is propagated. All statements discussed in this paper will be from high-level politicians of one of the Union parties (political alliance of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU)), which have been leading the German government since 2004.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be of value here as it allows a focus on how language, especially the language of politicians being replicated by the media, can determine social and political reality. Even though I will concentrate mostly on the language aspect of discourse, CDA nevertheless is most fitting because it allows me to highlight how language, no matter how inconspicuous, is the ultimate tool of political power. The fact that words can so powerfully influence the creation of our reality is both the reason for and the leitmotiv in this paper. Language shapes and maintains our values and with that it legitimizes certain values while discrediting others. As Norman Fairclough has remarked, language is the primary domain of ideology, rendering an analysis of how governing parties use language to influence public opinion regarding Islam indispensable. My examination of the above mentioned theories will be governed by this line of thought as well as by Antonio Gramsci’s assertion that discourses, depending on who disseminates them, have the power to construct attitudes and beliefs in a way as to “make them appear ‘natural’ or ‘common sense’ while in fact they may be ideological.” Specific discourse tools that will be examined both explicitly and implicitly within this paper are ideological squaring, aggregation, impersonalization,

genericization and an “us versus them” rhetoric. A critical analysis of these tools will show how discourses can limit both what we perceive as reality and whether we recognize this reality to be socially constructed.

The use of CDA has also led to the adoption of a transformative worldview for this paper. My research aims to be transformative because I examine societal dynamics and group attitudes with the intention of better understanding the reasons behind their formation as well as unveiling the power relations that may covertly influence them. By exploring different explanations for people’s negative attitudes toward Islam, I hope to offer insights into how these attitudes may be understood and countered for Germany to emerge as the truly democratic society that it professes to be.

My research is further influenced by critical theory in that it follows an “emancipatory cognitive interest”. Borrowing from Jürgen Habermas, I aim to transcend both the instrumental and the practical kind of knowledge and offer an emancipatory knowledge that will allow people to reflect upon the social construction of their reality and to arrive at what Jack Mezirow has coined ‘perspective transformation’.

III. Key Concepts and Previous Research

Belonging

What do we mean when we talk about belonging? The construction of Islam as (not) belonging to Germany is often used carelessly to indicate a more normative debate about who belongs to a given society or nation, who decides who belongs and what the repercussions of denied belonging may be. Abraham Maslow identified belonging as a fundamental human need, as compared to a want or desire. In his hierarchy of needs, he places belonging as the third strongest human motivation, immediately after physiological needs, meaning requirements for human survival, and the need for safety. According to Maslow, an individual can only move from one hierarchical need to the next when the former one has been satisfied. This means that the two needs coming after social belonging – self-esteem and self-

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actualization – cannot be achieved without a prior sense of belonging.¹⁷ When applied to Germany, denying Muslims the right to belong may bear unforeseen psychological repercussions for the affected individuals.

Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary took up Maslow’s need of belonging almost fifty years later and introduced the belongingness hypothesis, which asserts that wanting to belong is a fundamental human motivation that has strong effects on emotional well-being. They claim that people need both positive interactions with people and they need to know that the interaction is based on a mutual and stable bond upon which they can rely. This means that even though an individual may feel as though he/she belongs to Germany, if there is no certainty that this feeling is based on reciprocity, a sense of belonging is not achieved. Baumeister and Leary believe that this can have dire consequences, such as reduced self-esteem, aggression, depressive symptoms and mental illness.¹⁸ Leary claims that the psychological pain of denied belonging may in fact be so intense that it triggers the same brain regions normally involved in the experience of physical pain.¹⁹

Social Identity Theory, first introduced by Henri Tajfel, posits that our identity construction depends on group membership. It can be deduced that denying individuals this group membership by refusing to regard them as equal citizens may impede their identity formation. Ironically, our denial of Islam belonging to Germany may be rooted in an understanding of us (“the West”²⁰) versus them (“Islam”), a juxtaposition we end up reinforcing by denying Muslims the inclusion in our “we”. The fatally simplistic categorization of the West and Islam and its repercussions will be further explained in the second part of this paper with the help of Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations.”

Even though “us versus them” thinking is a staple of out-group stereotyping, it is essential to ask what consequences the consistent denial of Islam belonging to Germany will have. Individuals typically choose to form groups with individuals who they identify as similar.


²⁰ I will from this point onward use “the West” without quotation marks, which is not to be understood as a personal endorsement of this geo-political construction.
because that requires less cognitive and emotional effort. Including those who were previously identified as others, as “them”, into the “us” group may seem unnatural, but experiments have shown that individuals very easily form groups with individuals different from themselves - if they are provided with a common goal. In the classic Robbers Cave study, boys were randomly divided into two groups. When the groups were asked to compete, in-group favoritism as well as hostility toward the other group ensued. But when the groups were asked to cooperate to accomplish a superordinate goal, the group understanding expanded and initial hostility vanished.21 This study is relevant for the examination of Islam belonging to Germany because it shows that an agreement on the larger goals of a society offers the opportunity for a more inclusive and rewarding concept of national belonging. It also shows that denying Islam the right to belong may indeed backfire because when Muslims and their faith are being denied belonging by German society, they necessarily need to look elsewhere to satisfy their core need for group inclusion. Adopting an exclusive understanding of German belonging may then play into the hands of those fundamentalist Islamic leaders on whom the distrust of Islam is originally based.

**Imagined Community**

This exclusive understanding of German belonging can be understood as the result of a fragile imagined community. A concept originally introduced by Benedict Anderson, the imagined community is a social construct of belonging, imagined by people within a nation state in order to feel as part of a group.22 The shared imagining of community is crucial for the viability and survival of the nation state because it builds upon comradeship and solidarity between thousands or millions of people who will never actually meet but nevertheless need to regard one another as part of the same community. The arrival of newcomers, for example a Muslim minority, tests the functionality and limitations of the imagined community: who is allowed to join and who is dismissed? Suddenly, what was previously unquestioned and supposedly self-evident, becomes challenged. What constitutes the German imagined community? Anderson wrote that every nation has finite boundaries with which it separates itself from other nations, a necessary process for self-definition.23 The threat of minorities, especially asylum-seekers and refugees fleeing their home countries, to the concept of the

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23 Ibid.
imagined community is thus twofold: they were previously part of a different imagined community, one against which the German imagined community defined itself and thus clearly separate. With that, they force a revaluation of what constitutes the boundaries of the imagined community, a rethinking of why we may feel more connected to the unknown stranger living on the other side of the country than to our Muslim neighbor.

**Political Islam**

Much of the distrust toward our Muslim citizens may be based on the confusion between religious and political Islam, which is one of the root causes for the intricate nature of the debate about Islam belonging. In public debate, there are many different names used for what I define as political Islam, such as Islamist fundamentalism, conservative Islam, Islamism et cetera. All these terms are used to represent people who embrace Islam as a political ideology that gives clear instructions for the fight - the jihad - against what they perceive as their enemies, mainly the West and Western presence in Muslim countries. They do not accept the law to be above religion and claim that their interpretation of the Sharia, meaning God’s immutable law outlined in the Quran, cannot be challenged. The main difference between a person committed to political Islam and a person practising Islam as a religion is thus the interpretation of the Quran, or rather the Sunnah, which outlines the customs, practices and traditions that should govern the Muslim way of life. A political Islamist will try to follow the precepts of the Quran and the Sunnah as closely as possible, meaning exactly the way the prophet Muhammad did. A religious Muslim also adheres to Muhammad’s teachings but in line with historical developments and adaptations. A practising Muslim and an Islamist thus differ in their acceptance or rejection of historically grown traditions. While the discussion that this paper aims to dissect simply uses the term “Islam” without differentiation, I will focus on trying to understand why people may reject religious Islam as belonging to Germany. This decision was made because there is political and societal agreement about the dismissal and incompatibility of political Islam whereas matters become more ambivalent when the debate shifts to Islam as a religion.

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25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.
German Leitkultur and Heimat

Something that thrives on the public confusion of political and religious Islam is the debate about the German Leitkultur. Although the repercussions of this debate will be discussed in detail in the examination of the cultural citizenship argument, a short history of the term seems appropriate. While originally introduced in 1998 by Bassam Tibi as a European Leitkultur, the term was first used in the German context that same year by former Interior Minister of Brandenburg, Jörg Schönbohm, who pleaded for the adaptation to a German Leitkultur by immigrants.

The term was taken up by the media who mostly critiqued it as “dubious” (“Die ZEIT”) and “vague” and “obscuring” (“TAZ”). Nevertheless, the term repeatedly made it into the political discourse in the following years, especially through prominent utterances by CDU politicians including Friedrich Merz in 2000, then leader of the parliamentary group CDU/CSU in the German Bundestag, and Norbert Lammert in 2005, then President of the Bundestag. Thomas de Maiziè reheated the debate in 2017 when he presented what he called the 10 principles of German Leitkultur in a guest commentary in “Die Bild am Sonntag” (BamS). By then, Bassam Tibi had already distanced himself from the political instrumentalization of the term and spoke of a “failed German debate”.

