

German Muslims and the ‘Integration Debate’: Negotiating Identities in the Face of Discrimination

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Abstract Based on five focus groups (total $N=56$) with German Muslims, we analyze discourses on the experience of discrimination and feelings of national and religious attachment. The focus groups took place in mid to late 2010 in four German cities. Whereas only few participants describe personal discrimination by non-Muslim Germans, almost all participants complain about being collectively discriminated and rejected. This perception triggers processes of confirming their original cultural identity, primarily their Muslim affiliation and of strengthening the boundary towards the wider society. The analysis of the discourse shows the participants to fall back into an essentialized way of thinking that makes their ethnic being incompatible with being German; and they resort to their Muslim roots as a cultural resource for identity construction and self-worth. Others cope with their feeling of rejection by engaging in local politics and sports activities that allows them to attribute themselves a hyphenated identity as Turkish-Germans. The findings are discussed in terms of social identity, psychological essentialism, transnationalized religion, and boundary making.

Keywords Discrimination · Social identity · Psychological essentialism · Boundary making · Transnationalized religion

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Introduction

As a result of migration and transnationalization, societies have become more diverse in regard to their religious and ethno-cultural compositions. This diversity is often perceived as fundamentally problematic by European governments, media and most political parties (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). More generally, the category 'Islam' has gained a dubitable notoriety since the events of 9/11 and the bombings in Madrid 2004, and London 2005. Muslims are globally perceived as a threat because they are 'different' and seem to embrace violence. In such debates 'Islam' appears in such debates also as a security problem because of its assumed fundamentalist orientation (critically Kaya 2009), as an obstacle for migrant integration (analytically Foner and Alba 2008), and as a menace with regard to social cohesion (critically Grillo 2010). Furthermore, governments, right-wing politicians, and some feminists have alleged a clash between accomplished 'European gender equality' and 'Islamic backwardness or patriarchy' provoked by immigrants or ethnic minorities. Unequal gender relations among migrant groups, and particularly among Muslims, are identified as the core problem of diversified societies. In the face of the power developed by these dichotomous figures, a vivid debate has evolved within academia, and feminist scholars have exhibited critical responses (Shachar 2007; Phillips 2010; Bilge and Scheibelhofer 2012). In this article we are interested in the ways how Muslims respond to such stigmatization, exclusion, misrecognition, and discrimination. We argue, in line with other scholars, that although the main narratives about 'Muslim-Others' might be similar in most European countries, the responses to such 'othering processes' can only be understood by taking into account the specific national and local contexts which shape these responses in the sense of a 'cultural repertoire' (Dahinden et al. 2012; Lamont and Mizrachi 2012). That is why we explore in this article the identity constructions of German Muslims, their feelings of attachment towards their host country, their country of origin and their religion. We are interested in their strategies and negotiations of multi-faceted identities in face of perceived collective discrimination.

These questions will be approached by combining two theoretical lenses with regard to group formation and identification processes: First, psychological social identity theory with its focus on the need of people to maintain positive social identity is useful in order to elaborate on the reactions in case of discrimination to elevate collective self-esteem. Second, following insights from the boundary work paradigm and socio-anthropological identity theory, we show how such reactions can be understood as direct results from the dialects between processes of self-identification and external categorization. Finally, we consider social identity and group formation in the context of the specific German case which operates as a structure which constrains and enables different views of group identity.

In the following, we will first present some theoretical key concepts for our analysis before we elaborate on the methodology of the study. Afterwards, we discuss the German context in order to draw the main elements of processes of external categorization which will impact on the identity construction of German Muslims. Finally, we present our analysis on German Muslim's negotiations of their identities in face of this perceived discrimination.

Identity, Boundary Work, and Discrimination

Social identity constructions under condition of stigmatization and discrimination can be, as we argue, fruitfully analyzed by two different while complementary theoretical perspectives:

In the field of social psychology, the effects of discrimination on minority members are often discussed before the background of individuals' social identity (Tajfel 1974; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Hogg 2006). As people are motivated to maintain a positive social identity, discrimination poses a threat to minority members' collective self-esteem (cf. Luhtanen and Crocker 1992), and this will in turn trigger reactions to elevate collective self-esteem.

The effects of discrimination on the discriminated differ between the collective and the individual level: On the collective level, perceived collective discrimination—for example widespread negative stereotypes against one's ingroup—often increases the level of identification of disadvantaged group members with their own ingroup and may lead to increased hostility towards the discriminating outgroup. In contrast, personal experiences of discrimination rather tend to lead to less identification with the discriminated group in an attempt to escape discrimination on a personal level (e.g. Bourguignon et al. 2006; Branscombe et al. 1999; Schmitt and Branscombe 2002).

