

Germany: Migration, Islam and National Identity

Götz Nordbruch

Götz Nordbruch reconstructs the evolving narratives about national identity and policies of citizenship and migration in the context of changing demography of post-war German society. The 'quest for normality' and the modernization of the country's self-understanding is echoed in the shifting definitions of German identity, and in related approaches to migrants, Islam and German history.

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Introduction

Issues of national identity and migration remain central to public debates in Germany. Until the late 1980s, concerns over national identity were closely allied to the country's division into two existing German states. While the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and German unification in October 1990 unexpectedly ended the implied dilemma, questions of national identity persisted. In the light of Germany's newly unified demographic, economic and political weight, one major challenge was to legitimize the country's enhanced role in regional and international politics. Issues of national identity continued to involve the National Socialist past, Second World War and the Holocaust, as for many observers this past – in Germany and abroad – called into question any attempt to 'normalize' the German state as an equal among others.

This article reconstructs the evolving narratives about national identity and policies of citizenship and migration in the context of changing demography of post-war German society. The 'quest for normality' and the modernization of the country's self-understanding is echoed in the shifting definitions of German identity, and in related approaches to migrants, Islam, German culture and history. Acknowledging that issues of migration are a central factor shaping and transforming German society highlights the mounting interest in coming to terms with changing social realities. While previous governments repeatedly rejected the notion of Germany as an "immigration society" ("Deutschland ist kein Einwanderungsland!"), in 1998, the Social Democratic/Green government initiated legal reforms designed to reflect the post-war history of migration. Moreover, the laws were to be adapted to the effects of regional integration and processes of globalization. In recent years, similar shifts were also notable for approaches to Islam and Muslims in Germany. As for immigration policies, the definition of national history and identity is at the heart of major controversies which have shaped German policies towards Islam and local Muslim populations. Recent administrative initiatives such as the creation of the German Islam Conference ("Deutsche Islam Konferenz") represent a growing awareness of the need to engage with the Muslim communities in Germany and to respond to new realities of immigration, reunification and European and global integration.

History of immigration and changing demography

The demographic profile of the population in post-war Germany¹ underwent considerable changes over recent decades. These changes were strongly echoed in respective discourses on national identity evolving in post-war German society. (for a comprehensive documentation of these debates, see Gök-

türk/Gramling/Kaes/Langenohl 2011) As an immediate outcome of the Second World War, about 12.5 million ethnic German migrants from Eastern European countries (as of 1950, see Oltmer 2001: 194) had to be settled in a society that was struggling to overcome the destruction of the war. The settlement of German refugees and displaced persons was facilitated by an official rhetoric of national solidarity, allowing public discontent and anger about economic hardship to be countered. Only a few years later, labour migration during the 1950s and 1960s started a process that would – over the next few decades – create significant non-German immigrant communities in urban centres. In 1955, the German government signed the first recruitment agreement with Italy, followed by similar agreements with Spain (1960), Greece (1960), Turkey (1961), Morocco (1963), Portugal (1964), Tunisia (1965), and three years later, Yugoslavia. The official encouragement for the recruitment of labourers from Southern Europe and Mediterranean countries was closely linked to the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s (the so-called “Wirtschaftswunder”). While German refugees from Eastern Europe and the German Democratic Republic had for some years provided a pool of temporary workers, continuing growth of the West German economy called for additional sources to meet industry’s needs. Although the arrival in West Germany of so-called “guest-workers” met with opposition in some sections of society, the functional value of this labour force was widely acknowledged. This assessment of labour immigration was echoed in a public ceremony held on the occasion of the arrival of the first millionth guest worker in September 1964 (see Herbert 2001: 191-229, Meier-Braun 2002: 30-42).

This arrival of the first wave of non-German immigrants, who were predominantly single and male, was marked by the supposed temporary nature of their stay. The rotating system on which recruitment was based reflected the intention to create a “mobile reserve army” (Herbert 2001: 206), which was flexible enough to follow the changing needs of local production. Given the political and social context, interaction with German society remained confined to a few facets of daily social relations. The recruitment stop in 1973, which was provoked by the oil crisis and following economic recession, significantly altered the profile of an immigrant population so far settling in Germany. While the total number of foreigners continued to grow from 2.98 million in 1970 to 4.67 million in 1982 (that is, from 4.9% to 7.6% of the population), the number of workers and employees among these immigrants considerably declined (Herbert 2001: 233). Confronted with the choice of leaving Germany without the prospect of returning, or staying and opting for family unification programs, many immigrants for the first time began to consider long-term residence in Germany, and thus settling in German society. Since the mid-1970s, the non-

