Studii de lingvistică 8, 2018, 175 - 189

Immigration, integration and *Leitkultur* in German newspapers: competing discourses about national belonging

Janet M. Fuller[1]

Abstract: This research examines the use of terms for social groups in Germany, specifically *Personen mit Migrationshintergrund* 'people with migration background', *Türken* 'Turks', and *Biodeutscher* 'ethnic German(s)' in online discussions about the integration of immigrants into German society. These terms construct essentialist social categories that focus on ethnic background as inherent in cultural behavior, which makes integration for members of these groups impossible. Further, in some cases naming stigmatized groups is no longer necessary, as the discourses about members of these groups are so strong that the mere mention of particular cultural practices is enough to indicate who the unwanted members of society are. However, competing discourses, which challenge the use of these terms and the discourses of alterity, are also part of the discussion of national belonging exemplified in these data.

Key words: immigration, integration, *Leitkultur*, national identities, media discourse, critical discourse analysis.

1. Introduction

In the spring of 2017, the *Leitkultur* Debate (Manz 2004) was resurrected with a proclamation by the German Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maizière outlining a German 'guiding culture' into which immigrants should integrate. This gave rise to a series of articles and hundreds of readers commenting on the idea of a *Leikultur*[2] in the German newspaper *Die Zeit* in the week of April 30-May 7. In this research, I provide a qualitative analysis of the discourses present in comments on two of these articles. My analysis focuses on comments which address the idea of a dominant culture in Germany (what it is and how it should be, and who belongs to it and who does not), and the

[1] Rijksuniversiteit Groningen; j.m.fuller@ug.nl.

[2] The term *Leitkultur* (guiding culture) was used to refer to the idea of core German values and cultural practices which immigrants should adopt in order to integrate into German society.

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

linguistic means used to construct the social categories of belonging and exclusion. I approach these comments as part of the discourse of German national identity (see also Fuller forthcoming).

The term "discourse" is used to discuss how language, combined with other social practices, represent particular aspects of the world from a particular perspective (Fairclough 2009, Kress & van Leeuwen 2001). Here, I focus on how various linguistic strategies are used to produce and reproduce social categories related to national belonging (Wodak 2009). Discourses are thus more ideological than linguistic, but manifest themselves through the use of language. Migration discourse – including media discourse – can be studied as part of the mental processes underlying the ideological stances toward migration, as well as the social and political functions of these discourses in a given society (Van Dijk 2018).

Previous research on newspaper representations of migrants in the European context show that metaphors are commonly employed in the discursive construction of the migrants as an unwanted intrusion. These metaphors include natural disaster metaphors such as likening immigrants to a flood (Charteris-Black 2006) as well as other dehumanizing metaphors equating immigrants to parasites (Musolff 2015). In a study of British and Italian newspapers, Taylor (2014) found that tabloids discussed asylum seekers as a threat to taxpayers, although overall (including broadsheets, which focused more on migrants leaving the country) the depictions could not be said to position migrants and asylum seekers as scapegoats for societal problems.

Recent research on discourses of migration (Gal 2018) notes that even discourses which position migrants in positive ways must necessarily refer to stigmatization of migrant populations to refute them. However, this body of research also includes a focus on the process of social change. That is, the discursive construction of migrants both reflects and helps shape their place in society, so the hegemonic ideologies which disadvantage them are not fixed, permanent social positions but ongoing negotiations.

In addition to the analysis of discourses about migration, research on discourses about Muslims in Europe are relevant to this study. For the British press, Baker (2012) showed that Muslims were more likely to be linked to extreme beliefs than moderate or strong beliefs, which parallels the findings of Ahmed and Matthes (2017) in a meta-study of research on portrayal of Muslims worldwide. Baker *et al.* (2013) found that Muslims in the British press were overwhelmingly linked to conflict. Saeed (2007) claims that overwhelmingly, Muslims are represented as the Other and not British; in some cases, Muslims are also framed as a threat to society (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010). Wodak and Boukala (2015) also note that the discursive construction of European identity often excludes Muslims.

