

# Liberal-secular power and the traps of muslim integration in Western Europe

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## Abstract

Throughout the last decades, integration programmes in Western Europe have centrally revolved around debates on Muslim populations and the institutionalization of Islam. The concept of integration has become a master paradigm with which to structure plurality of immigration societies across Western Europe. Critically reflecting this inflation, this article argues that the integration of Muslims is animated by a contingent liberal-secular matrix through which the sovereign state, in close connection with civil society, is enabled to decide what counts as proper and improper religion. Integration directed toward Muslims as a “religious minority” is therefore indicative of the very problems that it purports to resolve. In a genealogical vein, the article begins by suggesting that integration is a liberal “recursion” of earlier projects of minority management such as assimilation and conditional recognition within emerging nation-states. It argues that the epistemological ground which animated the assimilatory forces of the modern nation-state has been intimately bound by an imperial knowledge order which classifies and hierarchizes people along a race-religion nexus. The analysis continues by dwelling on contemporary examples of state organized dialog with Muslims, and more specifically the establishment of Islamic Theology Chairs at state

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universities. Through these examples the article shows that the institutionalization of Islam in Europe reconfigures a pattern which conditionally embraces religious difference, while at the same time continuing hierarchical rankings and by transforming it to make it fit for religion's legitimate place in public life. Finally, the article suggests that the somatic aspirations prevalent in assimilation projects and imperial race-religion constellations are both inscribed and concealed in the frequent invocation of Muslims to reveal their loyalty to the liberal-secular contract by bracketing their religious sensibilities for the sake of secular reason.

**KEYWORDS**

assimilation, conditional recognition, integration, muslims in Europe, secularism

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the concept of integration has become a master paradigm with which to structure plurality across Western Europe. Integration is employed variably and can mean many different things. However, when directed toward particular populations addressed as migrants or people with a migrant background, integration has gained an outspoken civilizing incentive. Etymologically implying “to make whole”, “to repair”, or “to make cohesive”, integration thus imposes itself as a remedy for a seemingly fragmented, non-cohesive, and therefore deficient society *because* of immigration. Moreover, integration is conventionally pitted against the “failures of multiculturalism” (Jansen, 2013, Schinkel, 2017). Initiated by the rising number of Muslims in Europe, by the imagined or factual increase of Islamic radicalization or by normative conflicts emerging from Islamic practices, integration programs centrally revolve around debates on Muslim populations and the institutionalization of Islam (Brunn, 2012; Mavelli, 2012; Schinkel, 2017; Tezcan, 2012). Proclamations such as “naturalizing Islam”,<sup>1</sup> turning Muslims in France into “French Muslims” (Fernando, 2014) or creating a “Euro-Islam” (Mavelli, 2012) are its most pertinent political-rhetorical devices.

Given this inflation, it is surprising that integration discourses have gained relatively little critical attention both among scholars of critical migration studies (for exceptions see Hess et al., 2015; Ha, 2007; Castro Verela, 2013; Schinkel, 2017) and within the scholarship of Islam in Europe (for an exception see Aguilar, 2018, pp. 96–122). The racialization of Muslims in relation to an expansive security apparatus, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism have turned into a dynamic knowledge archive. Many of these studies have observed that contemporary discourses on Muslims and Islam in Europe echo Orientalist tropes (Attia, 2007; Meer, 2013; Shooman, 2014). The complex question more rarely posed, is how these tropes are translated into *liberal* projects of accommodating difference and managing minorities. Integration projects which govern Muslims with the incentive of according Islam its legitimate place within Europe, and sometimes in explicit rejection of enmity and segregation, have thus often escaped from view. Sometimes, integration even figures as a counter-strategy to Islamophobia and is celebrated as paving the way for “Muslim's emancipation” in Europe (Laurence, 2011).