German population increasingly included women and children, thus profoundly transforming the structure of immigrant communities and changing their relations with society and public authorities. Family life necessarily intensified contacts with the host society, encouraging interaction and extending social networks. This was echoed, among others, in the creation of various cultural, political, social and religious organizations that catered for the interests and needs of immigrants. Although Spanish, Italian and Greek immigrants had a significant share in the overall immigrant population, the number of Turkish immigrants ranked top of the statistics since 1972. In 1970, 469,000 immigrants of Turkish origin were resident in Germany; this number had risen to 1.8 million in 1991 and over 2.5 million in 2005 (Crisis Group 2007: 4). Turkish communities had an increasingly visible presence in cities like Cologne, Berlin and Hamburg, while Spanish or Italian immigrants made their presence felt in Munich and Stuttgart.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were characterized by an influx of a growing number of asylum seekers of various national and religious backgrounds. While the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc encouraged larger numbers to leave their native countries in search of political stability and better living conditions, the conflicts in former Yugoslavia forced several hundred thousand people to leave their homes. Smaller numbers of asylum seekers emigrated from conflict zones in Africa and South-East Asia, with various conflicts in the Middle East adding to the range of nationalities and religious affiliations among the immigrant communities in Germany. The number of requests for asylum rose from 74,000 in 1985 and 193,000 in 1990 to 438,000 in 1992 (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2007: 9). In 1992, over 26% of these applicants came from former Yugoslavia, followed by 23.7% from Rumania and 7.2% from Bulgaria. Turkey (6.5%), Vietnam (2.8%) and Nigeria (2.4%) were other relevant countries of origin (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2004: 45). In the following year, a major revision of asylum law significantly limited access to the legal procedures, which in the past had granted temporary residence to applicants; yet, throughout the 1990s considerable numbers of asylum seekers continued to cross German borders.

The immediate link between the issue of immigration and questions of national identity became most obvious in debates about a possible restriction of the asylum law in 1992/1993. While the rise in the number of asylum seekers and refugees in the early 1990s was at the forefront of public debate, far less concern was voiced about the growing number of ethnic German immigrants arriving from countries in the former Soviet Union ("Spätaussiedler"). In 1990 alone, some 397,000 ethnic Germans and their family members immigrated to Germany. While the numbers decreased significantly over the following years,

between 1990 and 2009 2.5 million ethnic German immigrants from the former Soviet Union settled in Germany (Federal Ministry of the Interior 2011: 53). Despite the related social and economic challenges of integration, the controversies over immigration largely remained confined to asylum seekers and “guest-workers” and their descendents.²

Since the late 1990s, core features of the demographic profile of the immigrant population have remained unchanged. Since 1996, when the number of non-German nationals in Germany reached an all time high both in absolute numbers (7.49 million) and in relation to the overall population (9.1%), the number of foreigners in German society had declined. In 2009, 7.13 million inhabitants – or 8.7% of the population (81.9 million) – did not hold German citizenship. This reflected both a declining number of new immigrants and a growing number of foreigners leaving Germany for good (Federal Ministry of the Interior 2011: 203; for estimates about future demographic developments and the impact of immigration, see Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2009 and Münz/Ulrich 2000: 39-56).

Yet, despite such developments, recent studies have highlighted the lasting impact of past immigration on the demographics of German society. As a result of a revision of the micro census law in 2005, official statistics for the first time provided detailed information about persons with migrant backgrounds (“Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund”), irrespective of their actual nationality and status as German citizens.³ According to most recent statistics, 16 million persons in Germany can be characterized as having a “migrant background”, equalling 19.5% of the overall population; and more than half of this population holds German nationality. In this regard, it is noteworthy that a variety of biographical experiences are included in this category: while 35.6% of this segment of the overall population were non-German nationals with a personal history of migration, 20.8% were ethnic Germans who had personally immigrated to the country. Importantly, 32.5% of the population, which is considered to be of “migrant background”, were born in Germany. Their immigrant status is thus linked to their parents, at least one of whom had previously migrated to Germany.

In this segment of the German population, immigrants with Turkish backgrounds continue to outnumber any other nationality. At 2.5 million, they are followed by 1.29 million from Poland, 1.06 million from the Russian Federation, while other major countries of origin include Italy (0.77 million), Kazakhstan (0.65 million) and Romania (0.43 million). The diversity of ethnic backgrounds of the immigrant population is reflected in considerable differences with regard to the length of residence and citizenship status, yet also in terms of age, gender, social status and religion (Federal Ministry of the Interior 2011: 215-224).

Since the late 1990s, and since the events of 09/11, the public's perception of immigration was increasingly linked to the question of religion. While immigrants of Muslim faith long confined their religious practices to the private or exclusively Muslim sphere, ever more immigrants started to identify self-confidently and in public as practising Muslims. The growing visibility of Islam in daily life was not only reflected in a growing number of Islamic associations and mosques, it is also echoed in numerous controversies about how to integrate Muslim religious practices and beliefs into the formal institutional settings of schools, the workplace and general administration. In the light of the "positive neutrality" of the state towards religion, which characterized the constitutional framework of religion in Germany, the state was obliged to find answers to the new challenges implied by this development (see below).

Reflecting the new visibility of Islam in society, over the last few years several studies aimed to provide basic information about Muslim communities in Germany. According to one of the most comprehensive studies on the subject, Germany's Muslim population – both with and without German citizenship – should be estimated at ranging between 3.78 and 4.34 million persons, equalling from 4.6 to 5.2% of the population. While immigrants with Turkish backgrounds represent the largest part of the Muslim population, Muslims living in Germany also come from southeastern Europe and the Middle East. While the overwhelming majority of Muslims has an immigrant background, some 45% are also German nationals (Federal Ministry of the Interior 2009: 80-84; see also Ministry for Labour, Integration and Social Affairs of the Land North Rhine-Westphalia 2010 and Bertelsmann Stiftung 2008).