Today, Leitkultur is anchored in the governmental programme of the CDU/CSU and Jens Spahn, current Federal Minister for Health, has proclaimed the CDU as “the party of the Leitkultur”. But despite the political anchoring of the word and the recurring debate regarding the meaning of it, there is no political or social consensus on what constitutes this German Leitkultur.

The term Heimat is similarly contested and unfortunately this paper will not allow for an elaborate analysis of it – this will, however, be taken up by the final chapter on ideas for

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future research. The fact that the Federal Interior Ministry was officially renamed in 2018 to include the term *Heimat* shows how relevant an exploration of its resurfacing is for German society. Until recently, the term was still to be found at the right political margins, given its central importance within Nazi ideology. Today, the term can be found everywhere from political debates to cooking books. Author and journalist Daniel Schreiber made a valuable point when he wrote that the resurfacing of *Heimat* points to an elusive place of longing\(^\text{33}\), a place we want to retreat to that never existed in the way we construct it in the present. The sudden initiation of the *Heimat* ministry, which, by February of this year had not introduced a single bill in the Bundestag\(^\text{34}\), may then be understood as a symptom of collective feelings of rootlessness and a perceived loss of cultural and national identity. If found to be valid, these feelings need to be politically addressed but Germany needs to be aware of the signals a *Heimat* debate conveys to the outside at a time where many countries across the globe are renouncing multilateralism and glorify their respective national *Heimat* as the ultimate place of retreat.

**Ian Buruma and “Murder in Amsterdam”**

Dutch writer Ian Buruma addresses the fragility and ambivalence of the above-mentioned concepts in a Dutch context in his highly acclaimed book *“Murder in Amsterdam”*. Published in 2007, the book is a journalistic endeavor trying to understand the sentiments surrounding the murder of Theo van Gogh, a controversial Dutch filmmaker. Van Gogh was brutally killed by Mohammed Bouyeri, a Moroccan-Dutch Muslim who was enraged about van Gogh’s latest film, which he regarded as blasphemy towards Islam. Even though Buruma writes about the Netherlands, his writing is valuable for an analysis of the German and broader European context as well. Most notably, Buruma manages to provide an objective yet delicate analysis of the situation in his home country, one that neither demonizes Islam nor does it naïvely endorse multiculturality.\(^\text{35}\) Instead, Buruma warns that a hardening of the already existing

\[^{33}\text{Schreiber, Daniel. „Deutschland soll werden, wie es nie war.“ Die ZEIT. 10 February 2018.}
\[^{34}\text{Friedrichs, Julia et al. “Keine Heimat für Gesetze. Tagesschau. 25 February 2019.}
\[^{35}\text{German Islam scholar Ralph Ghadban distinguishes between multiculturalism and multiculturality. According to him, multiculturality means the non-negotiable core values of democratic pluralism that are anchored in the Basic Law: freedom of opinion and religion, the rule of law and equal rights for men and women. Multiculturality, i.e. cultural diversity, is subject to these values. According to the doctrine of multiculturalism, however, all cultures and actions must be treated equally, even if they consist of intolerant practices, such as forced marriage. I will follow this line of thought in this paper and use multiculturality unless I am discussing or quoting a work where multiculturalism is explicitly mentioned.}
trenches between proponents and opponents of Islam belonging may inflame hostilities that bear the potential to dissolve any kind of social cohesion. Because European secularism has led to a privatization of religion and a disappearance of religion in the public sphere - apart from century old churches turned into tourist attractions - Islam has become the only visually recognizable religion in many European countries.\(^\text{36}\) For many, accepting this trend equals a dismissal of Christian tradition and for many more, accepting Islam belonging shows a lacking appreciation of the hard-won victories of liberal thought and democracy, such as gender equality and same-sex marriage. The Quran and the Sharia provide teachings that contrast these victories; however, it is important to differentiate between the teachings of the Quran and a practicing Muslim living in the Netherlands or Germany. As studies by the Bertelsmann Foundation\(^\text{37}\) have shown, the social and political environment of an individual has a greater impact on held convictions than the individual’s religion\(^\text{38}\). Further, one must not personally agree or endorse same-sex marriage to be able to recognize it as a democratic achievement on the quest for equality.

Buruma also provides Muslims the chance to speak for themselves, something that the German debate about Islam belonging has yet to fully implement. What stands out is a young Muslim woman explaining her ambitions to work for the Dutch government, which she would not be allowed to do if she does not discard her headscarf: “It’s as if you are mentally disappeared.\(^\text{39}\)” This goes beyond denied belonging and shows the very real psychological consequences this debate has on people. Given the human need to belong, denying a group of people the feeling to belong to their fellow citizens will make them vulnerable and prone for any other group who promises a sense of belonging, who provides them with recognition and respect. If this trend manifests, denying Islam belonging may have very real and potentially dangerous consequences for Dutch, German and European society. Buruma is correct in


\(^{37}\) The Bertelsmann Foundation was established in 1997 by Richard Mohn as part of the Bertelsmann multinational corporation. According to its own statement, the foundation promotes political and societal reforms necessary for a sustainable German society. The Bertelsmann sources used in this paper have been thoroughly analyzed and can be easily accessed for the reader’s own assessment.


asserting that the question of whether we accept Islam as a European, a Dutch and a German religion, will determine our future.

IV. History of Migration in Germany 1955 to Present

1955 - 1973

Germany is torn about whether to consider itself a country of immigration. However, beginning in 1955, Germany signed labor recruitment agreements with several countries such as Italy, Spain and Greece and with Muslim dominated countries like Turkey, Morocco and Tunisia, which saw an increase of foreigners coming into the country. Germany's economy was booming, and the country needed a workforce willing to engage in industrial mass production, heavy industry and mining. The foreign workers were granted temporary residence in Germany and were given a job in those industries. Photographer Hans Rudolf Uthoff, who accompanied the Bochumer Association for cast steel production AG to their recruitment travel to Turkey, recalls the optimism and hope those men had during their embarkation to Germany – their promise for a better future for themselves and their families. After the recession of 1966 and 1967 and the oil crisis in 1973, the agreements were stopped, and the recruitment of foreign workers came to a halt. Of the roughly fourteen million people who had come to Germany between 1955 and 1973 as part of the labor recruitment agreements, nearly eleven million went back to their home countries.

1973 – 1990s

Of those who stayed, many made use of the right to family reunification and brought their families to Germany – the number of people who came to Germany this way almost counterbalanced the number of people returning to their home countries, leaving the country with a large number of people whose permanent integration had not been politically

The years that followed saw high rates of unemployment and a lack of political efforts for social integration. The 1990s then brought a stark increase of asylum-seekers to Germany, mainly people fleeing from the crisis regions of the Yugoslavian war and from the escalating situation in the Kurdish-populated part of Turkey. Xenophobic attitudes intensified as the local German population regarded the foreigners as competition on the labor market, for housing and for social benefits. Germany experienced numerous riots against its foreign population, with the most public and shocking example being the 1992 Rostock-Lichtenhagen riots, where, under public applause of about 3,000 onlookers, the shelters of asylum-seekers were besieged for several days and finally set on fire.

2015 – Present

Immigration and asylum applications decreased during the late 1990s and early 21st century but then skyrocketed again in 2015 through a high influx of asylum seekers from the Middle East and parts of Africa. The main reason for this sharp rise in asylum-related immigration is the ongoing civil war in Syria and the threat posed by terrorist organizations in the neighboring countries, as well as the unstable political conditions and stagnation of economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The government’s decision to open its borders to asylum-seekers on September 4th 2015 has and still does divide the country; for some, even the time has become divided between a “before the border opening” and an “after the border opening”. At the Federal Press Conference several days earlier, Chancellor Merkel had said three little words that would come to find far-reaching reverberation in the weeks and years to come: “Wir schaffen das.” (We can do this!) She was speaking about what is now called the European refugee crisis, which was at that point already looming on the horizon but whose true magnitude had not yet been understood. On that weekend in September, 15,000 asylum-seekers

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46 Ibid, pp.18.  
49 Ibid. pp.24-25.  
50 Technically, the German government simply decided to not close its borders as European borders are open in the Schengen area.
seekers crossed the Austrian borders into Germany, it would come to be approximately 1.1 million people by the end of 2015.51

Opening the borders was a necessary humanitarian response but this act of solidarity has since then led to deep trenches within German society, frictions between proponents and opponents of Merkel’s refugee policy run across families. The rise of the populist right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD) can almost exclusively be contributed to their cheap propaganda against asylum-seekers, refugees, and anything connected to Islam. Co-founder and leader of the AfD, Alexander Gauland, infamously changed Merkel’s quote to: “Wir wollen das gar nicht schaffen!”52 (We don’t want to do this!) In the months to come, even moderate politicians, and especially politicians from Merkel’s own party (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), openly critiqued her for her decision and spread an atmosphere of insecurity and of the country being stretched thin.