Some authors criticize these findings for ignoring the complexities of immigrant identities. Muslim immigrants in Europe may, for example, identify with their ethnic group or original culture and religion and at the same time with their host society. Consequently, instead of strengthening the identification with their ethnic ingroup, members of discriminated minority groups may rather weaken their identification with the discriminating majority in face of discrimination than identifying more strongly with their ingroup (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2008).

A study in the Brixton immigrant community illustrates the repercussion that discrimination may have on the negotiation of a community's identity (Howarth 2002). Brixton is a suburb of London with a mixed African and Caribbean population. The author shows how young inhabitants of Brixton convert their negative outside representation and racial category into an identity that allows them to collectively resist the essentializing stigma of otherness (Howarth 2006). Among others, the immigrants engage in activities that contest the attribution of stigma such as art. By doing so, the community does not only reconstruct the outgroup's representation of itself but also its own identity. These studies highlight the strong articulation of outgroup and ingroup representations where a group's identity project is triggered and directed by an outgroup's derogation (Howarth et al. 2013).

An important element in the dynamics of identity construction is psychological essentialism. Psychological essentialism in the context of social groups and categories means to think, talk, and act as if a group were a discrete natural kind and as if its members were all endowed with the same immutable attributes determined by the group's essence (cf. Wagner et al. 2009). In the context of a social groups' self essentialization, discrimination may be 'the factor *par excellence*' for a minority to essentialize itself, because the common fate of being discriminated against strongly enhances minority group members' shared feeling of similarity and groupness (Yzerbyt, Estrada, Corneille, Seron, & Demoulin, 2004, p. 122). In focus groups with Muslim

immigrants in the Netherlands, minority members were found to endorse essentialist beliefs about their group when being requested to ‘assimilate’ to the host culture, that is, when they were asked to abandon their cultural identity. In contrast, in face of open discrimination, they tended to de-essentialize themselves, thereby reducing ‘visible homogeneity’ (Verkuyten 2003). Male and female homosexuals, for example, essentialize their group belonging when facing marginalization, that is, when the majority denies attributing them a stable identity. They de-essentialize themselves in face of discrimination, that is, when they feel that the majority devalues their identity (Morton and Postmes 2009). In such contexts, group ‘essence’ serves as a situated discursive figure in the service of maintaining a socially favourable and distinct group status as theorized by Wagner et al. (2009).

Of course, essentializing as well as de-essentializing rhetoric can be used towards out-groups as well. For example, in racist discourse, essentializing rhetoric helps to exclude individuals apparently bearing attributes of other categories from the in-group and may justify discrimination against them (Holtz and Wagner 2009).

Sociology and anthropology emphasize the relational and interactional aspects of social identity as ‘boundary work’ (Pachucki et al. 2007). In-groups and out-groups are, in this view, the result of symbolic and social boundary work of actors. Social differences—the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, thus in-groups and out-group—and corresponding boundary processes are historically constructed in specific contexts and are variable, hereby involving a broad range of actors. In general, boundaries are understood to have both *social and symbolic* dimensions. Lamont and Molnar (2002: 168) define symbolic boundaries as *conceptual distinctions* between objects, people and practices that social actors apply in their categorizing activity. Thereby they create groups that are “objectified forms of social difference” with unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities (ibid). In their daily interactions, the actors are involved in struggles over social distinctions and categorizations because of symbolic boundaries that can shift. When symbolic boundaries are agreed upon by the majority, they can, however, take on a constraining character and can become social boundaries (ibid: 168). Social and symbolic boundary making is necessarily relational as in-groups and out-groups are the result of a twin process of group identification and external social categorization (Jenkins 1997). On the one hand, *group identification* refers to the ways individuals differentiate themselves from others by drawing on criteria of similarity and shared belonging within the *in-group* (i.e. what does it mean for German Muslims to belong to the ‘Muslims’—what means ‘being German’). Such communality is a form of monopolistic social closure; it defines membership, eligibility and access. For the closure of group boundaries to operate, any “cultural stuff” in terms of Barth (1969: 8) can provide a basis and resource like language, ritual, kinship, lifestyle, religion or gender representations. Boundaries are often marked by normative elements (i.e. ‘our’ gender relations are more equal than ‘yours’), putting groups in a normative hierarchy by using different symbolic resources. Boundary making refers to subjectively meaningful differences and similarities which do not signify real conformity, but which are central to ‘communalization’ (*Vergemeinschaftung*, Weber 1996). The second process, *external categorization*, is intimately bound up with power relations and relates to the capacity of one group to successfully impose its categories of ascription upon another group of people, and to the resources which the categorized

collectivity can draw upon to resist that imposition, if need be (i.e. the meaning given to ‘Muslims’ in German discourses). And it is this point which will be on the focus on our analysis when it comes to German Muslims as identification processes from side of Muslim Germans are closely related to the perceived external categorizations and hence, power relations between majority and minority groups.