Immigration and Islam have thus clearly shaped the demographic development of German society. The growing number of studies related to immigration and Islam in Germany are not only a reflection of a growing academic interest in changing social realities, but also of persistent political controversies related to issues of national identity and Islam's place in German society.

Discourses on national identity and immigration and integration policies

The changing demographics impacted considerably on West German society's self-perception and definition of the boundaries between in- and outsiders of the national community. While in the late 1940s the debates about ethnic German "expelled" persons ("Vertriebene") and refugees focused on social problems caused by the massive influx from Eastern Europe, in the 1960s and 1970s the non-German origin of the "guest workers" was central to controversies surrounding labour migration. In a similar way, the term "foreigner", which was increasingly used in the 1980s to refer to immigrants, reinforced the image of a temporary culturally and ethnically foreign population. This label, which reso-

nated in common usage with the term “foreigner problem” (“Ausländerproblem”), thus highlighting this population’s non-membership in German society, echoed a continued insistence on an ethnic identification of the German nation; even immigrants, who had acquired German citizenship, or those born in Germany, continued to be perceived as foreign in mainstream public debates.

German reunification in 1990 and the growing nationalist agitation of right-wing political parties such as the Republikaner, DVU and NPD, as well as parts of the CDU/CSU and SPD, further polarized public opinion. Opinion polls conducted in the early 1990s confirmed growing support for nationalist and racist views. While right-wing parties were particularly successful in eastern parts of the country, radical nationalist ideologies and related violence were not limited to these regions; already in the late 1980s, right wing parties had successfully participated in elections and obtained seats in several West German city councils (Minkeberg 1998: 290-291). A wave of violent attacks and aggressive campaigns against immigrants in mainstream media outlets such as the tabloid *Bild* and the liberal-left leaning weekly *Der Spiegel* mirrored and contributed to a rise of racist stereotypes and resentments (Huhnke 1993: 213-266; see also Jäger/Kretschmer 1998). During the early 1990s, pogrom-like attacks on immigrants of predominantly South-Asian and African backgrounds, for instance, in Hoyerswerda (17-23 September 1991) and Rostock-Lichtenhagen (22-24 August 1992), intensified the debates about the place of migrants in unified Germany (for the development of right-wing and racist crimes in the early 1990s and the coverage of immigration in mass media, see Brosius/Esser 1996: 205-212). As a reaction to the wave of anti-immigrant crimes, several hundred thousands persons participated in early December 1992 in demonstrations expressing solidarity with immigrants and rejecting the claims of right-wing parties. In Munich alone, 300-400,000 people joined in the protests. For many immigrants, however, the deadly attacks against Turkish families in Mölln (23 November 1992) and Solingen (29 Mai 1993) raised serious concerns about their acceptance by mainstream German society. The “trauma of Mölln” (Deniz Yücel, taz.de, 11 Feb. 2008) fostered the country’s alienation. The slow response of the state – represented by the police and government – and the negative role of mainstream media further added to these concerns.

The ambivalence of the responses of mainstream society to anti-immigrant violence in the early 1990s is symbolized in the coincidence of solidarity demonstrations with the so-called “compromise on asylum” (“Asylkompromiss”) which the CDU/CSU, FDP and SPD agreed on 6 December 1992 (Herbert 2001: 296-322). The compromise was in line with a restrictive policy towards immigration that had taken shape in the 1980s and had been institutionalized with the reform of the “law on the entry and residence of foreigners on Federal terri-

tory – law on foreigners” (“Gesetz über die Einreise und den Aufenthalt von Ausländern im Bundesgebiet – Ausländergesetz”) in January 1991. While the new law improved the rights of immigrants who had already obtained residence, it was widely criticized for failing to modernize citizenship law and provide immigrants with channels of effective participation (see Herbert 2001: 283-284, Bade 2007: 51-52 and Butterwegge 2009: 140). The decision to revise the asylum law two years later marked an important concession to the rise of nationalist sentiments in public debates on national identity. This was justified by representatives of those parties involved as a necessary step to respond to popular anxieties and concerns. Introducing strict legal conditions to the right of asylum, the Bundestag revised a key article of the constitution that was widely associated with moral obligations related to the Germany’s Nazi past. This revision was the culmination point of intensified controversies over Germany’s reunified self-definition. Warning against a “state emergency” (“Staatsnotstand”) as a result of an increasing number of asylum seekers, in October 1992 the then chancellor Helmut Kohl explicitly linked questions of immigration to society’s ongoing existence and the stability of the political system (see Wichert 1998: 118). The metaphor of a “flood” of unrestricted immigration threatening Germany – and Europe in general – became part of daily public discourses; on the political right, the use of the notion of “over-estrangement” (“Überfremdung”) of German society by immigrants brought to the fore the persistent vision of a German nation exclusively based on decent and cultural homogeneity.

In a parallel development, the polarization of public opinion over questions of immigration coincided with a beginning Europeanization of immigration laws and policy. With the Schengen Implementation Convention of 1990 and the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, the EU became increasingly active in shaping and influencing national policies towards questions of immigration and asylum. The 1999 Amsterdam Treaty ultimately initiated a communalization of immigration and integration (Bendel 2009: 124). This process considerably limited national competencies in the fields of asylum; in contrast, policies of integration and citizenship that are striking at the core of national narratives largely remained subject to domestic prerogatives. Public opinion, and the need to seek compromise with the parliamentary opposition, thus continued to direct government policies on integration. Decisions about access to citizenship and the definition of belonging continue to be decided in national debates about the foundations of society and national community.