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

The discourses of immigration and integration in Germany discussed here also draw on discourses about what it means to be German. Discourses are seen as both reflecting and shaping ideologies about national identities (De Cilla *et al.* 1999), which in turn provide impetus for political change. As discussed by Williams (2014), the discourses about belonging in Germany have shifted to be more inclusive and to view integration as a two-way process. This is reflected to some extent in citizenship policy that has moved from *jus sanguinis*, which reinforced ethnonational ideas about being German, to, in 2000, a form of *jus solis* which lent credence to more cultural views of national identity. Those born in and living legally in Germany are now eligible for German citizenship, and the caveat that they must give up all other citizenships was removed in 2014. This more inclusive policy for citizenship is reflected in the discourses analyzed here. However, although the explicit mention of race and ethnicity in a definition of German belonging is, at least among the readers of *Die Zeit*, largely absent, this ideological shift has of course not been complete, and the competing discourses reflect inclusive and pluralist ideologies alongside new ways of encoding ethnonationalism.

One specific linguistic feature which will be examined here is the use of the terms for referring to different social groups. Lutter (2016) notes that the changes in terminology over the years, from *Ausländer* to the current term *Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund*, reflect changes in the status of the people denoted but did not alter the fact that these terms served to distinguish these residents or citizens from 'normal' Germans. In the analysis below, I will address the role of such terms in the discourse of belonging in Germany.

The methodology used in this analysis is a two-pronged approach that allows to look at the larger discourses of migration and also linguistic strategies used to reproduce them. The articles to be analyzed were selected after a preliminary examination of all of the articles on this topic which appeared within the week of the appearance of the first article on April 30; the initial article and one other were selected for analysis primarily because the threads focused on the topic of integration and the definitions of Germanness. Thus, there is no claim here about the salience of discourse on integration in online discourse, as the data were selected because they dealt with this topic. The question which can be addressed with these data is, once the topic of integration into German society is broached, what discourses emerge?

In the first phase of the analysis, the comments were coded for the ideological positions as they emerge in the data. Of the total of 643 comments on these two article, 195 comments specifically addressed the need for a *Leitkultur* for the integration of immigrants in German society (see the overview in Table 1 below). These results provide an overview of the multiple discourses present in German society, which include both inclusive and exclusive ideological stances.

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

Second, specific terminology used in discussing groups of people within German society are examined to see how these terms are part of the development of discourses of alterity. Here I examine the use of three particular terms: *Personen / Menschen / Mitbürger mit Migrationshintergrund* 'people with migrant background'; *Türken* 'Turks'; and *Biodeutsch* 'bio[logically] German'. These particular terms are indicative of underlying ideologies about the roles of culture, religion and ethnicity in national belonging. In addition, however, because I found that in this particular data set these terms were used infrequently, I show that in many cases the discourses about particular social groups are so well-entrenched that there is no need to name them; mentioning certain key generalizations about particular social groups suffices to make it clear who is being discussed as unintegrated. Thus the stereotypes, along with the labels, are used to construct essentialist social categories.

2. Themes in the data

A tally of the comments for the two selected articles is given in Table 1 to provide an overview of discourses in the data. These comments were categorized according to themes as they emerged in the data; however, only those which focused on the issue of the guiding culture – whether there is one or should be one, what it is and who belongs in it – were coded. There were a total of 195 comments from these two articles which presented a stance toward *Leitkultur* (i.e., there should or should not be one), and these are discussed in the first part of the analysis.