Hence, in this study we hypothesize that when facing discrimination German Muslims will tend to identify more with their ingroup and cut ties with the outgroup, that is the German majority. In order to maintain a positive in-group identity, German Muslims may employ a variety of different strategies.

Contextualizing the Case Study: “Islam” as a Categorie of “Othering” in the Context of the 2010 Integration Debate’ in Germany

Social identity constructions are always embedded in political traditions and discourses that are located in a relational and interactional space. Transnational, national and local-regional public representations compose a potential pool from which German Muslims simultaneously can select in order to negotiate their social identities. Hence, it is necessary to draw the main characteristics of these environments. The following example draws on the discursive public and political context which was virulent at the time of the study and it allows crystalizing the main conditions under which identity construction from the side of the German Muslims takes place.

In August 2010, Thilo Sarrazin, an economist and former politician from the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), published his book ‘Deutschland schafft sich ab’ (‘Germany abolishes itself’). Even before the actual publication of the book, the publication of excerpts in large German newspapers—such as the tabloid ‘Bild’—triggered a very controversial debate across all German media about the challenges of integrating immigrants—especially those coming from Turkey—into German mainstream culture (Wendland 2011).

In his book, Sarrazin claims that the massive immigration by non-European immigrants into Germany and their higher birthrates may finally lead to Germans becoming ‘foreigners in their own country’. He goes on criticizing immigrants’ supposed unwillingness to integrate and the high costs for the German welfare system resulting foremost from Muslim immigrants from Turkey. He suggests several measures to force unwilling immigrants to learn German language and to assimilate to German culture and habits. He also proposed limiting immigration in the future to well-educated specialists needed by German economy.

Immediately afterwards, the social democrats, though finally unsuccessfully, tried to void Sarrazin’s party membership and he lost his post as an executive of the German Federal Bank. Nevertheless, Sarrazin’s book became a bestseller and he was praised for ‘finally speaking out the truth’ by right-wing as well as conservative media and large parts of the German public. Debates about problems with the integration of immigrants from Turkey dominated the German media for months to follow. On the side of German Muslims, Sarrazin’s book was mostly perceived as a blatant act of prejudice (cf. Kunst et al. 2012).

What we find in these debates are, first, over-simplified and essentializing ideas about cultures and ethnic groups. The discussants implied the boundaries of ethnic,

national, and religious communities, their identity and culture, to coincide in an unproblematic way. This vision has been criticized by a series of scholars for their underlying “Herderian Trinity” (Wimmer 2009), “groupism” (Brubaker 2004), and essentialism (Wagner et al. 2009; Dahinden 2011). Such conceptualizations hides non-cultural/religious and structural factors of inequalities, mask internal heterogeneity (i.e. among the Germans) and dynamics as well agency and presume that migrants or Muslims are defined by a group-culture-based determinism (Howarth et al. 2013). This problem of ethnicizing migrant issues has been vividly debated since the 1990 in Germany (Bukow and Llaryora 1998; Radtke 1996). As a new trend, however, ethnicizing was replaced by ‘muslimization’ in such debates. This is a consequence of the transnationalization of the category of ‘Islam’ that does not anymore apply to specific national groups but refers to all migrant issues in an essentializing way (Ramm 2010; Schiffauer 2007), as the Sarrazin debate shows very clearly.

Second, in line with this common representation, it does not come as a surprise that integration is directly related to cultural assimilation and that some ‘cultures’ might, in this view, be seen as ‘incompatible’ with German values (cf. Holtz and Wagner 2009). Such negative representations about the ‘others’ are the main engine of current efforts to introduce neo-assimilationist policies demanding *individual* integration efforts, instead of bringing up issues of discrimination—and an avowal towards ‘national values’—a tendency which can be depicted not only in Germany (Schönwälder 2010), but in most European countries (Kofman 2005). The question arises, therefore, how German Muslims take up these essentialized ideas about integration and culture when negotiating social identities, how they deal for their identity constructions with these negative attributes and the demand for individual efforts to integrate and to adopt German ‘values’?

Method

Acquisition of Participants

We conducted five focus groups with German Muslims in four different German cities. As means of maximization of perspectives (cf. Strauss and Corbin 1990), we intended to interview as many different representatives of German Muslims as possible by recruiting participants at such different places as two mosques, a university, a Turkish sports club and a secular community center in four cities in different regions of Germany. Many of the participants knew, and interacted with each other beforehand. In all cases, the participants of the focus groups shared a common interest like attending the same mosque, the same sports club, or the same university or living in the same neighborhood. Interviewing such somewhat ‘natural groups’ in contrast to focus groups composed of very diverse individuals who do not know each other beforehand facilitates the development of spontaneous intra-group communication (Gaskell 2000) and allows for insights into participants’ everyday discourses (Wagner and Hayes 2005). In the following, we will provide a short summary of the five focus group settings and the respective participants.