Addressing this omission, my central argument in this article is that integration directed toward Muslims as a “religious minority” is indicative of the problems that it purports to resolve. I therefore do not so much ask how the integration of Muslims into the social fabric of European nation-states could be improved. Instead, I take integration

seriously as a political program which is imbricated in, and productive of, complex operations of power and its functions to secure the authority of the secular nation-state.

In so doing, I am inspired by Willem Schinkel's seminal book *Imagining Society. Immigrant Integration*. Schinkel analyses integration discourses across Europe and the way in which these "imagine society" as a holistic entity and delineate immigrants as people outside of this imagined whole (Schinkel, 2017). His social theoretical and empirical analysis confirms that Muslims have become the main target of integration discourses. Centrally, Schinkel argues that because "society" functions as the unmarked holistic center and as a yardstick, immigrants generally, and Muslims in particular, constitute society's problematic margins.

I expand and specify Schinkel's approach in two important ways. Firstly, I suggest a slightly different temporality. I locate political programmes of Muslim integration in the genealogy of the secular nation-state and its production of (religious) minorities. By coupling his critique of integration with a critical inquiry into social theory Schinkel also embeds contemporary integration programmes in a longer legacy of imagining society by constructing certain populations as "people apart". He does, however, not specify that these "people apart" had been more often than not racialized as erosive margins because of their assigned distinctive religious traditions. The "Jewish Question" in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, to which I refer in this article, is definitely the most pertinent case in point (cf. Batnitzky, 2011; Sorkin, 2019). To understand why Muslims are today's central focus of integration policies across Europe, I suggest more explicitly than Schinkel to decouple the political rationalities of integration from the context of migration and to embed them in a specific genealogy of the modern nation-state in producing religious minorities by addressing and hierarchizing them in specific ways.

This leads me to read integration as embedded in earlier projects, such as assimilation and conditional recognition or emancipation. These are closely tied to what Zygmunt Bauman has called the "gardening forces" of the modern nation-state (Bauman, 1991). Assimilation has revolved around somatic metaphors of organic "cultures", or the "nation" (Volk). I analyze integration as a liberal "recursion" of assimilation—recursion being a concept that I borrow from Ann Laura Stoler (2016). I argue that somatic aspirations are both inscribed and concealed in the frequent appeal to Muslims to be loyal to the liberal-secular contract by bracketing their religious sensibilities and opening up to the "common public" (Habermas, 2012).

It is in relation to political secularism that I secondly expand Schinkel's view on the connection between integration and secularism. Addressing this relationship, Schinkel writes that "secularism operates in the same plane as religion, as a program that allows for the attribution of inside/outside values through topics debated with a view to the secular and the religious. Secularism is part of a larger self-problematization of "society"" (Schinkel, 2017, p. 32). I argue instead that the politics of integration in liberal-secular nation-states do not only work through distinctions made between "inside/outside values". The integration of Muslims in particular rather operates by conditionally embracing religious difference, while at the same time transforming it to make it compatible with contingent understandings of religion's legitimate place in public life. In complementation to Schinkel's focus on how society is imagined through integration, I thus pay more explicit attention to the question how the secular state secures its sovereignty via the governance of religious plurality.

As exemplary cases, I dwell on integration measures like state dialog with Muslims or the academization of Islam. These examples pertinently reveal that integration mark minoritized subjects while simultaneously incorporating them into what Luca Mavelli has called the "secular episteme" (Mavelli, 2012) through the imperative of "secular translation". I use secular translation here by relying on Talal Asad (2018). Thereby, I put emphasis on the tacit operations of power involved in the integration of *religious* minorities by the secular state and its enabling *and* monitoring functions to accommodate religion by regulating the borders between the religious and the political. Secular translation, accordingly, has encompassing implications for minoritized religions in that it requires to transform social forms of life and religious practices in exchange of being recognized as full citizens.