	We need a *Leitkultur* that immigrants adhere to	Germany is diverse / tolerance and acceptance is/ should be our *Leitkultur*	*Grundgesetz* (German constitution) is the *Leitkultur*	*Leitkultur* is discrimination / integration goes both ways
Wir Sind nicht Burka **156**	85 (54.5%) specifically anti-Muslim: **14; 8.9%**	30 (19.2%)	20 (12.8%)	21 (13.5%)
Integration ist nicht einfacher geworden **39**	25 (64.1%) specifically anti-Muslim: **10**; **25.6%**	6 (15.4%)	5 (12.8%)	3 (7.7%)
Total comments: **195**	110 (56.4%) Specifically anti-Muslim: **24**; **12.3%**	36 (18.5%)	25 (12.8%)	24 (12.3%)

Table 1: Themes in the comments on the two selected articles

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

One of the selected articles is the first article which appeared on this topic, titled "*Wir sind nicht Burka*"*: Innenminister will deutsche Leitkultur* "'We are not Burka": The Minister of the Interior wants German Guiding Culture', which outlines the ten points listed by de Maizière and gave rise to 555 comments. The second is a column by *Die Zeit* editor Theo Summer titled *Integration is nicht einfacher geworden* 'Integration has not gotten easier', which had 137 comments provided by readers.

Four main themes emerge from the comments; see Table 1 for the descriptive statistics for the distribution of answers. Slightly over half of the commenters voiced agreement with de Mazière's premise that there is, or should be, a *Leitkultur* in Germany and that immigrants should orient themselves to this way of being. 54.5% of the comments coded fell into this category; an example is given in (1) below:

(1) ...man könnte schon etwas mehr auf Werte als auf Kultur abstellen-aber das Bedürfnis, eine gewisse kulturelle Identität zu definieren, dem Überkommenen gegenüber abzugrenzen und zu vertreten finde ich nichts *per se* schlechtes.
'...one could put more emphasis on values than culture, but the need to define a cultural identity, and to demarcate and advocate for this, I do not find *per se* a bad thing.'

About 22% of the comments advocating for a *Leitkultur* (12% of all the coded comments) specifically named Turks or Muslims as the group that needs to adhere to the *Leitkultur*[3]. The example in (2) illustrates how both *die Türken* 'the Turks' and *Zuwanderer aus muslimischen Ländern* 'immigrants from Muslim countries' are named and described as "the problem". One behavior which is said to be characteristic of them is that of not being able to speak German well even after being in Germany for many generations; this is an often-mentioned part of the discourse of Turks as the Unintegrated Other in Germany.

(2) Wenn Sie sich aber nun mal anschauen, wie sich die Türken bspw. In Umfragen äußern, gerade in letzter Zeit, dann sehen Sie, wo das Problem ist. Und dann verstehen Sie auch, warum viele Zuwanderer aus muslimischen Ländern auch in der 3. Generation manchmal kein gutes Deutsch sprechen, wohingegen das Menschen aus dem asiatischen Kulturkreis deutlich besser gelingt.
'If you look at how for example how the Turks respond in surveys, especially recently, than you see where the problem is. And

[3] I conflate these two groups here to refer to Turks/Muslims not to indicate that they are indeed terms which may have the same referents, but to reflect that the discourse of alterity does not differentiate between Turks (who in reality may or may not be Muslim) and Muslims (who may be of Turkish background from any other countries, including Germany).

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

then you also understand why many immigrants from Muslim countries in the third generation sometimes don't speak German well, while people from Asian cultures are much more successful at this.'

Thus, somewhat over half of the commenters indicate that their view of integration is unidirectional. This is the dominant discourse about integration in Germany in these data. However, there are other discourses which appear consistently in the data, and are echoed in other studies (see Fuller forthcoming, Williams 2014). One discourse which competes with the othering discourse is a discourse about cultural openness in Germany. Many commenters said that tolerance and acceptance is the most important aspect of German culture, as exemplified in (3) below. Another related discourse is that the important rules of society are specified in the constitution and that immigrants are required to obey the law but cultural or personal behaviors cannot be dictated. This position is shown in example (4).

(3) Toleranz und Akzeptanz gehören auch zu unseren Werten. Lesen Sie mal bei Goethe und Kant nach.
'Tolerance and acceptance are part of our values. Look it up in Goethe and Kant.'