What unites these very different times of high foreign influx is lacking political preparedness. Although the influx of labor recruits during the 1950s to 1970s was desired and pushed by German politics, the government was taken aback by the task of integrating those for whom they had initially only planned temporary integration plus a large number of their family members. This delicate situation was a result of lacking political foresight – the recruitment ban of 1973 confronted foreign workers in Germany with the difficult decision of whether to return home - a place most of them had left due to lacking economic opportunities - or to reunite with their families in Germany. The German education system as well as its economy were unable to cope with the following demographic change, leading to frustration on the side of the local as well as the migrant population. The same sentiments and lacking political prevision can be observed after the 1990s admission of asylum-seekers as well as after the 2015 influx. State preparedness for such extraordinary events is key for maintaining an atmosphere where both the local and the migrant population can approach each other with trust and without thoughts of competition. Xenophobic attitudes are the result of a fear of the other and associated feelings of insecurity.53

The Churches

Interestingly, it was the Christian churches who first recognized the integration of Muslim guest workers as an important and decisive task for German society. This proactivity may have been grounded in the declaration Nostra Aetate of the Second Vatican Council, held in 1965. The declaration defines the Church's attitude to non-Christian religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam with the intention of emphasizing their similarities without concealing their differences. The paragraph on Islam closes with an insistence to put aside past disputes and enmities between Christians and Muslims, and "to strive sincerely for mutual understanding and to stand together for the protection and promotion of social justice, moral goods and, not least, peace and freedom for all human beings".54

The heads of both the Catholic and Protestant church in Germany have been vocal and in agreement about Islam belonging, the basic tenor being that we must see others as people first; faith comes afterwards. As Pope Benedict XVI said in 2005, the dialogue between Christians and Muslims is not an option but a necessity.55 It was the churches, not the government, who first institutionalized this dialogue: In 1979, the Christian-Islamic encounter and documentation center (CIBEDO) was founded in Cologne with the aim of promoting interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Islam as well as peaceful coexistence of Christians and Muslims. Other associations have since followed, such as the Christian-Islamic Society (CIG), established in 1982, and the German Coordination Council for Christian-Islamic Dialogue e.V. (KCID), founded in 2003.

Both the Catholic and Protestant church highlight the imperative nature of interreligious dialogue and criticize the debate about Islam belonging as misleading and as misjudging the importance of including Islam into German society in the same way other religions are included – officially recognized but subordinate to the Basic Law. For religious communities to be able to participate in legal relations with the state, as the Christian and Protestant church do, they must acquire legal status, for example by forming an association. Unfortunately,

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Muslim religious associations have not come together as a union, analogous to the Catholic or Protestant Church, leaving a myriad of associations as possible counterparts for the state.

This fragmentation may have political reasons and it may be rooted in the Sunnite-Shiite segregation. But regardless of the underlying motives, the fragmentation has left the Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institute for Religion (DITIB), the Islamic association with the largest number of members in Germany, as the primary interlocutor for state authorities. This is problematic because DITIB has organizational and institutional links to Turkey's religious committee Diyanet, which is effectively controlled by the Turkish government. All DITIB leaders are either Turkish state officials or employees of Diyanet, all imams are sent and paid by the Turkish government. This influence of a foreign government is naturally viewed critically but given the unwillingness of other Muslim religious associations to establish a union, DITIB will, at least for the foreseeable future, remain the primary counterpart for the state when it comes to Muslim religious affairs. This negatively affects the public perception of Islam and effectively silences more moderate voices of religious Islam.

For other Muslim religious communities to become meaningful partners for the state as it is envisioned in the German state-church law, in order for them to become the civil society force that they themselves want to be and which is expected of them from German society, they must form alliances, preserve their political independence and abandon any claim to political validity.

The Basic Law

Some may wonder about the reasonableness of the debate about Islam belonging given that the freedom of religion is enshrined in the German Basic Law:

“The freedom of faith, of conscience and of religious and ideological confession are inviolable. The undisturbed practice of religion shall be guaranteed”. 56

Disputes typically emerge regarding the boundaries of the freedom of religion when people see their fundamental rights of undisturbed practice of religion, which also means the practice of no religion, to be violated. Atheists, just like believers, have the right to remain unaffected by religious influence. Many regard Islam, mainly the public display of Islam, as violating this right. I agree that the religiously justified curtailment of other rights, such as in the case of forced marriage, the circumcision of women, blood revenge or the exclusion of women from

public life, is incompatible with both the Basic Law and liberal thought. Such religious
displays cannot be accepted in Germany. The fact that religious freedom is enshrined in the
Law also means, conversely, that the Law is above religion. A strong and viable democracy
must clearly condemn religious communities aiming to determine public moral and opinion.
Similarly, the political order must not presume to legitimize itself religiously either. The
German Federal Constitutional Court demands that the state does not identify itself with a
particular religious or ideological confession. Rather, it must act according to the principle of
neutrality. In the German case, this means that we cannot deny Islam belonging to Germany
on the grounds of secular democracy and in the same breath highlight Germany’s Judeo-
Christian tradition as the defining national element.

While the term “Judeo-Christian tradition” implies ancient shared principles between Judaism
and Christianity, Judeo-Christianity is in fact a recent, politically motivated invention that
seems, at best, unfitting in a country responsible for the systematic murder of two-thirds of the
European Jewish population. Even though the term may have originally been used as a
gesture of reconciliation and inclusion provoked by shame and guilt at the Christian
involvement in the Holocaust, it is currently used as a means of demarcation in the debate
about the presence of Islam in the West. The reference to God in the preamble of the Basic
Law does not justify the reference to a Judeo-Christian tradition and does not diminish the
responsibility of the state to guarantee religious-ideological neutrality. It follows that for the
Basic Law to remain meaningful in the way it was intended, its contents need to be discussed,
lived and politically defended; otherwise, its words ring hollow.

Emergence of Islam as the Problem

The initiation of the German Islamic Conference in 2006 was an important step to include
Islam as an equal German religion. The fact that the invitation of this first conference invited
practicing Muslims to a joint discussion and snack during the fasting month of Ramadan
revealed the urgent need for communication between the state and Islam. When asked about

57 "Remaining Jewish Population of Europe in 1945", Holocaust Encyclopedia. United States Holocaust
Memorial Museum. https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/remaining-jewish-population-of-europe-
58 Almond, Philip C. „Is There Really Such A Thing As The “Judeo-Christian Tradition”?“. ABC Religion &
59 Betz, Tobias, Sonja Pohlmann und Carsten Volkery. „Schäuble wünscht sich „deutsche Muslime“.“ Spiegel
Online. 27 September 2006. https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/islam-konferenz-schaeuble-wünscht-
the purpose of the conference, the Federal Ministry of Interior stated better integration of Muslims in religious and socio-political terms while underlining that the focus should not be on the relationship between Islam and Christianity, but on the relationship between state and religion.\textsuperscript{60}

Unfortunately, this clarification was not taken up by public and political discourse on Islam belonging. Instead, debates continued to be dominated by the incompatibility of Islam with the German state and its religious traditions. By 2015, the year of the most recent influx of asylum-seekers and almost ten years after the initiation of the German Islamic Conference, the envisaged dialogue between the German state and its Muslim community had failed to be implemented and the undifferentiated debate about Islam led to fatal misunderstandings and the equating of religion with a political agenda. Much of the public still considered Islam religion as a threat to their way of life. The 2015 influx of asylum-seekers and refugees refueled these feelings of threat and further blurred the lines between people forced to flee their homeland, migrants searching for a better future, practicing Muslims, and fundamentalist Islamists with a claim to political power. Germany was once again confronted with an unforeseen influx of people for which it was not prepared. The enmities and distrust toward foreigners, originally born out of economic insecurity in the 1970s, inflamed once again and found their ultimate culprit in Islam.

While 2015 should have had both the government and the media taking a strong stand regarding both the rights and obligations of those entering the country, it was the debate of Islam incompatibility that was once again taken up. In 2016 alone, public television broadcasted over 50 talk shows about refugees (most of whom came from Muslim dominated countries\textsuperscript{61}) and their ability and willingness to integrate in German society.\textsuperscript{62} The Bundestag election of 2017 was largely determined by the refugee policies proposed by the different parties, with the right-wing AfD entering the Bundestag as third strongest force being its most


widely shocking result. In a chapter of their party program, specifically dedicated to their rejection of Islam, one can read:

"Islam does not belong to Germany. In its spread and in the presence of a constantly growing number of Muslims, the AfD sees a great danger for our state, our society and our system of values. An Islam that does not respect or even oppose our legal system and claims power as an exclusively valid religion is incompatible with our legal system and culture."