Attendees of an 'Independent' Mosque This mosque and the associated community center are independent in the sense of not being affiliated with any of the larger umbrella organizations of German Muslims. However, brochures and other material from the organization "Einladung zum Paradies" ('invitation to paradise') and frequent references to Saudi Arabia as an 'ideal' Muslim country suggest that the mosque represents a more Salafi interpretation of Islam influenced by the religious practice of Islam in Saudi Arabia (cf. Esposito 2010). The contact with the mosque was established via email. One of the mosque's officials organized the focus group which took place in one of the mosque's meeting rooms. Participants were eight male adolescents and young adults. Ages ranged from 15 to 26. One of the participants was born in Germany to Turkish immigrants; the other participants came to Germany as immigrants in childhood or adolescence. The families of four participants came from Dagestan or the Caucasus region. Three participants came from Palestinian families. After a request by the representatives of the mosque, also an adult official of the mosque of Turkish origin was present during the focus group. The discussion took place in June 2010 and lasted about 90 min.

Students of a German University Participants were invited by a female student of the respective university, who participated in the research project as a student worker. Thirteen university students (all in their twenties or early thirties; two female) participated in the focus group. Three participants (one female) were born in Germany as children of Turkish immigrants and hold German citizenship. The other participants came to Germany in the course of their university studies. Three (one female) were from Northern Africa, two came from Arab countries, two from Sudan, and three from Uzbekistan. The focus group took place in a meeting room of the university in June 2010 and lasted approximately 120 min.

Attendees of a Secular Community Center Contact was established by a frequent visitor of the community center, who is a relative of one of the student assistants involved in the research project. Participants were seven attendees of the community center (ages ranged from 19 to 37; two females). In the course of the discussion, five 'casual' guests of the community center (all in their sixties; two female) joined the discussion. The families of all participants came to Germany from the same region in Anatolia. One female participant was born in Germany, the others immigrated to Germany at some point in their lives. Two more male participants hold German citizenship, the others hold Turkish citizenship. All participants were representatives of the Alevi branch of Islam. The discussion took place in November 2011 in the community center and lasted about 130 min.

Attendees of a DITIB-Mosque Contact with this mosque was established via the internet. The mosque is affiliated with the official Turkish umbrella organization for mosques in Germany (DITIB). Participants were 15 male adolescents and young adults (ages ranged from 13 to 18), a 22 year old mosque official, and the 45 year old Imam. Most of the adolescents were born in Germany to Turkish parents; seven hold German citizenship, the other participants hold Turkish citizenship. The focus group took place in a meeting group in the mosque in December 2010 and lasted about 90 min.

Members of a Turkish Sports Club Contact with the organization was established via the internet. Actually, we intended to interview adolescent members of a football team, but as the adolescents did not show up due to conflicting schedules, we interviewed six male adult members of the sports club (ages ranged from 35 to about 65). One participant was born in Germany as a child of Turkish immigrants; the other participants are immigrants from Turkey. They all hold Turkish citizenship. The discussion took place in a meeting room of the sports club in December 2010 and lasted about 80 min.

Procedure

The first author of this paper moderated the discussions. In all focus groups except the one with attendees of the DITIB mosque and the one with attendees of the independent mosque, he was assisted by a student assistant with a Turkish family background. All participants spoke in German except for the older attendees of the secular community center and the imam of the DITIB mosque, who spoke Turkish. The focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed by the student assistants. Turkish comments were translated into German. Afterwards, extensive summaries of the focus groups were written ('formulating interpretations, Bohnsack 2004). Within these summaries, the focus groups were broken down into separate thematic sections. For each section, the discourse organization and the participants' way of relating to each other was analyzed ('reflecting interpretation'; *ibid.* p. 221) as means of deconstructing the social underpinnings of the participants' intuitive mutual understanding ('documentary analysis', *ibid.* p. 217).

The Questionnaire

The focus groups loosely followed a questionnaire. Whenever it seemed helpful, the moderator would skip questions, add new questions, or changed the order of questions. In the beginning, the moderator introduced himself, the research project, and if necessary his assistant. Afterwards, the participants were asked to introduce themselves. The participants were not requested to give other information about themselves than their first names and ages.

First, the participants were asked to discuss their experiences as Muslims in Germany in general. Next, participants were asked to discuss their religious beliefs and the importance of them for their lives. The following thematic block dealt with political questions and the 'integration debate' which will be discussed below. Afterwards, participants were asked if they identified more with Germany, their 'country of origin', or their religious affiliation. Finally, participants were asked if there are any other topics they want to discuss.