(4) Wenn wir überhaupt von einer Leitkultur reden, dann gilt das Grundgesetz.
'If we're going to talk about a guiding culture at all, then what applies is the constitution.'

Finally, there is also a discourse that counters the discourse supporting a guiding culture with direct criticism. In this discourse, it is maintained that such ideas are inherently discriminatory; many of these comments also address the issue of integration by saying that it is a two-way process and that immigrants alone cannot integrate, they must also be accepted and treated as if they belong.

(5) Integration kann ohne Anstrengung der Zuwanderer nicht gelingen. Aber sie kann auch nicht gelingen, wenn die autochthone Bevölkerung nicht bereit ist, Anstrengungen anzuerkennen und letzte Differenzen zu akzeptieren.
'Integration cannot succeed without the effort of the immigrants. But it can also not succeed when the native population is not ready to recognize these efforts and accept the remaining differences.'

Although these discourses are not the majority in these data, they are significant in the resistance they provide to the stance that depicts both German culture and migrants as homogenous groups with

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

fixed characteristics. Working against such ideological transformation, however, as will be examined in the next section, the terms themselves that are used to categorize people reflect essentialist ideas about these social groups.

3. Terms in the data

The second part of the analysis looks at the use of particular terms for groups of people and how their meaning is shaped through use. The underlying idea behind this analysis is that ways of referring to particular groups of people can be inclusive or exclusive, and that these terms can also change in their referential meaning as well as connotation. In my corpus of interviews with youths and young adults in Berlin, for example, I have found that the term *Ausländer* 'foreigner' is rarely used to refer to people who live in Berlin, regardless of their background or citizenship status, as it has come to imply a lack of belonging. Italians living in Berlin may not be German, but they are also not *Ausländer*. While there has long been some tendency to refer to Turks, but not other foreigners, as *Ausländer*, this usage is also fading. Are there new terms that have replaced this term, which is now seen as negative, and have terms developed for subsequent generations of migrant background residents and citizens – are they simply German, or still Italian or Turkish, or something else? While these data do not completely answer these questions, they do shed some light on underlying ideologies and motivations for membership categorization.

The official term now used for categorizing those who themselves come from outside of Germany, and their children, is *Personen mit Migrationshintergrund* 'people with migration background'[4]. In contexts such as the census and school statistics, this denotes people who themselves had the experience of migration, or have one parent who was not born in Germany. This category includes the so-called *(Spät) Aussiedler*, who are people of German background who were living in the countries of the former Warsaw Pact (i.e., the former Soviet Union and seven satellite states of central and eastern Europe) and returned to Germany in the post-Soviet era. In these official contexts (for example, the Mikrozensus done by the Statischtisches Bundesamt) there is also reference to *Deutsche mit und ohne Migrationishintergrund*, thus recognizing that migration background does not preclude German citizenship. The official term, then, says nothing about either ethnicity or citizenship status.

However, there is evidence that when this term is used in everyday language, it has a much narrower focus: it is in some cases

[4] In colloquial language, you will also see MimiMi (*Mitbürger mit Migrationishintergrund* 'fellow citizens with migration background').

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

used in contrast with the term *Biodeutscher*, a term which will be discussed in more detail below but refers to what I will gloss as 'ethnic Germans'. Further, *Migrationshintergrund* or *Migrant* is often used to specifically talk about Turkish-background or Muslim immigrant-background residents of Germany, and construct them as culturally Other. In example (6) – the only use of the term *Migrantenhintergrund* in these two articles – the term is clearly used to mean Muslims, as the commenter first mentions 'most Muslims' and then refers to this same set of people as having a 'so-called migration background'. Although this is not a negative comment about this group of people, it clearly establishes an equivalence between migration background and being Muslim; in other words, in a discussion of guiding culture and integration, the real focus is not all immigrants but specifically Muslims.