The party took advantage of the already existing confusion regarding religious and political Islam and used this to incite unreasonable rejection of Muslims as a threat to German society. This paragraph is a textbook example of both exaggeration and fear mongering. Pointing to a “constantly growing number of Muslims” is a form of aggregation, inciting fears of a minority takeover by conveniently leaving out actual numbers that may disprove this statement. The reasons for the growing number of Muslims, namely that most of them have come to Germany as refugees, meaning people who were forced to flee their home countries due to persecution, is also ignored, effectively nullifying any chance for sympathy or compassion. This is a form of both genericization and impersonalization that impedes the perception of Muslims as equals and of asylum as a basic human right. Indicating Islam’s disregard of the legal system and its aim for political power further leads to unquestioned protection of German society and its values – which the party regards as so universally understood that they do not need to be mentioned. The whole paragraph makes use of ideological squaring by highlighting the positive and threatened “us” while emphasizing the negative and threatening “them”.

None of these claims are, or need to be, proven with facts in order to unfold their intended effect. Even though granting Islam the right to belong to Germany does not, in any way, equal an endorsement of the Basic Law being supplemented with the Sharia, the rhetoric used by the AfD blurs this important line of differentiation. According to the Infratest dimap research institute, 57 percent of the German population are worried that the influence of Islam is getting increasingly strong. I assume that most people who respond in such a way fear political Islam and not their practicing Muslim neighbor. However, if the difference between

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religion and a political claim is not repeatedly underlined in public discourse, people are increasingly incapable, and unwilling, to separate one from the other.

While this paper does not allow for a critical discourse analysis of the media’s contribution to these tendencies, we can confidently assume that the consistent coverage of Islam has led the German public to drastically over-estimate the number of Muslims. The blur of Islam religion, political Islam, refugees and the generally foreign in public discourse has added to this misperception. The focus of both politics and the media on the refugee issue in the year leading up to the 2017 election may have thus unintentionally contributed to the rise of xenophobic and specifically islamophobic attitudes. The first line of argument – threatened national identity – explains how the perception of a threat may indeed have a greater effect on people’s opinions than its plausibility.

V. Exploration of National Identity Threat Argument

Herbert Blumer and Perceived Group Threat

Herbert Blumer’s relevance for this paper is twofold. In 1931, he introduced the term symbolic interactionism, which he credited to his teacher and well-known social psychologist George Herbert Mead. Blumer proposed that social reality is a fluid and constantly negotiated process, one that is created through the symbolic interaction between individuals. The symbols of interactions are constantly produced, arranged and redefined and are the basis for social and individual action. What makes this framework so relevant for this paper is its social constructionist approach which implies that we must put ourselves in the others’ shoes to understand the symbols that determine their action.

In 1958, Blumer published another work, focused on explaining race prejudices, which he proposed may be a reaction to perceived threats to the social status as a group. Dominant groups aim to preserve their advantaged social position and regard the existence of minority

67 Ibid.
groups as diminishing their prerogative and position of power.\(^{68}\) Minorities thus signify possible disruptions in existing social arrangements, which is experienced as a threat by those in power, the majority. Whereas Blumer’s theory focused largely on the clash of economic interests between groups, the theory shows that it is the perceived threat (regardless of whether that threat is of economic, social or political nature), which leads to hostility: the reality of the threat is subordinate.

Scott Blinder confirmed these findings in 2015 when he wrote about “imagined immigration”. He adds to Blumer’s theory by showing that there is a strong association between the mental images or perceptions of immigrants and attitudes toward immigration policy: it is in fact the perceived number of immigrants that is more relevant than the actual number.\(^{69}\) Of special interest regarding Germany is Blinder’s statement that resistance to immigration increases when there is a feeling of receiving more migrants than others, even if this may not be the case in terms of actual numbers.\(^{70}\) If population size is taken into account, Germany ranks only fourth within Europe with their intake of refugees and asylum-seekers\(^ {71}\), however, the prevailing sentiment in Germany is one of being the only state to welcome people in, leading many to plead for a more restrictive asylum and refugee policy. Similarly, the consistent and non-differentiated media coverage surrounding issues of immigration, refugees and Islam contributes to an increased awareness and consolidation of these issues, which in turn increases people’s reservation and anxiety.

Jack Citrin and John Sides add another relevant aspect for my examination of Germany. Their article on immigration and the imagined community points to a tendency to overestimate the size of minorities, especially if they are visually conspicuous and distinguishable from the

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\(^{70}\) Ibid.

majority population. Given that the German public is mostly free from religious symbols, the Muslim headscarf attracts attention and increases an awareness of the bearer’s otherness, leading many to accept the AfD propaganda of a Muslim takeover as quite plausible. The 2015 Bertelsmann Religion Monitor found that 57 percent of Germans perceive Islam as “very much” or “somewhat” of a threat, despite only 5.4 to 5.7 percent of the German population identifying as Muslim. This shows that the imagined community of the nation state can be challenged by only a small number of people whose inclusion into that concept seems unnatural and requires conceptual efforts.

Charles Taylor on “Modern Social Imaginaries”

The philosopher Charles Taylor builds upon the imagined community with his concept of modern social imaginaries. Taylor posits that the social imaginary is a broad understanding of the way people imagine their collective social life. For people to act together, as one nation and imagined community, requires agreement on the values that underscore their social imaginary. A high degree of common commitment and identification is necessary for the modern nation state to be understood as a form of common will. Taylor argues that this makes the nation state extremely vulnerable to mistrust. As soon as there are speculations about the breach of trust or about lacking commitment by parts of the community, the basis of the nation is threatened.

An example: even though crime statistics have proven that refugees and asylum-seekers are not more criminal than the average German population, events like the sexual assaults on New Year’s Eve 2015/2016 show how easily trust toward an entire population group can be shattered by just one single event. Months of integration efforts of both the migrant and the

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local community can be nullified with just one report claiming lacking commitment or wrongdoing. Given the undifferentiated media coverage that equates Muslims with refugees and asylum-seekers and vice versa, apparent wrong-doings of one group inherently affect the other.

Even though most people understand that individual actions should not be used to paint the picture of an entire migrant community, they may nonetheless feel unwilling to extend their trust to that community in the same way they do to other strangers with whom they happen to share the same birth country, with whom they self-evidently share an imagined community and social imaginary. This points to the difficulty of defining and upholding a collective identity within a pluralistic nation, especially when faced with people who may have in the past, in their home countries, been part of a different collective identity. Taylor argues that for a democratic nation state to remain relevant, the political identity needs to be embraced and upheld by all members. This identity is defined partly by an agreement on basic principles such as democracy, human rights and equality and partly by an agreement on historic, linguistic or religious traditions. Depending on whether an individual focuses on the principles or the historical traditions of collective identity, Muslims and Islam will have very different chances of being included. Unfortunately, the German debate regarding Islam belonging increasingly depicts Islam as being incompatible with all the mentioned aspects of collective identity but especially with Germany’s religious tradition.

Even those politicians who embrace Islam belonging to Germany are diligent in their emphasis of the state’s religious tradition. A closer look at some of the most popular utterances of negated Islam belonging shows how difficult a task the inclusion of Islam into the German collective identity may prove to be if we value shared traditions more than we do shared principles.

**The Indecisiveness of German Debate**

At the festivities for the 20th anniversary of German unity, on October 3rd, 2010, Christian Wulff, then Federal President of Germany, said the following words:

“First and foremost, however, we need a clear stance. An understanding of Germany that does not restrict belonging to a passport, a family history or a faith, but one that is broader in

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We need to understand this sentence as a response to a public debate that had been sparked by the 2010 publication of a book by Thilo Sarrazin, member of the Social Democrats (SPD) and former member of the Executive Board of Deutsche Bundesbank. In his book, titled “Germany abolishes itself”, Sarrazin argues that the combination of declining birth rates, a growing lower class and immigration from predominantly Muslim countries will eventually lead to an islamization of Germany. Previously, he had caused a stir when he claimed that increased immigration of Muslims to Germany will lead to a decline in the country’s average intelligence. Sarrazin was met with harsh criticism from his party colleagues as well as from Chancellor Merkel and eventually had to resign from his functions at Deutsche Bundesbank, yet efforts to exclude him from the SPD failed. Despite these backlashes, Sarrazin managed to have a lasting effect on the public debate surrounding Islam and its place in Germany. More than 1.5 million copies of his book were sold, and it remained the number one on the Spiegel bestseller list for 21 weeks in the years 2010 to 2011.

Tensions were consequently high at the time that Wulff gave his speech on October 3rd. But instead of gathering behind his endorsement of Islam belonging, German politicians mirrored the indecisiveness of public debate. Many praised Wulff for his courage in defending multiculturality, while many others began the painfully absurd and revealing differentiation of saying that while Muslims do belong to Germany, their religion certainly does not. For example, Joachim Gauck, successor of Wulff as Federal President, distanced himself from the statement and said: “I would have simply said that the Muslims who live here belong to

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Volker Kauder, then leader of the parliamentary group CDU/CSU in the German Bundestag, commented similarly in an interview in 2012 when he stated that: “Islam is not part of our tradition and identity in Germany and therefore does not belong to Germany. But Muslims do belong to Germany.” Current Interior Minister Horst Seehofer remarked in his first interview as acting Minister in 2018: “Islam does not belong to Germany. Germany is shaped by Christianity. (...) But the Muslims who live with us naturally belong to Germany.” Many had previously resorted to similar differentiations, among them former Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich (CDU) and current Bavarian State Prime Minister and CSU Party Chairman, Markus Söder.