Reactions to Stigmatization and Discrimination

I'm OK, but we Suffer a Lot: The Feeling of Collective Discrimination

The vast majority of participants describe their personal situation as Muslims in Germany in rather positive terms. One of the university students told that his

Sudanese family even warned him before going to Germany—especially the former communist “Eastern” part of Germany—because they feared racism and islamophobia. Nevertheless, his experiences were quite positive and he was surprised by the religious freedom in Germany. In several focus groups participants state that it is easier for Muslims to live in regions of Germany with a large immigrant population.

Accounts of personal experiences of open racism and discrimination are sparse. If such accounts are given, not ‘the Germans’ in general are targeted as culprits, but only subsets of the German population like some older right-wing people and some young Neo-Nazis. Frequently, such racists are called “lunatics” or “victims” and it is hoped that such open forms of discrimination may “die out” in the near future.

Possibly, this discursive use of intragroup differentiation or strategy of boundary fission (Wimmer 2008: 1036), allows for the participants to maintain a certain level of identification with Germany in face of negative experiences with members of the German public. All participants describe interactions with non-German Muslims either at their workplace, their school or university or in their neighborhood. Only the very religious attendees of the independent Mosque say that it is not possible for them to have non-Muslims—independent of their nationality or ethnicity—as close friends, but they as well have no problem working together with them or being in the same sports club.

On the other hand, in all focus groups there popped up accounts of strong feelings of collective discrimination. An overwhelming majority regards the depiction of Islam in German media as overly negative. As a consequence, whereas the participants rarely report instances of overt discrimination, they feel under constant subtle suspicion of being terrorists or religious fanatics. According to participants in other groups, discrimination is strongest whenever visible elements of Muslim culture like veils or beards are displayed. A young adult visitor from the Turkish mosque says:

A: This is just big world politics. What the big and powerful ones are doing comes back to us. We are always denigrated. If you go to a shopping mall and your beard is too long, people will look at you with suspicion.

An adolescent attendee of the secular community says that he was often refused as a roommate in flat shares. He thinks that this is because potential roommates would suspect him not to drink alcohol and be against music and partying even though he describes himself as an atheist and non-religious. Even before he lost his faith, other Muslims would not regard him a ‘real’ Muslim, because his family is Alevi. But anyway, “if you don’t shave for 3 days, people believe you are a terrorist, although you are not even a Muslim”. It must be noted, that the participant was not told openly that he was refused because of his supposedly Muslim background. However, he holds his somewhat ‘Muslim’ appearance responsible for being treated unfairly.

Many participants view different interest groups as the driving forces between the negative image of Islam in Germany: right-wing politicians, US-America and other Western powers because of economic interests in the Muslim world (namely oil in the Arab peninsula), and in some cases also ‘the Jews’, who want to legitimize their control over Palestine. Also in this case, the general German public is exculpated from these more subtle forms of discrimination.

The participants in all groups distanced themselves widely from any forms of terrorism and militant Islamism, creating a strong boundary towards extremist Islam. A few participants even doubt that Muslims were involved for example in the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center and express conspiracy theories. To the vast majority, Muslim terrorists are either victims of personal loss and hardship, like fugitives from the civil war in Afghanistan or Palestinian refugees, or they are regarded angry young people who just happened to “fall into the hands” of evil people, lunatics, and criminals, who taught them a wrong understanding of Islam. Again, intragroup differentiation is used to cope with the perceived ‘evils’ of Muslim culture.

Corroborating Ethnic Essentialism: The Impossibility of Being ‘Truly’ German

All participants were asked in how far they regard themselves as Germans. Interestingly, whereas a number of participants have German citizenship, none of them identified him- or herself as German in the first place. Some participants with German citizenship suggest percentages of their identity as “30 % German, 70 % Turkish”, whereas others tend to identify themselves mainly or “truly” as Turks. A participant of the student group with German citizenship answered the question of the interviewer to what extent he regards himself as ‘German’:

B: I do not regard myself as German, but I cannot ... one cannot deny the German influence, because I grew up and went to school here. [The interviewer asks, if he feels more German or Turkish] ... I would say I am a Turk, but I got a German passport. Yes, one could put it like that ... although I am certainly a bit German as well.

All participants, who do not fully regard themselves as Germans in spite of German citizenship, explain this phenomenon by referring to the German people’s unwillingness to accept them as equals. Another participant with German citizenship of the same focus corroborates B’s statement:

C: I regard myself as a Turk as well, because in German society I will never be accepted as a German ... that is impossible [...] just look at my black hair ...

An adolescent visitor of the Turkish mosque answered to the same question:

D: I was born in Germany, but I do not hold German citizenship. I could never say that I feel German, because we are automatically excluded by the Germans. They tell us that we are no Germans.

