

**“Going beyond Culture and Assimilating Immigrants: The Conversation that
Germany Needs”**
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A cursory look today at the pages of a mainstream magazine like *Der Spiegel* will reveal the vitriolic and even paranoid (as well as counterproductive) tone of the wrangling over Germany’s integration “problem.” Headlines such as “Germany’s Difficult Debate with Its Muslim Community,” “Religious Divisions within Germany: A Parallel Muslim Universe,” or “Muslim Integration: Germany’s Lost Daughters” abound. They make clear to the reader that Germany faces, above all else, a religious or cultural problem. The problem, it appears, is not about encouraging naturalization and educational/occupational attainment, or creating citizens and middle-class stakeholders; it’s about how to perform a speedy makeover of people’s deepest beliefs through government fiat. This is not to say that incorporating culturally different citizens into the more progressive fold of liberalism is undesirable: it is merely to suggest that social exclusion and public hostility do not create liberal and integrated citizens out of immigrant minorities. Germany’s slow progress in making citizens out of “foreigners” who may be third-generation immigrants, its failure to incorporate them into universities and elite jobs, and its failure to include them in the body politic, as well as a generally ethnic conception of Germany, impede integration far more than immigrants’ slow adoption of Western liberalism. I argue that liberalism will follow socio-economic and political incorporation. For that, Germany must become inclusive. Habermas’ constitutional patriotism may thus be a better idea than a *leit kultur*.

The initially temporary postwar migration of guest-workers from Turkey and other labor-exporting countries turned into permanent settlement in due time, which made

a reluctant country of immigration out of Germany. The Swiss writer Max Frisch famously analyzed the situation by pointing out: “We wanted workers and we got people instead.” And today there are more than 7 million non-citizen immigrants (and children or even grand-children of immigrants) in Germany. From 1955 (when recruitment began) until 1990, naturalization was far from being a “right” of long-term citizens, as naturalization was realized (and only rarely) purely at the discretion of authorities. The federal Naturalization Guidelines of 1977 famously stated: “The Federal Republic of Germany is not a country of immigration; it does not strive to increase the number of German citizens by way of naturalization...” Until laws which led to liberalization in 1990, 1993, and 1999, citizenship was based on the ethnic conception enshrined in a 1913 law. Ethnic Germans who had never even been to Germany had more of a right to naturalization than third generation Turks. Ruud Koopmans noted in a 1999 article about Germany and its immigrants that 100,000 “foreigners” were being born in Germany each year. This of course has much to do with the so-called ethnic conception of German nationhood, recounted famously by Rogers Brubaker, and which dates back at least to the emblematic debate between Renan and Treitschke more than a century ago.

This has all contributed to a situation whereby immigrants have been seen as non-Germans (even if they naturalized) and Germany has been perceived as an exclusive club. Even after German naturalization law was belatedly liberalized by the Schroeder government in 1999 (over fierce objections by the right), naturalization has remained low. Koopmans and his colleagues found in 2005, in their book *Contested Citizenship*, that Germany’s naturalization rate (as a percentage of the foreign population) was 2.5 % (lowest among the five countries examined) versus 7.1 % in the Netherlands in 2000. An

article by Merih Anil in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* in 2007 notes that this has steadily climbed down to 1.9 % in 2004. She also found that the absence of a right for dual citizenship and continuing feelings of exclusion from the “German nation,” as well as the lack of encouragement by the government, have kept rates low. Even after the reforms, certain states insist on making naturalization difficult rather than encourage it. In an article entitled “New Rules for Muslims in German State Blasted,” *Deutsche Welle* reported, in 2006, that Baden-Wuerttemberg’s new procedures included lengthy cultural attitude interrogations for Muslims.