What this shows is a political unwillingness to incorporate Islam into German collective identity. It shows both political indolence and arrogance when politicians assume that people with another religion, Islam in particular, will not, or cannot, be able to adopt the principles of democracy, human rights and equality as their own. Even though religious tradition may be an important aspect for many to separate their national identity from others, the insistence on a religiously homogenous state will ensure that Germany is ill-prepared to thrive in an ever-increasing pluralistic world. In fact, attaching German collective identity solely to aspects that cannot be changed or adopted by others, such as historic, linguistic and religious tradition, seems like just the kind of backwardness that is otherwise criticized about Islam.

**Arjun Appadurai and “The Fear of Small Numbers”**

Arjun Appadurai adds to this line of argument by exposing how fragile and vulnerable the project of a national identity truly is and with what vigor it can nevertheless, or precisely because of that, be defended. In his 2006 essay “The Fear of Small Numbers. An Essay on the Geography of Anger”, Appadurai explores the nature of violence in a globalized world and how this has shaped the nation state’s relationship with minorities. One of his essential arguments is that globalization has led the nation state to be suspicious of minorities, who pose a threat to its unity and power, which is already experienced as diminishing through the change from national economic networks to global ones. Appadurai sees the media as largely

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responsible for minority resentment because it presents minorities or the respective ‘other’ within a nation as targets for feelings of insecurity, which globalization evokes on both an individual and collective level. Their presence, presented as a negative effect of globalization and global migration movements, is experienced as a “betrayal of the classical national project” and a failure of “the national ethnos”.\textsuperscript{86} This necessarily results in dissociation from minorities to secure the self and the national collective.

This creation of and distinction from others is a requirement for the definition of the ‘we’, rendering the ‘we’ dependent on the existence of the other, ‘them’.\textsuperscript{87} Minorities, Muslims in this case, have thus become both a requirement for and a threat to German identity. Even though they may be denied inclusion to German identity, the latter is very much dependent on Islam as its antidote against which German identity can define itself. A revealing example of this dynamic is that it needed the high influx of Muslims to Germany for the Interior Ministry to establish a branch that deals specifically with questions of ‘the German homeland’ (Heimat). Similarly, the success of the AfD is inexplicable without their right-wing propaganda against Islam and Muslims. In the style of Goethe’s Faust, we may say that the question of Islam belonging has become the ‘Gretchenfrage’\textsuperscript{88} of German national identity.

If we follow Appadurai’s argumentation, we can assume that “us versus them” rhetoric will gain in impact through globalization. Mobile identities, fast-moving technologies of communication and large migration flows threaten the traditional boundaries of the nation state and will lead to increased feelings of insecurity on the part of the national majority. Whereas the existence of minorities may, as stated above, indeed be necessary for the identity formation of the majority, their existence may also lead the majority to adopt what Appadurai calls “predatory identities”.\textsuperscript{89} Appadurai believes these to be a result of the fatal combination of nationalism with the idea of a national ethnos that requires purity and separation from others as well as a constant claiming of superiority.\textsuperscript{90} This promise of both national unity and uniqueness is doomed for failure in a globalized world with tensions between identities of

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{87} Hegel, Georg W.F. \textit{Hauptwerke in Sechs Bänden.} Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2018.
\item\textsuperscript{88} “Gretchenfrage” is a German idiom, inspired by the character of Gretchen in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s “Faust” (1808). Gretchen asks Faust “…wie hast Du’s mit der Religion?” (How do you feel about religion?). In public discourse, the term “Gretchenfrage” is used to indicate a question (not necessarily about religion) that is aimed to reveal true but undisclosed intentions and may thus be unpleasant to answer.
\item\textsuperscript{90} Ibid, pp.42.
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origin, identities of residence and identities of value.¹ These tensions, highlighted by the media through their focus on minorities, blur the lines between collectives that were previously neatly defined by the nation state. Globalization questions the natural givenness of the nation state and with that, robs people of their most convenient collective grouping. But because globalization is an intangible concept, and as such cannot be held responsible, minorities become the next best target.

Appadurai believes that it is common for cultural majorities aiming to be exclusively linked with the identity of the nation.² Naturally, including Muslims into German national identity challenges this singularity and is seen as a possible contamination of German culture. The 2015 Bertelsmann Religion Monitor found that when asked how to best live together in cultural diversity, 52 percent of the German population responded that immigrants should adapt to the culture of the mainstream society.³ When the purity of the cultural majority and thus the content of national identity is threatened by minorities, identities turn predatory. Whereas the Religion Monitor findings do not yet prove the emergence of predatory German identity, they do show that more than half of the population regards Islam as incompatible with German culture, or rather unfit for an inclusion into German culture, rendering cultural adaptation the only option to preserve both cultural unity and the relevance of the German nation state.

VI. Exploration of Cultural Citizenship argument

The question of cultural adaptability leads to the second set of arguments I want to explore within this paper: that German citizenship is understood as a form of cultural citizenship with which Islam is incompatible. Most citizenship literature focuses on ethnic and civic citizenship representations. Ethnic citizenship is built on common descent whereas civic citizenship is built on people living in the same national territory and adhering to agreed societal rules and laws. Naturally, the civic citizenship representation is more inclusive than an ethnic representation because the latter is dependent on blood ties. Immigrants, for example, will never be able to obtain ethnic citizenship whereas civic citizenship is seen as

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² Ibid, pp.52.
open for all who commit to it. The 1990s brought another citizenship concept into the discussion: cultural citizenship.

Cultural citizenship rests on a symbolic definition of culture, according to which culture is understood as a system of meaning that individuals use to communicate and interact with one another.\(^{94}\) Most cultural citizenship scholars regard these systems of meaning as open-ended and not rooted in one unchangeable representation of meaning.\(^{95}\) Cultural citizenship would consequently need to be open for inclusion and not necessarily confined to one nation or community. Will Kymlicka makes that point in his widely known book “Multicultural Citizenship”, where he argues that minority cultures, such as those of immigrants, can be accommodated within a liberal democracy based on cultural citizenship, eventually leading to the emergence of a multicultural society that embraces different societal cultures and is thus open for the inclusion of immigrants and their cultural systems of meaning.

While culture seems to be a more inclusive category than ethnicity, the former is nonetheless often regarded as the ‘heart of society’. If we proceed with this imagery, it seems natural that societies aim to defend their cultures with all their might – for when the heart stops beating, the body is lost. Culture is the fabric of societal unity: societies are essentially self-created groups of people that pretend that their grouping is natural, based on cultural commonalities and harmony. Social critic Cornelius Castoriadis sees culture as the imaginary institution of societies, one that allows societies to institutionalize tradition, values, norms - a way of life.\(^{96}\) Every society institutes itself by means of imaginary significations, which are communicated and understood as cultural values and norms. The pursuit and internalization of these values is then established as the cultural norm of the given society.

**Arjan Reijerse et al. and Cultural Citizenship Representations**

Given Castoriadis’s assessment of culture, it may be more difficult to open societal culture for the inclusion of others because it threatens the essentialist assumption of culture being the


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\(^{95}\) Most notably Renato Rosaldo “Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy”, Will Kymlicka in “Multicultural Citizenship. A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights” and Nick Stevenson in “Globalization, National Cultures and Cultural Citizenship”.

natural product of a certain grouping of people. Similarly, Arjan Reijerse, Kaat Van Acker, Norbert Vanbeselaere, Karen Phalet and Bart Duriez caution that we may need to adopt a more exclusive understanding of culture. They argue that the liberal aim of defining citizenship on cultural terms, upholding the ideal of an inclusive and culturally pluralistic society, may in fact achieve the contrary: an increase of negative attitudes toward immigrants and whoever is defined as the cultural other.

Following Social Identity Theory, Reijerse et al. assert that identities derived from group membership are an integral part of a person’s overall identity. Self-categorization theory posits that members of a group undergo a process of self-stereotyping. This means that members of the group decide on certain ingroup prototypes with which they can both easily identify and differentiate themselves from other groups. These group prototypes include norms, values and customs and lay the basis for the definition of cultural citizenship. Contrary to both civic citizenship, which is necessarily available for all those living in the national territory and adhering to societal rules, and ethnic citizenship, which is necessarily closed to any inclusion of outsiders, cultural citizenship depends upon the subjective definition and significance people place on what they understand as their culture. The question of Islam belonging to Germany clearly shows strong cultural citizenship representations in Germany because both ethnic and civic representations do not allow for much debate - the former is exclusive while the latter is inclusive. It is the cultural citizenship representation that allows room for interpretation, a room that a decade of German public debate has shown to be filled with a myriad of subjective understandings of German culture and its inclusivity. Religious freedom may be enshrined in the German Basic Law, but as Reijerse et al. write, “having been granted citizenship by the state does not guarantee acceptance as a fellow citizen by national majority group members.”