These participants appear to think in terms of an essentialized conception of ‘Germanness’ by the ‘autochthone’ German population. Often, visible and easily recognizable physical features like black hair or a dark complexion are mentioned as elements prohibiting being accepted as a German. Hence, assimilation strategies such as individual boundary crossing (Zolberg and Woon 1999) are considered unfeasible. In response to the statement by D, another adolescent visitor of the Turkish mosque mentions exemptions from the ‘rule’

that Germans are unwilling to accept ‘Turks’ as Germans—even if they hold German citizenship:

E: There are of course exemptions, because there are Germans saying ‘you are a German; you were born here, live here, you are German, we do not regard you as a Turk’. But in the end, we are of course ... we speak Turkish, regard Turkey as our country ... *truly*, we are Turks [emphasis by the authors]

Whereas participant E is glad that at least some Germany are ready to accept him as a German, he is still ‘truly’ regarding himself a Turk thereby displaying a very essentialized conception of the Turkish part of his identity. In many statements, biological metaphors like ‘Turkish roots’ or ‘Turkish blood’ are used to describe the indispensable Turkish influence. Turkishness—as well as Germanness—is construed in a heavily essentialized way. In contrast, when describing the ‘German part’ of their identity, participants tend to use ‘mechanical metaphors’ like being ‘stained’ with Germanness or being ‘influenced’ by German schooling. Nevertheless, a number of participants complained about not being fully accepted by ‘the Turks’ as well. A member of the Turkish sports club gave the following statement, after he tells how he was angered by the bad organization in the Turkish consulate:

F: In the consulate, you are treated like a German in Turkey and if you go out you are treated by Germans as a foreigner. Where do you belong? This is a problem, because you are no real Turk and lived in Germany for 30 years and have really tried to get along, und then you are not accepted at all, you ‘failed to integrate’ so to say. Where do you belong?

In this case, the reference to the ‘failure to integrate’ was a cynical response to the ‘integration debate’ mentioned above. Before, other participants angrily complaint that even if you got a job, learned German, and participated in German society, at least some Germans will still deny that you integrated into German society.

For older participants who immigrated to Germany at some earlier point in life, identification seems to be easier. They regard themselves as Turks who happen to live in Germany. For the younger participants—many of whom were born and grew up in Germany—the situation is more difficult. They express belonging to Germany as well as to their parents’ homeland. Unanimously, they do not perceive this bi-ethnicity as a mutual enrichment, but as a burden. Instead of feeling German or Turkish, they tend to neither feel completely German or Turkish.

Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that the participants were invited to these focus groups because of them belonging or at least having familiar ties to the group of German Muslims—irrespective of their citizenship. Hence, participants may have been less inclined to self-identify as Germans then they would have been under different circumstances.

The Role and Importance of Transnational Religion

The situation is in a way different for the very religious visitors of the independent mosque. Here, the participants explicitly identify themselves primarily as truly believing Muslims. Ethnic or national identities are at best secondary. In response

to the interviewer's question, to what extent the participants feel 'German', a young adult visitor of the mosque says:

H: All Muslims are brothers. There is no nationality among brothers. This means that there is no differentiation between for example German Muslims and Russian Muslims.

This statement was heavily corroborated by the other participants. The superiority of religious belonging is in line with the transnational salafi interpretation of Islam in general (cf. Esposito 2010). Proudly, some visitors of the mosque tell about German converts to Islam as a proof that ethnicity does not matter to them at all—applying the strategy of universalizing. The transnationalized category of 'Islam' is their direct resource fuelling self-recognition. Furthermore, "Islam" is used in terms of a normative inversion and presented as the morally superior religion.

Being accepted in this community depends on strict obedience towards the respective religious beliefs and practices. This becomes obvious, when the mosque official refers to rather secular German politicians with a Muslim family background explicitly as "Muslims" in quotes. Hence, the superordinate identification with Muslim belief only refers to the 'true Muslims', who practice their religion in accordance with its salafi interpretation. This is in contrast to most of the other participants who regard religion as a private affair and often even emphasize the diversity between Islamic practices and beliefs.

The question of 'true Islam' becomes salient as well in the student focus group. At some point, a very religious participant from an Arab country (K) explained to his colleagues that according to Islamic belief, if a Muslim man marries a Christian woman, she is not required to convert to Islam. On the other hand, a Muslim woman is not allowed to take a Christian husband unless he is willing to convert to Islam. A participant from a Turkish family background with German citizenship (I) replied that for him it is more important that husband and wife respect each other's religion:

I: What I do not understand ... religion is in fact something between man and God, isn't it? I think everyone has to come to terms with it himself, no matter if the husband is Muslim, Jewish, or Christian ... why not?