The election of the SPD/Green government in September 1998 mirrored a growing public awareness of the need to revise established notions of national identity and challenge nationalist narratives. The symbolic and explicit descrip-

tion of German society as an “immigration society” (“Einwanderungsgesellschaft”) led the new government to initiate steps to modernize immigration and citizenship laws and reformulate state policies towards questions of integration and cultural and ethnic diversity. Yet, while introducing the principle of *ius soli* by granting – under certain conditions – citizenship to children born in Germany, the new law was criticized by NGOs for excluding the option of dual citizenship. While the government originally planned to include such an option, vehement objection by the parliamentary opposition led to the failure of this initiative (see Bade 2007: 51-52 and Butterwegge 2009: 142-144). Despite these shortcomings, the law was widely considered a significant break with past politics towards immigration, and most importantly with the principle of *ius sanguinis* that had previously exclusively governed German citizenship laws. This shift in public and political discourse was also noticeable in the increasing acceptance of terms such as “immigrants” and “persons with migrant background”. While notions of ethnicity and – to a lesser extent – citizenship had in the past dominated debates on immigration, the focus gradually shifted to the multiple dimensions of migration experiences and their link to questions of identity, belonging and social integration. In early 2000, the government’s decision to introduce a green card program for highly qualified IT experts further illustrated the state’s intention to make immigration policies more flexible. Taking up the interests of local markets, the government’s approach toward labour migration prioritized pragmatic considerations over questions of national identity.

Yet, while ethnic understandings of the nation have gradually lost support among the public, recent studies highlighted the growing importance attributed to cultural conformity as a central criteria for citizenship. Along these lines, belonging to the nation is not necessarily linked to ethnic descent, but rather is assessed according to one’s assimilation to core features of national culture. In this context, the growing importance of religion in public discourses is notable. While questions of integration and citizenship were long since discussed in terms of ethnicity, religion only recently emerged as an alternative prism through which such topics were addressed. Since the late 1990s, Islam and its place in German society moved to the forefront of public interest and political concern; in this sense, in public debates the term “foreigner” has increasingly been substituted by the term “Muslim”, reflecting the growing concern for questions of culture and religion (Seidel 2008; for a discussion of the changing notion of national identity in East and West Germany from ethnicity to cultural understandings, see for instance Diehl/Tucci 2010).⁴ While for decades the religious background of immigrants was largely ignored, various issues in the past sparking controversies over immigration were now associated with a real or

assumed Islamic religiosity of immigrants. This development was also reflected in growing agitation against Islam in right-wing and nationalist populist narratives and political discourses. While “immigrants” continue to be at the centre of right-wing campaigns, the image of Islam as undermining a supposedly over-historical Christian German society developed considerable popularity in major segments of German public opinion (Leibold/Kühnel 2008: 102-103 and Schiffauer 2007; for a discussion of anti-Islamic attitudes, see Benz 2009). The debates sparked by Thilo Sarrazin, a former Social Democratic Finance Minister in Berlin, illustrate the popular support for anti-Islamic resentments. His book “Germany does away with itself” (“Deutschland schafft sich ab”, 2010), which combines strong anti-Islamic arguments with contempt for unemployed and lower social milieus, was a major commercial success. Only a few months after its publication, it had already obtained the status of the most successful non-fictional book in post-war-German history.

On a political and popular level, warnings against existing or emerging “parallel communities” (“Parallelgesellschaften”) in urban centres with a high percentage of immigrant population reflect such concerns for the disintegrative effects of Muslim immigration. In some arguments, such segregated communities are perceived as undermining existing bonds of society; in others, parallel structures would not only cause mutual alienation, but ultimately lead to a replacement of the existing order. In this context, Muslims and Islam are identified a threat to society (for a critical discussion of the notion of ‘parallel communities’, see Gestring 2011, Worbs 2009 and Schiffauer 2008).

This new focus on religion is mirrored in the growing academic and political interest in questions of religiosity and policies towards religion and religious communities. Over the past decade, numerous studies have addressed the religious dimensions of immigration (for an overview of recent research on Islam in Germany, see Thielmann 2007, Thielmann 2010; for the state of research on immigration, see Bommers 2010); similarly, political debates have increasingly addressed questions related to religious practices and beliefs as a new field of government policy. Political initiatives such as the creation of the German Islam Conference (DKI) under the then Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble in September 2006 (see below) clearly meant to provide answers to new political challenges.

The increasing relevance attributed to Islam in mainstream society echoed a persisting, or according to some studies, growing identification with Islam among immigrants themselves. (See Sauer 2009: 49, Diehl/König 2009, Bertelsmann Stiftung 2008: 46, Sen 2007: 19). These findings are corroborated by a growing number of associations appealing to young Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds. With Muslims often identifying self-consciously and self-

confidently as Muslims, these emerging associational structures symbolize the mounting visibility of Islam as part of German social, cultural and political life. (See, for instance, Yurdakul 2009. For a general study of the development of Turkish-Muslim associations, see Ceylan 2006). This development includes the growing presence of initiatives and individuals that clearly articulate an image of themselves as Muslim *and* German (Nordbruch 2010, Gerlach 2006). As a general phenomenon, these voices stand for the greater impact of Muslims on mainstream German public and political discourses; the growing interest of Muslims in becoming members of political parties and contributing to the media as well as the developing influence of Islamic associations in public life can be interpreted as an increasing naturalization of Islam in German society.