(6) Religiöse Symbole? Wir reden von der Burka? Diesen Unterdrückungssack wollen auch die allermeisten Moslems nicht haben. Ich habe auch noch nie eine selbst gesehen, und in meiner Stadt gibt es wirklich genug Leute mit dem sogenannten Migrationshintergrund.
'Religious symbols? Are we talking about the Burka? Most Muslims don't want this oppression-sack. I myself have never seen one, and in my city there are really enough people with the so-called migration background.'

This one usage is only suggestive of such understandings of this term, and deserves further research on other corpora. However, the use of other terms in these data support the claim that there is the presence of a focus on Turks as the stereotype of the Unintegrated Other, and that German belonging still involves ethnicity.

In order to look closer at this issues in these data, I examine the use of specific reference to Turks, as a means of examining the essentialism of this social category. The label *Türk* or the adjective *türkisch* was used in twelve comments on these two articles. In 7 of these twelve comments, Turks were used as an example of unintegrated immigrants; one of these is given in example (7):

(7) Kann sich jemand jetzt noch vorstellen, dass man die türkische Community auf Sprachfähigkeiten verpflichtet, mit Kontrolle und saftigen Sanktionen, dass man überhaupt noch Härte zeigt in der deutschen Zuwanderungspolitik?
'Can anyone imagine that the Turkish community would be required to show language proficiency, with testing and hard sanctions, that one would show any sign of strictness in German immigration policy?'

Two of the remaining comments were a response to the comment in (7), criticizing the idea of dictating language use. Another

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

two provided different perspectives on the Turkish population: one resisted essentialist understandings of that group by making reference to differences among Turks based on education, and another noted the irony of shared attitudes about religion and family among Turks and the CDU[5]. A single comment offered a critique of the use of the term 'Turk', problematizing the otherization of Turks by viewing them first and foremost as Turks, regardless of their level of integration. An excerpt of this comment is given in (8).

(8) Hier kannst du hier geboren sein und bist trotzdem zuerst der Türke. Ob man will oder nicht. Werde ich als Einwanderer nur nach mögl. weiter Assimilation akzeptiert, dann wird Inetgrationsbereitschaft sehr schwer.
'You can be born here but you will always be a Turk anyway. Whether you want to be or not. If I as an immigrant am only accepted after further assimilation, then willingness to integrate will be unlikely.'

The small numbers of usages of these terms in these data do not lead to conclusive findings, but are certainly suggestive of discourses which create a hierarchy of immigrants. There is frequent mention of Turks as unintegrated, sometimes compared unfavorably with immigrants of other national backgrounds. This lack of integration often focuses on language, as Turks are depicted as not learning German. Also, cultural practices which are associated with religion are often mentioned, in particular, veiling and restrictions on female family members. These practices are depicted as signs of lack of integration and have become doxa; evidence for the lack of German proficiency, for instance, is not provided but presented as a given.

To construct a category of people who do not have migration background, the term *Biodeutscher* has gained popularity. Its coinage is sometimes credited to Green party politician Cem Özdemir (*Der Tagesspiegel* 2009[6]) and the history of the term in popular references sources (e.g. *Pluspedia*) is that it was first used by people of migration background to refer to Germans who sought to exclude immigrants from German society. Two of the four uses of this term are this type of use; although it is not clear if the authors of these comments are indeed of migration background, this use follows the disparaging tone said to be typical of the term.

The other two uses, however, do not follow this pattern, and instead use this term to refer to a group of people who are the authorities on what it means to be German. It also bear mentioning that while the

[5] The Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany), a center-right political party in Germany.
[6] Ataman, Freda, "Berliner und Türken Türkisch für Fortgeschrittene", *Der Taggespiegel*, 16.04.2009, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/stadtleben/berliner-und-tuerken-tuerkisch-fuer-fortgeschrittene/1497172.html.

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

popular reference sources also indicate that *Biodeutscher* is not used by anyone to refer to themselves, its use in these data indicates that this is no longer true. In (9), the commenter is responding to an earlier post in which it was said that part of being German is communal bathing (a reference to spas and swimming pools which are used by mixed sex groups).