In their study of high school students from six different EU countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Sweden), Reijerse et al. examined, inter alia, how a cultural citizenship representation affects attitudes toward immigration and how robust these attitudes are in comparison to ethnic citizenship representations, commonly understood as the most robust and clearly confined citizenship representation. As they had predicted, cultural

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98 Ibid.
citizenship representation related positively to ethnic citizenship representation and negatively to the civic citizenship model, challenging the claim that cultural citizenship models are naturally fair, liberal, and open towards immigrants. However, the more astounding finding was that the cultural representation proved to be even more robust than the ethnic representation in its negative attitudes towards immigrants. This means that members of a national majority may be even more hesitant to regard outsiders and immigrants as fellow citizens when they adhere to the cultural citizenship model than when they base citizenship on common descent, which is exclusive by nature. This is, if attested through further studies, a shocking testament to the increasingly culturally framed citizenship debate.

**The German Leitkultur**

The German debate about Islam belonging has, since the beginning, been dominated by references to a threat to German culture. In 2010 - the year of both the publication of Thilo Sarrazin’s book “Germany abolishes itself” and Christian Wulff’s speech at the German Unity Day, and arguably in response to both events - Chancellor Merkel and Horst Seehofer, then Bavarian State Prime Minister, declared that the multicultural concept had failed. Seehofer went as far as to state that “multiculturalism is dead” and that his party (CSU, sister party to Merkel’s CDU) was committed to the perseverance of the German Leitkultur.

Even though the term was first used in 1998, discussions about the German Leitkultur came to the forefront of public debate only once the German public saw itself confronted with a large influx of people, mainly Muslims, who, by their mere presence and ‘otherness’, seemed to challenge the validity of German culture. Unfortunately, instead of seeing this as a chance to sharpen and reinforce its Enlightenment value system, the German public took to the most natural and effortless response: defense. Without agreeing on the contents of their Leitkultur, everybody was at the forefront of defending it against potentially disruptive Islam influence. A study by Paul Snideman and Louk Hagendoorn’s on multiculturalism in the Netherlands found that majority group members expect and demand assimilation to national culture in

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100 Ibid. pp. 626


102 Ibid.
order to protect cultural homogeneity, i.e. the purity of national culture. This exposes that exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants may indeed be adopted out of fear, not out of reasonable threat. If we recall Castoriadis’s imaginary significations, we can understand how the emergence of different sets of significations threatens the naturalness and objective necessity of our own sets of significations. Other cultures threaten the historical ‘givenness’ of our own culture and require a deeper assessment of what it is our culture entails and what it is that differentiates it from others.

Ironically, the literal translation of the term Leitkultur refers to the guiding principle of culture whereas in the German discourse, it is most often used to refer to a culture everyone must adhere to – a significant departure from the original meaning of the term. German-Arab sociologist Bassam Tibi introduced the term in 1998 to define a European Leitkultur, it was meant to define the essential values of modernity: democracy, secularism, the Enlightenment, human rights and civil society. Tibi argued that the coexistence of different cultures, as envisioned by multiculturality, requires consent on the irrevocability of these values. This simply means that there are values that everybody must accept before we can begin to tolerate, accept and gain from each other’s differences. Unfortunately, the public debate surrounding the German Leitkultur often puts the latter in juxtaposition to multiculturality – as though it has to be one or the other. More than anything, this shows how fragile German culture truly is, if it requires the extinction or abandonment of other cultures for its survival. Instead of regarding multiculturality as a chance to learn from other cultures while still being firmly rooted in our own value system, German Leitkultur has become the battle cry of an insecure German society. The fact that in 2016, then Minister of Food and Agriculture, Christian Schmidt, aimed to include the eating of pork and drinking of beer as part of the German Leitkultur, shows how tragically estranged the debate has become.

Hagendoorn, in a paper published together with Gerard Kleinpenning, suggests that the focus on citizenship being defined in cultural terms – in this specific case without a consensus on

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105 For example, the official political programme from the AfD reads: “German Leitkultur instead of Multiculturality.” In their understanding, the German Leitkultur is a static and naturally non-inclusive concept built on shared language, religion, customs, habits and traditions.

the content of German culture - may also be an indication for what they identify as symbolic racism. The authors argue that the horrors of World War II have rendered blatant racism, based on race and ethnicity, socially unacceptable and condemnable but outgroup prejudices and feelings of superiority have manifested in a more subtle form of racism based on cultural dominance. The goal of this new form of racism is the maintenance of ingroup culture, untainted by foreign influence. Regardless of whether one decides to label this belief of cultural purity as a form of racism, the constant referral to the necessity of protecting the German Leitkultur points to the belief that this Leitkultur is inherently superior and needs to be protected from foreign contamination. We can call this symbolic racism because it pretends to aim for the preservation of tradition whereas it aims for cultural homogeneity. It divides people along cultural lines and presupposes that this division is natural. However, accepting other cultures as part of a nation does not hinder the preservation of that nation’s cultural roots. But when national citizenship becomes solely defined via cultural terms, the inclusion of people with a different cultural background presents an obstacle to social cohesion. Consequently, and as seen in Germany, the local population demands complete adaptation of German culture, otherwise one will be punished with a denial of belonging.

**Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations”**

This demand for cultural adaptation does not necessarily need to be rooted in a form of racism in order to unfold divisive tendencies. A look at Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations”, despite being rightly criticized for its essentialist depictions of what constitutes civilizations, explains why. Published in 1993, only two shorts years after the fall of the Berlin wall and the Iron Curtain, Huntington predicted that world politics will from now on be dominated by conflicts between different civilizations. He outlined a civilization as a cultural entity defined by common elements such as language, history, religion and customs and a self-identification of its people. A civilization is to be understood as the broadest common cultural denominator, meaning that Bavarians may be (definitely are) at odds with Berliners, but both will come together under the umbrella of German culture and Western civilization. Even though Huntington at times paints a painfully simplistic picture of world politics, I

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108 Ibid.

believe he is correct in his assumption that “the dominating source of conflict will be cultural”.110

Huntington presents several explanations for his prediction of a clash of civilizations, some of which we can confirm within the German context. First, Huntington argues that civilizations are more fundamental than political ideologies and thus far more difficult to propitiate. People are generally willing to accept people with differing political views as part of their in-group whereas a difference in historical traditions, customary behavior and religious beliefs - meaning a difference in civilization - is seen as a threat to in-group cohesion. Studies have found that 61 percent of Germans believe Islam to be incompatible with the Western world.111 We can deduce that Islam is here not only understood as a religion but as Islamic civilization, with its different history, languages, cultures, traditions and religions. Whereas differences in class status, ideology or political views can be changed, a change in civilization is nearly impossible.

Secondly, Huntington predicts that increasing interactions between civilizations, propelled by globalization, will intensify “civilization consciousness”.112 Whereas civilizations, as understood by Huntington, have existed side by side for centuries, increasingly global economic networks and migration movements necessarily lead to a confrontation of people from different civilizations. Our civilization consciousness intensifies through these confrontations with other civilizations against which we need to define our own. Large numbers of asylum-seekers and immigrants from Islamic countries will consequently lead to a stricter demarcation of the boundaries of our Western civilization.

Lastly, Huntington is correct in his assumption regarding the diminishing significance of the nation state as the ultimate source of collective identity. Cultural adaptation is only expected from those who come from different civilizations, which is supported by the fact that nobody in Germany expects immigrants from Italy or Spain to assimilate and discard their culture whereas immigrants from Syria or Afghanistan, i.e. Islamic civilization, are asked to shed

their religion, culture and customs in order to be accepted as fellow citizens. Even though the public debate is focused on the preservation of German culture and tradition, we can assume it is the protection of Western civilization that is ultimately meant.

This again highlights that religious and political Islam are often not understood as separate entities but as synonymous and as part of the greater Islamic civilization. I believe that this fatal conflation is due to an understanding of world politics as a clash of civilizations. Islam in Germany is not regarded only as a religion but as a general threat to everything considered Western, leading to the natural conclusion that the increased presence of Muslims in Germany will lead to a clash of the Western and the Islamic civilization. What is tragically forgotten is that religion in fact constitutes only a part of civilization and that religious differences are not necessarily a threat to civilizational or national cohesion. It is equally tragic that those who evoke fears of Islam civilization tend to simultaneously disregard the values of human rights, equality and democracy - the values which Western civilization upholds as its greatest triumph and which Islam is accused of disregarding. Unfortunately, this simplistic and ill-founded juxtaposition of Islam versus the West has crept into public debate where it has become deeply entrenched.