Hence, there is a striking and widespread reluctance in major parts of German public opinion to recognize a changing demography as a constant feature of social reality. Support for the theses formulated by Sarrazin can thus be read as an expressed desire to preserve an idealized past of the German nation. This idealized past has increasingly come under threat due to the influx of culturally and ethnically foreign populations. In this wider context, notions of “lead culture” (“Leitkultur”), “Christian-Occidental culture” (“christlich-abendländische Kultur”) or “Judea-Christian civilisation” (“Jüdisch-christliche Zivilisation”) are used to define the cultural core of German society. Such insistence on the Christian character of German society – which, despite the long history of anti-Semitism in Germany, often implies references to a shared Jewish-Christian heritage – explicitly distances Islam from German culture. Building on ahistorical concepts of history, culture and civilisation, these notions aim at legitimizing culturalist narratives of national identity. Interestingly, in 1998 the term “Leitkultur” or “lead culture” was originally coined by Bassam Tibi, a Syrian-born German political scientist in a bid to define a set of values and norms that could serve as a consensual basis of European societies. In the debates of the late 1990s and at the start of the millennium, however, the term underwent an ethno-culturalist re-reading, suggesting the existence of authentically German cultural traits guiding and framing German social and political life (see Tibi 2001). According to this perspective, while immigration might to a certain extent impact on the demography of the country, such changes would be limited to the phenomenological level; culture, values and political structures should be protected against immigration-induced changes.

Such an understanding of German “Leitkultur” was elaborated upon in conservative circles, and explicitly adopted by prominent politicians. The term was challenged in intellectual and political debates; critics highlighted the highly normative implications of such attempts to define an essential core as reflecting the social reality of pluralist German society. As one contribution to these de-

bates, the term “constitutional patriotism” (“Verfassungspatriotismus”) suggested an alternative basis that could provide common bonds of society. Instead of aiming at identifying a core set of values and norms, this term pointed to the negotiated origins of values and norms; not specific values and norms, but the procedures through which these values and norms were established and codified were at the centre of this “patriotism”. Social change, for instance, as a result of immigration, could thus potentially echo in changing values and political structures (for the various positions articulated in this debate, see Lammert 2006).⁵

These conflicting conceptions of German society are paralleled by controversies over the implications of the term “integration” that is commonly used to describe the process of becoming part of German society. It is disputed what this “becoming part of society” actually implies both for those integrating and for those members of society with whom the newcomers are integrating. (see Scherr 2009) Similar controversies are related to the question of dual citizenship. Efforts by the SPD/Green government in 1998/99 to facilitate the nationalization of immigrants by granting the right to preserve one’s original citizenship were met with vehement objection from within the CDU and CSU (see Herbert 2001; Butterwegge 2009: 143-144). A campaign initiated by leading representatives of the parliamentary opposition against the project to reform the citizenship law added to the polarization of public opinion on this issue. According to protagonists of the campaign, dual citizenship contravened the very notion of loyalty towards one’s nation; loyalty, it was claimed, was indivisible. As on similar occasions in the past, right-wing parties jumped on the bandwagon of the campaign by radicalizing its slogans (see Klärner 2001).

The debates surrounding the passing of the “law on immigration” in 2005, which attempted to provide a general framework for various forms of immigration, reflected the polarization of these discussions. While initiated by a Social Democratic/Green government, the law was only ultimately passed after protracted negotiations with the opposition. As in the past, this need to compromise was echoed, among others, in a strong focus on regulating access to the labour market. In contrast, the law placed new emphasis on strategies of integration, introducing various measures, which were meant to bind immigrants to the local cultural and political context. Policies of integration, it was officially stated, were now considered a political task that had to be met by all political and social actors, involving the national, federal and communal level (“gesamtgesellschaftliche Aufgabe”) (Butterwegge 2009: 149).

Despite persisting opposition to an explicit revision of narratives on immigration and national identity in significant parts of German public opinion, the new approaches initiated in the late 1990s and at the start of the millennium

stand for a gradual adaptation of government policies to demographic realities. Here, it is interesting to note that the German Islam Conference was launched by the Christian Democratic Interior Minister, Wolfgang Schäuble. This suggests a new pragmatism in parts of the conservative political spectrum with respect to the challenges of an increasingly pluralist society. On a symbolic level, German President Christian Wulff's (CDU) statement in his speech on 3 October 2010 (Day of German Unity) that "Islam also belongs in Germany" marked another important development: this was widely perceived as an explicit recognition of Islam as a constitutive – and not merely tolerated – element of German society (spiegel.de, 5 Oct. 2010). Yet, the fierce opposition sparked by this statement even within Wulff's own party points to the contentious character of the implied message. In April 2011, the newly appointed Interior Minister, who is in charge of the German Islam Conference, explicitly challenged Wulff's understanding of Islam's place in German society.