(9) Mit Ihnen z.B... teile ich kulturell nichts ausser meiner Herkunft. Nichts von dem was für Sie... Massstäblich ist, hat für mich die geringste Bedeutung. Und sie wollen einem Biodeutschen wie mir nun Ihre individuelle Lebensweise (z.B. gemeinschaftl. Baden) als Leitkultur vorschreiben?
'With you for example... I share culturally nothing but my origin. Nothing that is... normative for you has any value whatsoever to me. And you want to dictate individual lifestyle (for example, communal bathing) to an ethnic German like me?'

This usage shows that even in a context in which the commenter is clearly against the idea of a *Leitkultur*, there is nonetheless a category of people – *Biodeutscher* – who are keepers of the culture and should not be told what it means to be German. Although objecting to the idea of dictating cultural norms, this comment nonetheless reproduces an ethnonational ideology of Germanness, and reinforces the idea that ethnic Germans are at the top of the social hierarchy.

4. Discourses of exclusion

While these terms are critical to the development of social categories, on the whole this data set does not contain frequent use of these particular labels to refer to members of particular social groups. Instead, in some instances the discourse of exclusion is created through the use of reference to particular tropes. As mentioned above, there are certain behaviors which have been linked with Turks/Muslims so frequently that they index these groups without requiring them to be named. In particular, behaviors which are linked to Islamic beliefs and practices are mentioned, often in the form of not participating in things that are considered core to German culture. The above-mentioned communal bathing is one example; this is an issue which was addressed in the 2013 decision by the Federal Administrative Court in Leipzig, which ruled that girls may not be exempt based on religious belief from co-educational swim instruction in schools, and this is a topic which has thus been the subject of public discourse. Also, various means of oppression of women (veiling, restricting their movement through public spaces, forced marriages) have been frequently addressed in public fora, in Germany and elsewhere, in the context of the integration of Muslim populations.

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

The following examples show how the category of the Other is created and maligned without labels but with stereotypes that index Turks/Muslims. The excerpt in (10) comes after several paragraphs of discussion of immigrants from Sweden, Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Britain, Canada and Australia, who come to Germany and maintain many of their cultural practices but follow German laws and participate in German society. Again, we see the construction of good versus bad immigrants, and the bad immigrants are characterized as oppressing women and children, being controlled by religious dogma, and wanting to make Germany into the (unnamed) country they came from.

(10) Aber es gibt eben auch eine Gruppe, da ist die Integration schwieriger. Insbesondere dann, wenn sie ihre Frauen nicht alleine aus dem Haus lassen, ihren Kindern den Schulsport untersagen aber Kinderehen zulassen, an Weinfesten o. ä. nicht teilnehmen und ihr Alltag durch Religion und Glaubensbrüder geprägt ist. Kurz, wenn sie das Land, in das sie gekommen sind, zu dem machen wollen, aus dem sie kamen.
'But there is another group where integration is more difficult. Especially then, when they do not allow their women to leave the house alone, don't allow their children to take part in sports at school but allow child marriages, don't participate in wine festivals among other things, and their everyday lives are shaped by religion and fellow brethren. In short, when they want to make the land they have come to into the land they came from.'

In (11), the commenter has outlined different spheres of *Leitkultur* – western, European, and German – and then goes on to list things which violate all three. Included in this are oppression of women, forced marriage and refusing to learn the national language, all characteristics of the essentialized category of Turks/Muslims.

(11) *Die von Männern verfügte Abschottung von Frauen und Mädchen vom öffentlichen Leben und von einer gemeinsamen, freiheitlichen Erziehung von Jungen und Mädchen.
* Die Verheiratung von minderjährigen Mädchen und die Bestimmung von Ehepartnern durch Eltern.
* Die Verweigerung des Erlernens der jeweiligen Landessprache.
'*The male-dictated separation of women and girls from public life and from a combined, liberal upbringing of boys and girls.
*The marriage of minor girls and the selection of spouses by the parents.
*The refusal to leave the given national language.'