When coupling integration of Muslims with a critical analysis of its secular incentives I am thus inspired by the critical secular studies scholarship around Asad that has explored the pervasiveness of secular governance in shaping religious subjectivities. More specifically, I am concerned with two components of secularism which Saba Mahmood

has analytically distinguished as *political secularism* and *secularity* (Mahmood, 2015). The former implies the political and legal regulation of religion in public life, whereas the latter comprises a set of sensibilities, emotions, social conventions, and habituated practices, which constitute “the epistemological and cultural ground on the basis of which religious claims can be authorized and validated” (2015: 206). In my reading of integration politics, I am mostly concerned with the intimate connection of these two dimensions. For it is only by taking seriously how secular rule is complicit with, and dependent on, these more tacit and often unmarked inscriptions of formally liberal and secular societies that we can fully understand the pitfalls for religiously marked minorities interpellated by the paradigm of integration.

An Asadian approach also implies that secularism plays out very differently and dynamically in different European contexts and according to diverse arrangements of church, state and the nation. My intention in this article is not to capture this variety. I rather argue that the integration of Muslims operates by conditionally embracing religious difference, while at the same time transforming it to make it compatible with *contingent* understandings of religion's legitimate place in public life. It is in this vein that I focus on “Western Europe” only which I understand less a pre-constituted given entity than as a dynamic set of formally liberal and religiously neutral states which gain contours through the ongoing demarcation of internal and external borders (cf. De Genova, 2016).

### 1.1 | Legacies of integration as assimilation and conditional recognition

Integration is a two-way process. It is not a one-way road. It requires, on the one hand, that immigrants feel at home here. If they do not want to live like one lives in Germany but maybe according to ideas of some people in the Islamic world, then the necessary requirement for integration is missing [...]. In turn, we do not only have to want that immigrants feel at home, but we also need to know that our conditions of life and also we ourselves will change to a certain degree. We are changing, our country is changing, if three and a half Million Muslims live here. This is a different country than if no Muslims lived here. To know and accept this is also part of the integration.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the last two decades, most Western European states have begun to foster the regulated institution-ization of Islam and the social and cultural integration of Muslims into society. State organized co-operations with Muslims such as the *Conseil Français des Musulmans de France* in France (see Peter, 2008), the *Council for Islam* in Italy (Jasch, 2007), the *Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid* in the Netherlands (Van Bijsterveld, 2015) or the *Deutsche Islam Konferenz* (Amir-Moazami, 2011) are key examples of this trend. In one way or another, all of these measures were responses to 9/11 and other terrorist acts committed in the name of Islam. This becomes obvious, for example, from the strong thematic focus on Islamic extremism and counter-radicalization measures (e.g., Aguilar, 2018, pp. 123–148; Peter, 2008; Schiffauer, 2008). The security dispositive animating such measures should not, however, lead to the conclusion that the state governs Muslims merely by surveillance and discipline. The most prevalent political rationality that all these measures share, is that they govern through dialog and recognition, in short, integration rather than sanction, discipline, or overt exclusion.

The statement quoted above from the inaugural speech of the *Deutsche Islam Konferenz* (German Conference on Islam, DIK) by the then Federal Minister of the Interior Wolfgang Schäuble reveals this dialogical incentive pointedly. At the same time, it makes clear that benevolent statements such as “we have to want that immigrants [read: Muslims] feel at home” or “our conditions of life and we ourselves will change to a certain degree” rarely exist without consequences. Rather, the behest to make immigrants feel at home and the affirmation of the lasting, as opposed to temporary, presence of Muslims in European nation-states is frequently coupled with a whole set of conditions. These simultaneously mark, contour and re-enact the borders of the nation. Precisely because the conditions for integration are flexible [“live like one lives in Germany and not according to the ideas of some people in the Islamic world”], the line between inclusion and exclusion is much thinner than it appears at first glance. The requested and supported integration as a flexible instrument characterizes mechanisms of the constant reproduction of majorities and minor-

ities more fundamentally beyond this example. At stake is here a tension that is paramount to the functioning of modern nation-states and their regulations of (religious) plurality. That integration of Muslims pushed itself onto the political agenda in the aftermath of 9/11 should therefore not lead to the conclusion that its patterns were entirely unprecedented or even primarily related to Muslims in the first place. To understand these in-built exclusionary mechanisms of national liberal orders also in their inclusive incentives, in this section I recall Zygmunt Bauman's social theoretical elaborations on assimilation (Bauman, 1991), and Patchen Markell's political theoretical critique of politics of recognition (Markell, 2003).