Engaging state and society – Immigrants and Muslims as actors

State policies have an immediate impact on discourses concerning national identity and questions of integration. Over the past decade a growing number of immigrant and Muslim organizations have attempted actively to influence policies and to broaden the options available to immigrants to become engaged citizens. Muslim organizations have highlighted the need to redefine the place of religion in public life.

The initial efforts to institutionalize relations between immigrants and the authorities can be traced back to the late 1970s when "coordination councils" ("Koordinierungsräte") and "foreigner councils" ("Ausländerbeiräte") were established in numerous municipalities to facilitate contacts and to provide advice to the administration within all departments on affairs relating to the social, cultural and religious concerns of local immigrant communities. Generally, these councils were limited to an advisory function, lacking any direct influence on municipal policies. Their role was considered, as reflected in a statement by the government of North Rhine-Westphalia in 1980, to facilitate "solutions to their problems" (Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Ausländerbeiräte Nordrhein-Westfalen (Foreign Residents' Representatives of the Foreigner Councils of North Rhine-Westphalia) 1998: 12; see also Hunger/Candan 2009: 9-11). Immigrants, as this statement illustrates, were not perceived as actors in formulating overall municipal policies and strategies.

In the early 1990s, a lack of resources, the often non-representative character of their constituencies and the negligible role in local political life were increasingly reflected in the critiques of these councils. Representatives of immigrant organizations as much as scholars and a growing number of politicians started

lobbying for opportunities that would enable immigrants to effectively participate in political life. Such calls often included demands for voting rights on a municipal level. Yet, while nationals of EU-member states obtained municipal voting rights in 1994, large segments of the non-German population, for instance Turkish nationals living in Germany, remain excluded from active participation in the electoral process.

On another level, informal barriers to joining mainstream associations and thus profiting from material and immaterial resources continue to be a major concern for immigrants. Associations catering for the social, cultural and religious concerns of immigrants had existed since the 1970s; such associations tended to have an ethnically homogenous membership and aimed at preserving language and cultural traditions of the countries of origin. These associations provided few links to German society. The emergence of a younger generation, which had been socialized in Germany, as well as the growing frustration among established immigrants about persisting barriers to mainstream society encouraged demands for an opening of German associations to immigrants. Since the late 1990s, these demands are reflected in a change of policy on state and federal level that aims at an “intercultural opening” of associations and institutions, providing channels to seek active representation for immigrants in mainstream society. In addition, the promotion of “self-help” by immigrants and immigrant associations echoes an evolving recognition of the positive effects of active participation. Immigrant associations, in this sense, are not seen as necessarily fostering ethnic seclusion, but as providing essential services to immigrant communities. (For a discussion of these associations’ impact on questions of social integration, see Esser 1986, Jungk 2001, Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration 2003). Official support for these associations can be interpreted as an important opening towards immigration organizations and their constituencies; at the same time, it follows the logics of recent reform policies that aim at encouraging self-initiative and limiting public welfare. In contrast to the past, a government directive published in 2007 on questions of integration (“Nationaler Integrationsplan”) explicitly defines immigrants as part of German civil society. The measures outlined in this directive were meant to promote an integration of immigrants into the various associational structures with the aim of fostering “initiative, involvement and participation” (Bundesregierung 2007: 173; see also Sauer/Halm 2005 and Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration 2003).

Recent studies have highlighted a rise of such immigrant membership in both “German” and immigrant associations, echoing a shift from previously near exclusive organization in “home-country”-oriented associations (Sauer

2009: 155-156, see also Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2010 and Sauer 2011). This tendency is confirmed by a growing number of immigrants who have taken an active role in party politics. While as late as 2010 only 17 out of 622 members of the German Bundestag had an immigrant background (less than 3%, Schwab 2010: 2), party officials have become aware of this problem. In the light of the growing numbers of German citizens with immigrant backgrounds, most parties have realized that this segment of the electorate cannot be neglected any longer (see Crisis Group 2007: 29-30).

Yet, despite this overall tendency towards a gradual opening of society for immigrants, and a growing openness amongst immigrants to join mainstream associations, immigrant organizations continue to be important actors in promoting and defending the interests of the various communities. For instance, they are central to the government-initiated annual national summits on integration ("Integrationsgipfel"). Since 2006, such meetings provide a forum for debates related to questions of immigration and social cohesion. Immigrant associations such as the Turkish Community in Germany and others have frequently used these meetings for vehement critiques of government policies, reflecting the persistent function of these associations to represent and promote the interests of immigrants.