Finally, the mention of the word *Religion* 'religion' in this context needs no further explanation; it is clear that the religion that is meant is Islam. In (12), we see how the word *Religion* with respect to migrants is

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

enough to indicate which group this commenter is referencing. Especially when mention of religion is paired with the question of intercultural relationships (which according to the discourse are forbidden for Muslims), there is no question that the religion being discussed is Islam.

(12) Ob sich parallel Kulturen bilden oder nicht hängt meiner Meinung nach vor allen Dingen damit zusammen, ob es zu ethnischen Durchmischungen kommt. Primär also zu interkulturellen Ehen. Interkulturelle Freundschaften sind da eine weitere Option, haben aber mMn nicht so starke Auswirkungen.
Daher stellt sich für mich die Frage inwieweit die Kultur der Migranten eine solche Durchmischung zulässt.
Haupt integrationshemmnis ist da in meiner Wahrnehmung die Religion.
'Whether parallel culture form or not is dependent in my opinion above all on whether there is ethnic intermingling. Primarily intercultural marriages. Intercultural friendships are another option, but have in my opinion not as strong an influence.
Thus for me the question is how far the culture of the migrants such intermingling allows.
The main integration inhibition there in my experience is religion.'

In this and other comments, the mention of *Religion* is enough, there is no need to name Islam. Discourses of difference in Germany, and indeed in Europe more generally, focus on Muslims as the unintegrated other; this discourse is so pervasive that the term *Religion*, in the context of a discussion about immigration, can be assumed to refer to Islam. There is no discourse about members of other religious groups not integrating into German society because of their religious beliefs and practices. In fact, as we have also seen, in some cases there is no need to even mention religion because particular practices – in particular restricting the movement and activities of women and girls – so strongly imply Muslim, and/or Turkish, group membership.

In the dominant discourse in these data, the construction of the categories of Turk/Muslim assumes a homogenous unintegrated group. And this group is so much the focus of the discussion of integration that in some cases, other people of migrant background have ceased to exist and *Migrationshintergrund* is used to refer only to Turkish/Muslim people.

5. Conclusion

Brubaker (2013) notes that the category of "Muslim" must be used carefully; instead of being seen as a homogenous group it needs to be treated as a heterogeneous category. While Brubaker's words of caution are designed for scholars, his problematization of the discourse about Muslims applies more broadly and is clearly a relevant

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

critique of the discourses about Muslims in these data. In particular, the discourse about Muslims as the unintegrated Other positions all Muslims as similar in their lack of ability to speak German, their oppression of women, and their lack of willingness to participate in German cultural activities. Although there are voices in these data which explicitly challenge these views, and note the heterogeneity of Muslim groups, there are far more comments which begin with the assumption of Muslims as a homogenous group and move from there to general statements about their lack of belonging in Germany.

Abadi *et al.* (2016) note that the integration debate in Germany has led to people positioning themselves as for or against Muslims, and these data exemplify this. Again, the starting point for this positioning is an assumption of the homogenous nature of the category "Muslim". However, along with Williams (2014), the present study notes that there are voices which call for more differentiated understandings of social identities which challenge the hegemonic essentialism. Although they are a minority, these voices do not just object to the idea of a guiding culture which all migrants should adopt, but question unilateral views of integration and locate the problems with migrants not in their own behavior but in the lack of acceptance of them by the society at large.

There are many negative consequences of essentialist discourses which depict Muslims, as an inherently homogenous group which has no place in German society. Ignoring the diversity and individuality of those within a group defined in terms of national, ethnic or religious background erases the reality of the heterogeneity of the groups, and leads to exclusion based on stereotypes.

Further, there is an inherent contradiction in the focus on ethnic/national/religious background by those who support a German guiding culture. A focus on ethnicity privileges some Germans above others, and ignores the very cultural values which are so adamantly believed to be central to Germanness. If it is cultural belonging that is important, than terms such as *Migrationishintergrund* and *Biodeutscher* would not be relevant, but instead terms which focused on cultural practices would emerge. Instead, there is an assumption about the behavior of people based on their backgrounds. This research problematizes the use of particular terms to reinforce boundaries based on ethnic background, showing that named categories are never neutral, but always contain ideological stances.