When one thinks of the implications of these facts for the political theory of democracy and political participation, one need not be surprised to find political alienation or a lack of “belonging,” that is, *integration* among “foreigners” in Germany. Rosenstone and Hansen argued in *Mobilization, Participation, and American Democracy* (along with, say, Verba, Schlozman and Brady in *Voice and Equality*) that a lop-sided system of participation leads to political inequality and alienation: “the idle go unheard,” they pointed out. After all, how is belonging to a political community of equals possible without citizenship? There is something that is amiss when a huge portion of a country’s population has to stay out of the national political conversation. The sight of angry politicians scolding immigrants for their lack of integration, when those immigrants are either non-citizens or are seen as foreigners (given the still ethnic conception of German nationhood), is surely a farce to most at the receiving end of the fiery lecture. This political exclusion also means that Turks, or other immigrants, rarely encounter public figures or government employees that are like them, which would make them feel included. On a very symbolic, but important, note it should also be remembered that the

German national team in the 2006 World Cup looked as if Germany had experienced no migration, while France, Britain, and the Netherlands boasted very diverse football teams.

In addition to political exclusion, migrants or Germans of migrant origins also suffer from socio-economic exclusion. The new theorists of assimilation (for example, Richard Alba and Victor Nee) or scholars who focus on the second generation and their educational attainments (such as Roger Waldinger, Maurice Crul, and Hans Vermeulen) all note that assimilation (understood not as a wholesale adoption of the host society's culture but as adaptation to and success in that society) absolutely requires educational attainment and occupational mobility. If immigrants and their offspring are left behind in the new knowledge-intensive economy, they will not become assimilated. If they are destined to ghettos, menial jobs, or unemployment, they will not feel included. They also will not become as liberal as German society wants immigrants to become. At the individual level, becoming liberal almost certainly requires a degree of material comfort and educational attainment. The 2005 micro census data of the *Statistisches Bundesamt* reports that only 4% of German Turks have attained a university degree, compared to 17% of non-migrant Germans. By contrast, in Britain 12 % of Muslims have university degrees or equivalent qualifications according to UK National Statistics. In the United States, the census reports that 14.3 % of Dominicans (who are one of the most disadvantaged immigrant groups) have college degrees. Socio-economic exclusion in the form of unemployment is also rampant in Germany. Bender and Seifert report in a 2003 article that 25 % of Turks in Germany are also unemployed. In Berlin, that number is much higher. Yet Germany, given its obsession with integration and its efforts to regulate the cultures of immigrants to that end,

never seems to debate the socio-economic requirements of assimilation (or integration, which is the word most people in Germany use).

Lastly, one must note that the political culture of Germany is relatively hostile to the inclusion of immigrants as equal co-citizens in the German body politic. Debates that are ostensibly about asylum or immigration routinely are redirected towards the desirability in principle of having any immigrants in the country at all. The conservative parties especially have been guilty of this in the past. In the early 1980s and the early 1990s, CDU/CSU galvanized the nation in favor of more restrictive policies. Roger Karapin noted in a 2002 contribution to *Shadows over Europe*, an edited volume on the radical right, that the conservatives' politicization of immigration politicized and legitimized anti-immigrant rhetoric, while strengthening the radical right. In recent debates on expanding high-skilled immigration, Jürgen Rüttgers (a CDU candidate in North-Rhine Westphalia), famously used the slogan "Kinder statt Inder!" (Children not Indians!); and he was not on the margins. Moreover, any government policy meant to ease treatment of foreign-origin Germans or immigrants is still controversial. Even though Germany only belatedly passed an anti-discrimination law at the behest of the EU in 2006 (Britain has had a Commission for Racial Equality for decades without much controversy), the bill was vehemently opposed by Conservatives as an "overfulfillment" of the EU Race Directive.

None of this is to say that acts that are illegal under German laws which may be regularly practiced by minorities, or radicalism, should be tolerated; nor is it to say that multiculturalist policies (however that is defined) are needed. It is only my contention that an excessive concern with culture and religion has infused Germany's debate on integration and the government policies needed to bring integration about. Socio-economic inclusion and the creation of a more inclusive conception of nationhood have

been thrown by the wayside. Even impeccably liberal commentators have given into the temptation to have a tabloid-style conversation on the challenges of migration. I submit that political and socio-economic inclusion must make its way into that conversation.