José Casanova and the Misunderstanding of Secularism

José Casanova, head of the Berkley Center's Program on Globalization, Religion and the Secular, has identified this fusion of religious Islam with the whole of Islam civilization as the essential dilemma of multiculturality in Western Europe. Casanova adds an important dimension to this debate by proposing that the rejection of multiculturality, or in the German case the denial of Islam belonging, may be caused by a mistaken union of secularization with modernization, or, similarly, secularization with democratization.

For Casanova, the dilemma of Islam inclusion in Europe can be traced back to a limited European understanding of the history of democracy. He argues that the obstacle to successful inclusion of Islam into European, or in my case German, identity, may be mistaken secularist assumptions about the relationship between religion and democracy. Such assumptions typically propose that secularization is the modern response to long-lasting religious wars, which in turn can be led back to the fatal fusion of religion with politics. The modern

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separation of these two realms is seen as a demonstration of progressive human development. Casanova argues that such goes the narrative of the foundational myth of modern European identity, perpetuated by politics, the media, and consequently, the public. This argument is interesting not because Casanova aims to present an alternative reading of European history, but because he illuminates the often unquestioned assumption that secularization is a necessary premise for democracy. Casanova makes a compelling case when he states that despite the fact that the recent century has produced some of the most violent and bloody conflicts in human history – none of which were based on religion but were the product of modern secular ideologies – religion is still seen as the main cause for conflict by most Europeans.

A study by Andrew Greely, titled “Hostility towards religion in Europe” found that over two-thirds of the population of every western European country views religion as “intolerant” while the majority of those countries also agree that “religion creates conflict”. It is essentially regarded as the antidote of progress and as undermining democracy. Interestingly, the Bertelsmann Religion Monitor found that 90 percent of Sunni Muslims, which make up more than 70 percent of Muslims in Germany, regard democracy as a desirable form of government. This shows that whereas Muslims are not resistant to democracy at all, it is Europeans that are resistant to believe them. These widespread prejudices regarding religion and Islam in particular, may be part of a secular construct that helps Europeans differentiate themselves from others, specifically from religious others and particularly Muslims, as more modern, progressive and enlightened.

Casanova argues that this insistence on Islam as a threat to European identity may have resulted from several dimensions of ‘otherness’ being culminated in Islam as the ultimate ‘other’. The fact that the vast majority of Western European Muslims are immigrants has led to a parallelization of immigration with Islam:


115 Ibid.


and

“The immigrant, the religious, the racial, and the socio-economic unprivileged ‘other’ all tend to coincide. (...) All those dimensions of ‘otherness’ now become superimposed upon Islam, so that Islam becomes the utterly ‘other’.”

These tendencies do not allow for the integration of Islam because accepting the other as a part of oneself will necessarily shatter, or, at the very least, challenge one’s own construction of self. The German struggle of accepting Islam reveals the fragility of German identity and culture as well as the limitations of our secular tolerance. Whereas we see the Western and secular separation of religion from politics as one of Europe’s greatest achievement, we fail in granting others the intellectual capacity to do the same. If we believe that every practicing Muslim has surely been indoctrinated with Islamic political agenda, we have good reasons for believing that they will not be able to adopt our secular and democratic values. Although European history has shown that a state being governed by secular values does not necessitate a dismissal of religion, we nevertheless believe that accepting Islam as a German religion undermines our secular and democratic political values.

Repercussions of Denying Islam the Right to Belong

The undifferentiated nature of the debate which declares the whole of Islam as backward and unfit for inclusion fuels feelings of European rightful superiority and creates potentially irreconcilable divisions. As Casanova wonders, will Muslims ever be able to pass the unwritten rules of European membership?

Charles Taylor writes that it is natural for an in-group to assume that those from outside, those with differing basic views, cannot really subscribe to the principles we live with – not the way the in-group does. I believe that this may be negligent ignorance: if we regard values of human rights, equality and democracy as our values, as Western values that are naturally superior, we prevent Muslims from embracing these values as theirs as well. Seeing Islam as the enemy of European Enlightenment values is thus misleading in that it may turn out a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Ian Buruma writes:

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'Attacking religion cannot be the answer, for the real threat to a mixed society will come when the mainstream of non-revolutionary Muslims has lost all hope of feeling at home.'

Not differentiating between political Islam and Islam religion is liable to inflame hostility on the side of those who are being denied the right to belong, often despite them having citizenship or having been born in Europe. As outlined by Charles Taylor, free societies require a higher level of commitment than authoritarian ones because decisions previously made by a ruler are now shifted to citizens. For this commitment to develop, people need to form a bond of identification with one another. Denying Muslims their inclusion within this bond necessarily makes them look elsewhere and receptive for promises of belonging voiced by despotic and authoritarian Muslim regimes. What we risk is the ignition of dangerous feelings of Muslim victimhood – something shared by all terrorists having performed their deadly work since 9/11.

VII. Reflections on the Necessity of Embracing the Positive Construction of Islam Belonging to Germany

Where does this leave us? The different reflections and theories presented above form the basis of a better understanding of the manifold reasons people may have for adopting a critical stance toward Islam inclusion. I want to add two arguments of why it is essential for the German state and its people to adopt a positive construction of Islam belonging. First, I will build on the arguments of Casanova and Taylor and show that we need to understand that secularism does not equal a dismissal of religion but instead values the freedom of religion and a multiculturality that is built on a foundation of common values. Secondly, I will borrow from Judith Butler to plead for an acceptance of the non-chosen character of cohabitation - we shall not mistake the fortune of being born on a certain territory with a birth-given entitlement to that territory.

The True Meaning of Secularism

José Casanova and Charles Taylor both question the assumptions upon which we have built our Western understanding of secularism. Both argue that instead of understanding secularism as regulating the relation between the state and religion, secularism should concern the

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response of the democratic state to diversity. For Taylor, secularism rests on three principles, borrowed from the French Revolutionary trinity: liberty, equality, fraternity. In application these mean the free exercise of religion, the equality between people of different faiths and the inclusion of all religions in the consensus-building process of political identity. Of course, we cannot allow democratic values to be compromised in the name of inclusive multiculturality, religious freedom or secular fraternity – the Basic Law is not up for discussion. But Taylor makes an important differentiation by arguing that, indeed, certain political principles, such as human rights, equality, the rule of law and democracy should not be debatable. But it is important to recognize and accept that people may have different reasons for supporting these principles; to accept that it is possible for people to have different views and different faiths and yet agree on the principles that govern the state.

The 2010 media attention surrounding the swearing-in of Aygal Özkan (CDU), Lower Saxony’s Minister for Social Affairs and Integration, shows how important and yet difficult it is to accept that we may not all have the same personal motives even though we share the greater goal. Next to her being the first Muslim minister in Germany, it was her inclusion of the assertion “So help me God” that sparked outrage. Özkan explained that the assertion does not exclusively reference the Christian God and that it is therefore not exclusively reserved for Christians. For the three great monotheistic world religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - all believe only in one, the only God. Özkan’s example shows that we may aim to serve the same purpose with different reasons. It is the duty of a secular state to uphold the principles upon which it is built while refraining from favoring any of the deeper reasons people have for adhering to them.

A secular state like Germany must accept the reality of a religiously active, pluralistically constructed society. The increasing diversification owed to globalization and global migration movements requires a constant discussion of the defining principles of the state – a far-reaching and strenuous process. The foundation of these discussions should be the Basic Law, guaranteeing every person the right to self-determination in religious, ideological and cultural issues, as long as it does not infringe on the rights of others. This is where people tend to

121 Ibid. pp.34.
disagree because Islam does not adhere to the trend of the privatization of religion taken for
granted in most European states. As José Casanova writes:

“...due to the pressure toward the privatization of religion, which among European societies
has become a taken-for-granted characteristic of the self-definition of a modern, secular
society, those societies have a much greater difficulty in recognizing some legitimate role for
religion in public life and in the organization and mobilization of collective group
identities.”123

The practice of Islam becomes a source of anxiety precisely because it challenges the
privatization of Christian religion and therewith one of the pillars mostly associated with
secularism – the clearance of the public sphere from religion. However, this anxiety rests on a
misunderstanding of secularism as the latter does not imply a diminishing of religion’s
importance in public or private life but rather a dismissal of religious politics. What the
anxiety about the public exercise of Islam truly shows is an uncertainty and insecurity
regarding one’s own religious or secular values. The 2015 Religion Monitor found that while
57 percent of Sunni Muslims in Germany between the ages of sixteen and thirty are highly
religious, only 13 percent of Catholics in the same age range are highly religious.124 May the
high religiosity of others lead to anxiety and painful questionings of one’s own faith or lack
thereof?