These data show how citizens use newspaper comments to not just state opinions, or to agree or disagree with stances taken in the article, but also to unveil underlying assumptions of in the comments of others in this online forum. It is through such competing discourses that cultural change occurs, and it is these discourses which will continue to shape the everyday lives of both those with *Migrationshintergrund* and *Biodeutscher* in Germany today.

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

References

Abadi, D., d'Haenens, L., Roe, K., Koeman, J. (2016), "Leitkultur and discourse hegemonies: German mainstream media coverage on the integration debate between 2009 and 2014", *International Communication Gazette*, 78, p. 557-584.

Ahmed, S., Matthes, J. (2017), "Media representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A meta-analysis", *International Communication Gazette*, 79, p. 219-244.

Baker, P. (2012), "Acceptable bias? Using corpus linguistics methods with critical discourse analysis", *Critical Discourse Studies*, 9, p. 247-256.

Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C., McEnery, T. (2013), "Sketching Muslims: A corpus driven analysis of representations around the word 'Muslim' in the British press 1998-2009", *Applied Linguistics*, 34, p. 255-278.

Brubaker, R. (2013), "Categories of analysis and categories of practice: A note on the study of Muslims in European countries of immigration", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36, p. 1-8.

Charteris-Black, J. (2006), "Britain as a container: Immigration metaphors in the 2005 election campaign", *Discourse and Society*, 17, p. 563-581.

De Cilla, R., Reisigel, M., Wodak, R. (1999), "The discursive construction of national identities", *Discourse and Society*, 10, p. 149-173.

Fairclough N. (2009), "A dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis in social research", in R. Wodak, Meyer, M. (eds), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, 2nd ed., Sage, London, p. 162-186.

Fuller, J. M. (forthcoming), "Discourses of Immigration and Integration in German Newspaper Comments", in Musolff, A., Viola, L. (eds), *Migration and Media: Crisis Communication about immigration in Europe and the world*.

Gal, S. (2018), "Discursive struggles about migration: A commentary", *Language and Communication*, 59, p. 66-69.

Jaspal, R., Cinerella, M. (2010), "Media representation of British Muslims and hybridized threats to identity", *Contemporary Islam*, 4, p. 289-310.

Kress G., van Leeuwen T. (2001), *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*, Arnold, London.

Lutter, A. (2016), "Jenseits von assimilation und multikultur? Herausforderungen migrationspolitischer bildung in Deutschland", *Linguistik Online*, 79, p. 127-137.

Manz, S. (2004), "Constructing a normative national identity: The Leitkultur debate in Germany, 2000/2001", *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 25, p. 481-496.

Musolff, A. (2015), "Dehumanizing metaphors in UK immigrant debates in press and online media", *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict*, 3, p. 41-56.

Saeed, A. (2007), "Media, racism and Islamophobia: The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media", *Sociology Compass*, 1, p. 443-462.

Taylor, C. (2014), "Investigating the representation of migrants in the UK and Italian press: A cross-linguistic corpus-assisted discourse analysis", *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 19, p. 368-400.

Van Dijk, T. (2018), "Discourse and Migration", in Zapata-Barrero, R., Yalaz, E., *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies*, Springer Open, Cham, Switzerland.

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)

Williams, H. (2014), "Changing the National Narrative: Evolution in Citizenship and Integration in Germany, 2000-10", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 49, p. 54-74.
Wodak, R. (2009), *Discursive construction of national identity*, Edinburgh University Press.
Wodak, R., Boukula S. (2015), "European identities and the revival of nationalism in the European Union: A discourse historical approach", *Journal of Language and Politics*, 14, p. 87-109.

BDD-A28587 © 2018 Facultatea de Litere din Oradea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:48 UTC)