K: If everybody could do as he likes, we would have a billion religions.

[A female member of the group interjects 'but this is exactly how it is in reality']

K: Certainly not! Allah only accepts, what he prescribed through his prophet!

For many of the younger visitors of the Turkish mosque, religion is also a means to be accepted by their relatives in Turkey. An adolescent visitor told about his experiences with his Turkish relatives:

L: [When I visit Turkish relatives] ... they always ask: "Do you go to a mosque in Germany? Can you pray?" [...] They didn't even know that there are mosques in Germany as well. Then we went to the mosque during Ramadan and we had to pray. I went there and did that and they were so surprised. They all asked me, how

I come to know about that [the ‘correct’ religious practices]. I told them that I *can* pray, believe it or not, and that I learned it in Germany.

Accordingly, some older participants of the secular community center and sports club groups were concerned that their children and grandchildren may become ‘assimilated’ to German culture instead of being ‘integrated’. Religion—and in particular religious practices—is consequently an important symbol for showing respect and acceptance towards their ‘origins’ and their ‘cultural heritage’—again Islam is there the resource which serves not only for boundary work, but also for finding recognition and self-assertion. Furthermore, many of the adult participants expressed severe concern against the German authorities interfering with religious matters. A member of the Turkish sports club says during a heated discussion on the ‘integration debate’:

M: As far as integration is concerned, I say ‘yes’, but if you equate it with religion, I say ‘no’. I really approve that every immigrant has to learn German, that’s not the point ... but if I can speak German perfectly and someone asks ‘hey, why are you still carrying the Koran with you and not a [Christian] cross?’, I say ‘no’.

Who are we? The Integration Dilemma and Strategies of Collective Symbolic Coping

The ‘integration debate’ in Germany and the abundant media reports on fanatic Muslim extremists put a strain on Muslims’ identity constructions—irrespective whether they are strongly religious and irrespective of nationality and ethnicity. One obvious reaction is the denial of the ‘German part’ of participants’ identities. As shown above, the ongoing debate, which was also a matter of debate in the focus groups, seems to prevent even the participants with German citizenship from identifying with Germany. Within the participants’ discourses on national, cultural, and ethnic identities, different strategies can be observed in their pursuit of a positively valued social identity:

Reactive Religious Awakening Among the attendees of the independent mosque and some members of the student group, a ‘total identification’ (cf. Verkuyten 2007) with Islam seems to fill the ‘identity void’ resulting of the perceived rejection by the German majority. Many attendees of the mosque tell about how they found to the ‘real religion’ and how happy they were that Allah brought them on the right track. Four attendees tell that their families are not very religious or practiced their religion in a ‘wrong’ way flawed by local customs and ethnic traditions. They had their religious awakening as immigrants in Germany which is a way to cope through normative inversion—we have the morally good religion (Wimmer 2008: 1037).

The strong practice of religion, expressing itself through overt symbols like beards and religious clothing, public praying, participation in mosque activities and missionary work, is used to bond the participants. All these visible symbols of the inner transformation by finding to God increase perceived homogeneity between the

mosque attendees, who come from very different ethnic and social backgrounds. This homogenization expresses itself and is reinforced by the extensive use of essentializing rhetoric like referring to community members as brothers and sisters.

Of course, this new found identity comes at a price: the religious laws—as understood according to the salafi interpretation of Islam—put an obstacle towards participation in German ‘mainstream’ culture. As the participants are not allowed to drink alcohol, dance, or listen to music themselves or to be present at places, where such behavior takes place, a lot of ‘typical’ activities for adolescents and young adults in Germany are barred from them. Close friends and among the older participants spouses only come from within their religious community.

Less religious Muslims are not regarded members of their community. Like non-Muslims, community members are encouraged to try to bring them back to the right path, but close friendships are impossible and there are no signs of identification with the Muslim community or *Umma* as comprising of all Muslims independent of different religious traditions and forms of religious practice—a universalizing strategy. This eclecticism is typical for fundamentalist orientations, which can be found in all major religions including Christianity, Judaism, as well as Hinduism (Almond et al. 2003; Herriot 2007; Sen and Wagner 2009).

Religion as Means of Maintaining Ethnic Identities For many participants from Turkish families, maintenance of their ethnic identity as Turks living in Germany is pivotal. When directly asked whether they feel more Turkish or German, even participants with German nationality state that they rather identify themselves as Turks. Thereby, they confirm the boundary with the German majority population, which is perceived as denying the German aspects of their identities, and blur the boundaries towards the Turks in Turkey.