Muslim associations share many of the characteristics of these organizations. Yet, the particular place of Islam in official and public discourse has complicated the 'normalization' of Muslim associations as civil society actors. Muslim organizations play a crucial role in providing religious and cultural services. With over 2,400 mosques and prayer-rooms countrywide, Islam has a clear presence in urban life (see Sen 2008: 36; for a study of Islamic associational life in Berlin, see Spielhaus/Färber 2006). The Turkish-dominated umbrella organization DITIB, which is institutionally linked to the Turkish state, controls over 300 associations and 7,800 prayer rooms and mosques. The Islamrat and Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland (ZMD, Central Council of Muslims in Germany), two other major Islamic organizations, hold similar sway over large parts of the Muslim population, with the management of 700 and 400 prayer rooms and 140,000 and 12-20,000 members respectively (Crisis Group 2007: 7-8; for an overview of major Islamic organizations, see Rosenow/Kortmann 2011, Wunn 2007). Despite this importance of Islamic organizations for the provision of religious services, according to most studies only 10-20% of the Muslim population are formal members (Crisis Group 2007: 9 and Haug/Müssig/Stich 2009: 167-181). In addition, support for these organizations has considerably declined over the last decade. Studies conducted among Turkish immigrants aged between 18 and 29 years found the percentage of those who felt repre-

sented by any of the major Islamic organizations had dropped from 78.4% in 2000 to 65.5% in 2005 (Sen 2007: 26).

Since the late 1990s, and since the 09/11 attacks and, in particular, the subsequent controversies several new initiatives and associations have emerged among younger generations. These clearly stand for novel approaches to questions of identity and belonging. While in recent years umbrella organizations such as the Islamische Gemeinde Milli Görüs and the ZMD have made considerable efforts to modernize their youth sections and reach out to youngsters through new media and social activities, the success of initiatives such as the Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland and Netzwerk Zahnräder symbolizes the growing interest in Germany-centred activities and structures. Members of these formal and informal initiatives share a self-understanding as young German Muslims who identify as citizens. Moreover, they aim to build their future in the country; references to the ethnic background of their parents are secondary to their public activities. For them, conservative religious values and piety are no contradiction to active citizenship and participation (Nordbruch 2010: 36-38 and Gerlach 2006).

Despite such diversification of individual Muslim religiosity and Islamic associational structures, Islamic organizations play a major role in negotiating the place of Islam in the formal and informal structures of society. Similar to other European countries, German public opinion has presented heated debates over the headscarf, Islamist violence and cases of forced marriage. Similar debates were sparked by cases of so-called 'honour killings' that culprits have tended to justify with reference to religious-cultural traditions. Addressing both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences, on several occasions Islamic organizations intervened in these debates by clarifying their respective understandings of Islam and critiquing acts of violence and discrimination in the name of religion (for responses of the IGMG to debates over Islamic terrorism, see Jonker 2006: 133-140; Muslim perspectives on the headscarf controversy are addressed in Yurdakul 2006).

On a formal level, Islamic organizations have been involved, among others, in lobbying for political solutions or legal arrangements with regard to problems related to religious practices such as halal-slaughtering, conflicts over the wearing of the headscarf at workplaces or conducting prayers in school (for overviews of the challenges related to an integration of Islam into the German legal system, see Oebbeke 2008, Rohe 2008, Bielefeldt 2003). Yet, importantly, Islamic organizations differ from their Christian counterparts through their formal non-qualification as "religious communities" that would grant them state recognition as representatives of communities of faith. Religious communities, according to the German constitution, are characterized by their compre-

hensive character of their religious services for their respective constituencies; in addition, their constituencies have to be clearly defined through formal membership in the community (de Wall 2010: 8-10; Bielefeldt 2003: 14-120). So far, both for the executive and the judiciary, Islamic organizations have failed to meet these criteria, echoing – for instance – persisting conflicts over the introduction of Islamic education in public schools. Given the symbolic importance of education for questions of national identity, demands for an introduction of Islamic education in public schools remain a controversial issue with relevant parts of the public. In the German educational system, religious education is conducted under state supervision, yet in close cooperation with the respective religious communities.⁶ This implies, among others, the prerogative of religious communities to define and develop the curriculum. For some observers, the introduction of Islamic education thus risks granting conservative Islamic associations additional channels to promote their understanding of Islamic practices and norms. In contrast, representatives of the Muslim community have highlighted the anachronism of the current situation, with large segments of the student body being denied religious education. In addition, formal religious education is promoted as facilitating the integration of Muslim pupils, and as countering the impact of radical Islamic currents that have proven increasingly successful in filling the void of religious instruction.

The growing awareness about the benefits of an institutionalized dialogue between the state and the Muslim population is reflected in the German Islam Conference (DIK) that was launched in September 2006. (See Busch/Goltz 2011 and Tezcan 2011). The conference's mission was to "ameliorate the religious and societal integration of the Muslim population and (to achieve) a good-living together of all people, whatever their faith." (Quoted in Peter 2010: 120). At the core of the initiative lay the idea of bringing together representatives of various segments of the Muslim population and relevant state officials to discuss key issues influencing the relations between the state and its Muslim citizens. (See Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2005) Yet, the question of representation proved a major point of conflict. Among the 15 Muslims delegates invited by the Federal Ministry of the Interior to attend the annual plenary sessions, only five were representatives of the major Islamic associations; most participants were individuals with no formal affiliation to relevant Islamic bodies. Critique did not only focus on representation, but was also directed against the strong focus on security-related issues that were placed on the conference agenda (see Peter 2010: 120-122). Since the inauguration of the meeting, both the invitation policy of the ministry and the prominent role of security issues have repeatedly provoked heated conflicts between the various sides involved in the conference.⁷

Yet, despite these controversies, the DIK facilitated an agreement among the relevant actors that the introduction of Islamic education at public schools would be “a valuable contribution to (the challenge) of integration” (de Maizière 2011: 6). Islamic education is increasingly perceived as promoting a “nationalization of Islam” and fostering the identification of Muslim pupils with the German social context. Related to this are recommendations of the DIK to explore ways of introducing Islamic theology at German universities; academic programs focused on Islamic theology, it is argued, would allow the formation of teachers of Islam according to German academic and educational standards. In addition, an “Islamic theology that is anchored in the middle of Germany society” would provide “appropriate answers to questions of Muslim life in the diaspora” and open the way for an active engagement with the general public (Deutsche Islam Konferenz 2009: 13; with regard to the expectations linked by the various actors to the introduction of Islamic theology, see Kiefer 2011b: 37-38).