The same Monitor found that while Muslims in Germany may be more religious than their
Christian counterparts, the intensity of religious faith is becoming less and less of a factor in
an individual’s views on ethical and moral questions.125 The fact that 40 percent of highly
religious Sunnis in Germany support gay marriage while only 14 percent of highly religious
Sunnis in Turkey do so126, shows that the shared state principles an individual lives and
identifies with may be more influential than one’s religion. The secular state should not be
threatened by religious diversity.

pp.5 https://www.bertelsmann-
stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSI/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/BSI_ReligionsmonitorSonderstudieIslamSum-
125 Ibid, pp.6
126 Ibid, pp.5-6.
Judith Butler on Cohabitation

A last, but relevant, point to consider when talking about national belonging in the era of globalization is the undeniable heterogeneity of our earth’s population - the “irreversible condition of social and political life”127, as Hannah Arendt wrote. Globalization requires an examination of one’s individual and national response to others and otherness in general. Whereas the existence of others was easily ignored or simply went unnoticed in pre-modern times, modern technologies bring far-away wars to our attention and its victims to our doorsteps. We must find a sustainable and just way to respond to this irreversible diversity of modern societies. 128 I believe that the modern nation state, despite its potentially necessary existence and arguable advantages, may have its citizens forget that all habituation on this earth is cohabitation and that this cohabitation, not the nation state, is the basis of social and political existence.129

Whereas most people would not have a problem agreeing with the sentence that we cannot choose with whom to cohabit the earth, matters become more ambiguous when the sentence is changed to “We cannot choose with whom to cohabit Germany.” We feel entitled to determine matters within the nation state, based on our citizenship. Similarly, we feel entitled to decide who deserves this citizenship. This is an understandable yet tragic fallacy. Accepting others as fellow German citizens needs to be based on an acceptance of and adherence to the principles of human rights, equality and democracy, enshrined in the Basic Law. Citizenship, on paper, does not depend on subjective feelings, belonging unfortunately does. It is important that we do not demand a full absorption of what we define as national values in order to grant somebody the right to belong. In the case of Islam belonging, there is a great risk of applying double standards – only of the visually outstanding Muslim and thus undeniable other we demand complete conformity to our secular values while it is precisely those values that should enable us to grant them belonging without limiting their religious freedom.

Building on Hannah Arendt, the philosopher Judith Butler has argued that we must “actively seek to preserve the non-chosen character of inclusive and plural cohabitation”.130 Being able to grant citizenship and belonging to those different from us is an important step in this

128 Ibid, pp.7.
129 Ibid, pp.9.
130 Ibid.
direction. Butler argues that it is difficult but of pivotal importance to expand our sense of obligation beyond those with whom we can identify, whether that be based on gender, race, class, nationality, et cetera. We must work to expand our sense of obligation precisely to those who are different from us if we are to survive in an ever-increasing pluralistic world and society. Even though we may not feel any personal sense of belonging to those we identify as others, our Muslim neighbor, for example, we are obligated to preserve these lives and the plurality of which they form a part. This also means that even though we may not feel a sense of belonging between those individuals with whom we share citizenship, no one has the right to deny another their right to belong. We do not all need to be equal in order to belong together – it is our belonging that must be equal. Butler states:

“Equal protection or, indeed, equality, is not a principle that homogenizes those to whom it applies; rather, the commitment to equality is a commitment to the process of differentiation itself. (...) Everyone has the right of belonging. And this means there is a universalizing and a differentiating that takes place at once and without contradiction—and that this is in fact the structure of pluralization.”

Accepting Islam belonging to Germany does not aim to homogenize either Islam or Germany. It is in fact in the appreciation of differentiation that true equality is born - the prerequisite for a sustainable pluralistic society. This appreciation does not require an understanding of the other or a biblical love for thy neighbor. It simply needs to be accepted as a fact of life. Butler puts it bluntly: “The ethic of cohabitation (...) does not need to come from a pervasive love for humanity or a pure desire for peace that we strive to live together. We live together because we have no choice.”

This means that we cannot strive to find a personal connection to all those with whom we share this world, this nation, this community with, in order to rally for their inclusion. What is needed is “a passionate commitment to the everyone and the anyone.” Maybe, instead of drawing potentially irrevocable lines of division, we should consider including this passionate commitment as part of the German Leitkultur.

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132 Ibid, pp.85.
134 Ibid.
VIII. Further Research

This paper was written with the intent of breaking down a harmful and yet too often rekindled debate. While the collection of theories is necessary for a foundational understanding of the different constructions that make people receptive for exclusionary propaganda, this cannot be the endpoint of the discussion. Questions about identity and culture will not cease in significance, rather, globalization will prompt a constant reassessment of their contents and sustainability. Further research is required to provide the German society with a toolkit of how to effectively counter negative sentiments based on insecurity and fear. Gordon Allport’s contact theory may be applied to test whether promoted opportunities for contact and interaction have the potential to counter negativity toward Islam in Germany. An examination of school curricula may also illuminate possibilities to counter fear-based prejudices before they manifest into a perception of reality. Lastly, a critical assessment of the concept of ‘the homeland’ (Heimat) in a globalized world is necessary to understand how debates about belonging can be led in the future.

IX. Conclusion

Whether it be due to feelings of threatened national identity or exclusive cultural citizenship understandings, I have shown that denying Islam the right to belong is neither just nor sustainable – nor is it realistic. The presence of millions of law-abiding Muslim citizens in Germany has indisputably already affected German identity and culture, thereby exposing the debate about Islam belonging as a political negation of facts. The interplay and overlapping of the discussed theories mirror and simultaneously provide insights into the mosaic and mechanism of public opinion and how the latter has been shaped by this debate. The emergence of feelings of threatened national identity can only be understood if we add the findings about perception surpassing facts, the high demands of a collective identity and the threat minorities can incite within a fragile nation state. Similarly, the argument about exclusionary cultural citizenship requires a critical assessment of the multicultural ideal versus its reality, the potential brutality of civilizational consciousness and the misleading confusion of secularism with a denial of religion. Taken together, these theories show that it is often fear and insecurity and not resentment and spiteful denial that lead people to adopt a negative construction of Islam in Germany.

This demonstrates that the debate about Islam belonging is in fact a tool of misguided political propaganda and a symptom of a long-overdue discussion - a discussion about what constitutes the identity and culture of Germany, a country rich in tradition but with a fractured identity
and the responsibility for two world wars. The constant referral to a non-existent Judeo-
Christian tradition and the related dismissal of Islam as incompatible with the West cannot
become placeholders for this discussion. Germany’s historical legacy and its reverberation in
the public conscience clash with the country’s image as Europe’s economic and political
powerhouse and impede the country’s ability to meet the political and social requirements of a
globalized world. Our desperate clinging to a national construct comprised of whitewashed
religious history, Prussian virtues and Bratwurst reveals an insecure national identity and an
antiquated citizenship model. Much more than Islam, it seems to be globalization which has
led the German public to frantically embrace its Germanness as a protective armor. I strongly
believe, that – with varying degrees – the findings and the validity of this paper are not
restricted to Germany but are, in the age of globalization, applicable to many modern western
societies. The political campaigns for the European election demonstrate this anxious retreat
into the national shelter.

But an increasingly globalized world does not allow for narrowly defined national identities
and cultures that cannot tolerate or actively refuse foreign influences without breaking apart.
If we take the values of Enlightenment and our humanistic traditions as seriously as we claim,
then we need to embrace value-based political, cultural and ethnic pluralism as our present
and our future. If we continue to declare Islam as an unwanted foreign body amid democracy,
we are playing into the hands of Islamists who use that exact claim as a license for the
manipulation of non-political Muslims and for righteous terror. Globalization requires us to
no longer be tricked by generalizations and mainstreaming allegations that aim to create
divisions and will eventually harm our national ability to survive in an ever-increasing diverse
world. Politicians must end the semantic gamble that does not differentiate between a
practising Muslim and a politically motivated Islamist terrorist and which portrays the
separation of people from their faith as a sustainable citizenship solution. Politicians must
realize that their words shape political and social reality.

We must rethink the content of German national identity and Leitkultur without the backward
focus on the invariability of tradition but with the forward purpose of guarding the democratic
value of equality while appreciating our differences. This is a process that cannot be entrusted
to the political sphere, instead, it must be detached from daily political maneuvering and
election campaigns and be reclaimed as a societal and public process. The formation of
national identity cannot be left to the Homeland Affairs branch of the Interior Ministry,
neither can it be left to politicians who may be too tempted to exploit public debates for
political gains. German identity and the concept of *Heimat* needs to be filled with a new understanding of Germanness – one that acknowledges its history, embraces its tradition and yet recognizes plurality as a virtue. A modern and inclusive national identity must be the result of a societal negotiation process that involves stakeholders from all levels of German society. The foundation of this new Germanness needs to be the Basic Law, which – 70 years after it was drafted as a provisional constitution – is unanimously regarded as a visionary masterpiece. But the Basic Law and the rights and freedoms prescribed by it must not remain words, they must also be lived and transcend into a new national raison d’être. Germany must finally become the progressive, secular and democratic society it proclaims to be.
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