Younger participants, who grew up in Germany, face the problem that they feel as well rejected by Turks when visiting relatives in Turkey. In this case, religion can help to prove that they did not lose their ‘cultural heritage’ in Germany and still feel belonging to the culture of their parents and grandparents. Here, transnational religion helps to bridge the gap between Turks in Turkey and Turks in Germany. Not so much visible religious attire and overt symbols, but ‘correct’ religious practices are emphasized.

In spite of the German ‘influences’ and often in spite of personally feeling quite at home in Germany, perceived collective discrimination leads many participants to consider returning to Turkey at some time, which has become a significant and increasingly frequent phenomenon among German Turks. Return migration is most frequent among well-educated immigrants and most often the unwillingness of the German majority population to integrate Turks into Germany is quoted as a reason (cf. Sezer and Daglar 2009).

Marginalization and Social Creativity In some cases, participants express feelings of marginalization. For example, the young attendee of the secular community center complaining of being stigmatized as a Muslim in spite of in fact being non-religious and not being accepted as a Muslim by the Muslims, expresses frustration about falling in between the social categories feeling neither as German, nor as Muslim, nor

as a Turk. In this case, political activities in the left-wing of the political spectrum seem to fill the void resulting of this feeling of deprivation.

In the case of the member of the Turkish sports club complaining of being no ‘real’ German and no ‘real’ Turk, local identities (Tilly 1998) such as being a member of the group of Turkish immigrants in his hometown serves as the primary source of identification. In different groups, participants state that their identity can best be described as ‘German-Turks’ (‘Deutschtürken’), thereby displaying ‘hyphenated identity’ (Sirin and Fine 2007; Fine and Sirin 2007). We argue that this reconstruction of participants’ social identities is more than just a change in the dimension of evaluation *sensu* Tajfel (1974). Participants may go beyond that and find ways to radically reconstruct their social identities (Howarth et al. 2013).

Discussion

This study is about integration from the to-be-integrated’s point of view. Being a highly topical issue in all European countries, integration of immigrants receives a lot of attention from both, the public and political leaders. The local majority population in Germany as well as in other countries perceive integration as a debt to be paid by the original immigrants and by the following generations and not to be offered by the host country. The idea of what constitutes successful integration, though, differs between the two groups: National majorities tend to see successful integration in an assimilative process whereas immigrants do not want to do away with their cultural inheritance, hence rejecting blatant assimilation. For them, shedding their cultural baggage would mean losing the resources that define their very identity as an individual and severing the ties to their extended family, that often still lives back in their country of origin. The older participants’ fear of their children becoming ‘assimilated’ to German culture shows that integrating for them would mean participating in the economic and political life of their host country and maintaining their ethnic identity, at least for a few generations. In the case of Muslim immigrants, stigmatization in the aftermath of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’ aggravates these problems.

The participants of our focus groups dominantly display feelings of collective discrimination. Even non-religious participants or non-practicing Muslims fall victim to stigmatization. Some participants resort to ‘strong’ religion to fill the void that any rejection creates; others resort to emphasizing their ethnic identities. In both cases, transnationalized religion helps to bridge gaps between members of the same community: in case of the strong religious salafists, religion helps to overcome ethnic boundaries. In case of the younger Turks, religion helps to keep the ties to their ‘homeland’ in spite of growing up in another country. Both groups deploy essentializing discursive strategies as well: the salafists are using ‘blood-metaphors’ like brothers and sisters to reinforce the ties between the community members, the young Turks refer to their ‘blood’ and ‘roots’ to legitimize their claim for a Turkish identity even though they feel “somewhat German” as well.

The vast differences between Muslim communities in Germany with regard to identity implies that neither in the scientific, nor in the political discourse it is helpful or adequate to speak about “the German Muslims” or even worse “the Muslim” as a

monolithic block (Martin-Muñoz 2010). Religion as a symbolic resource (Zittoun et al. 2003) can help bridging boundaries or can be used to create fissions within the Muslims and between them and the non-Muslim Germans. The more the German media and politicians mirror the self-image of Islam propagated by extremist or religious fundamentalist groups, the more difficult it gets for the vast majority of Muslims to successfully integrate the different aspects of their personality and to feel Muslim and German at the same time. Allegations towards German Muslims to be ‘unwilling’ to integrate or to ‘deny’ integration (‘Integrationsverweigerung’) flatly ignore the difficulties and complexities of developing a positive social identity as a member of a stigmatized group. The ‘integration debate’ in Germany as propagated by populists like Thilo Sarrazin seems to be part of the problem, not the solution. This suggests that meaning-making and resulting social identities and boundaries can only be understood in their local and transnational contexts and that they are closely related to power relations between majority and minority groups.

Acknowledgments The focus group data are part of a research project on young Muslim lifeworlds funded by the German Ministry of the Interior. The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Mehtap Yildiz, Kadir Cetin, and Jens Jirschitzka in organizing and conducting the focus-groups.

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