On an organizational level, in April 2007, the need for effective representation of the Muslim population led to the creation of the “Coordination Council of Muslims in Germany” (“Koordinierungsrat der Muslime in Deutschland, KRM”) that is meant to provide a unified stance of major Islamic umbrella organizations and to facilitate negotiating with the state (Bodenstein 2010: 60). While such attempts to coordinate the efforts of Muslim associations reflect the requirements of intricate relations with the state, this is in notable contrast to the gradual diversification of Muslim religious, social and cultural realities. The umbrella organizations not only lack the support of the majority of the Muslim population; in addition, the Muslim population in itself had become increasingly heterogeneous, making a unified representation ever more difficult.

Conclusion

The history of immigration in the post-war period (that is, the Second World-War) clearly influenced the demography of German society. These changes in social reality were increasingly mirrored in public discourses about questions of German identity. The ongoing controversies over dual citizenship and the opening of the labour market for immigrants reflect the link of social, economic and cultural concerns with respect to an increasing presence of non-German residents in the country.

Even more controversial are the debates about the place of Islam and Muslims in society. The success of Thilo Sarrazin’s theses and the support he received from leading politicians and public intellectuals point to the persistence of ethno-culturalist understandings of the German nation. In this perspective,

Islamic beliefs and practices appear to contradict basic values and norms on which the nation is built.

While immigrants have long been confined to a passive role in these controversies, they gradually acquired an active part in these negotiations over national narratives and political orientations. In this case, it is noteworthy that immigrant and Muslim responses to mainstream discourses on national identity tended to diversify. In other words, while parts of the immigrant and Muslim populations opted for strategies of self-ethnification and religious seclusion; others explicitly challenge essentialist notions of identities. Although these strategies are primarily directed against essentialist discourses in German mainstream society, they pose no less a challenge to notions of presumably authentic and unchangeable identities as “Turks”, “Arabs”, “Croats” or Muslims. Such diversification adds to the “normalization” of immigrant and Muslim identities in German society, paralleling similar changes and shifts in the mainstream German population.

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¹ This article focuses on developments in the Federal Republic of Germany; the history of immigration to the German Democratic Republic is not covered.

² It is noteworthy that the immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe provoked no major controversies among the general public. Since 1990, Germany accepted the immigration of Jews and their relatives from countries of the former Soviet Union. Between 1990 and 2009, 212,000 persons settled in Germany under this arrangement, with a majority emigrating from the Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union countries contributed significantly to the re-emergence of Jewish communal life. Of the 104,000 members of Jewish communities in Germany, some 90% are of Russian-speaking origin (Federal Ministry of the Interior 2011: 101-102. On the situation of Jewish immigrants, see Bodemann/Bagno 2010).

³ In official statistics, persons with a migrant background are defined as "all persons who, since 1949, have immigrated to today's territory of the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as all foreigners born in Germany and all persons born in Germany as German nationals with at least one parent that had him- or herself immigrated to Germany or who had been born with a non-German nationality in Germany." (Federal Statistical Office 2010: 6) Linguistically, the German terms "Migranten" and "Migrationshintergrund" refer to "migrants" or "having a migrant background" in general, including emigration and immigration; however, in common and formal usage, they are used to depict people who are *immigrants* having *immigrated* to Germany.

⁴ These debates in Germany follow a general trend in Europe (see Allievi 2005). For the continuing relevance of "foreigners" as an object of rejection see Asbrock/Lemmer et al. 2009.

⁵ Similar debates are related to the term "multicultural society". While the German neologism "multikulti" has been used in a normative sense by supporters of unrestricted immigration, it has been denounced in other political circles as reflecting a naive approach to society and culture. In recent years, prominent politicians and intellectuals have argued that approaches of multiculturalism have culminated in a dead end. Chancellor Angela Merkel, for instance, opined that "the approach of multiculturalism has failed, absolutely failed." (spiegel.de, 16. Oct. 2010) Others have pointed out that Germany is *de facto* a multicultural society.

⁶ In the German federal system, the schooling system falls under the competencies of the Länder, further complicating the negotiations between Muslim organizations and the state. For an overview of the various projects initiated at a country-level that aim at exploring the options of institutionalizing Islamic education, and the obstacles they face, see Kiefer 2011a.

⁷ One conflict is related to the role of the IGMG that the Federal Ministry of the Interior considers as pursuing an anti-constitutional ideological vision. While the IGMG had for a time been represented at the conference under the auspices of the Islamrat, the invitation of the respective representative was suspended due to a legal court suit against him. Yet, although the court suit ended with an acquittal, the suspension of the person was not reconsidered.