In his chapter on assimilation Bauman stresses that segregation and assimilation are two sides of the same coin and part and parcel of classificatory principles inscribed into the modern nation-state. The notion of assimilation was first coined and adopted by the disciplines of the natural sciences during the sixteenth century. In Biology, in particular, assimilation described the process of absorption of one organ or substance by another (Bauman, 1991, p. 103; see also Aumüller, 2009, p. 28). Given the emergence and proliferation of racist theories in the nineteenth century, which heavily relied on natural science epistemologies, it is not surprising that the notion of assimilation took off in human sciences and was adopted by nationalizing projects. The focus of assimilation, Bauman goes on, shifted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century from the converting organism to the "absorbed material"—"exactly about the time when an invitation (or, more precisely, *the command*) to assimilate was first sent around by rising nationalisms." (Bauman, 1991, p. 103, emphasis in the original).

In accordance with the somatic metaphors used in national projects of assimilating subpopulations into an assumed national body, the term "assimilation" thus increasingly referred to the transformation of the foreign into the familiar, or the strange and deviant into the desired normal.<sup>3</sup> According to Bauman, the rhetoric of absorption was far more than merely metaphorical. It was a functional mechanism of the modern nation-state. The "designing/ordering/gardening ambitions of modernity" (ibid: 189) and their efforts to measure, classify, order, tame, segregate, or incorporate the abnormal have paved their way into modern nation-state institutions such as the legal, educational, and medical systems or border regimes which regulate citizenship and belonging. More importantly, the quest for assimilation was never merely reduced to culturalist, *völkisch* or outwardly racist understandings of nationhood. On the contrary, Bauman elaborates on the intimate relationship between discourses of "value superiority" (ibid: 107) that dwelled on Enlightenment notions of equality, liberty, and tolerance, and the injunction to uniformity (ibid: 108).

Unsurprisingly, Bauman discusses at length the example of Jewish assimilation in Germany in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The gradual granting of citizenship rights for Jews and the simultaneous absorption of their differences was bound by the condition to become docile subjects. And yet, and hence the paradox, no matter how much Jews tried to overcome or hide their Jewish traditions and reveal markers of Germanness, they never reached the status of fully recognized citizens but remained the "unregenerate Jew[s]" (Bauman, 1991, p. 121). Assumptions about the (in)assimilability of minorities through the granting of liberal rights were thus at no point unconditional. Rather, assimilation was predicated on the assumption that these minorities should abstain from the specificities of their traditions and merge into ideals of the abstract human subject (see also Aumüller, 2009, p. 146).

These dynamics pertain more generally to the notion of minority as a "cunning concept" (Amir-Moazami, 2020). Far from being merely a descriptive or quantitative category, the very coming into being of "minorities" is rooted in a Christian legacy of secular nation-states (Asad, 2003: chap. 5). In her seminal conceptualization of minority-majority constellations, Saba Mahmood has rightly emphasized that minority defines a group that has acquired a cohesive collective identity based on certain shared social characteristics, *and* the process by which that group is distinguished in its marginality in a polity (Mahmood, 2015, p. 54, emphasis added). In this entwined sense, minority—as deriving from "minor"—is a political term that denotes hierarchized difference.

While Bauman is attentive to race thinking, and to the racialization of Jews that was prevalent also in assimilation projects, he does not spell out the close relationship between race and religion in the intrusive techniques of the ordering nation-state. For the purpose of my analysis it is, however, important to consider that the modern nation-state has always been driven by gardening ambitions in relation to "religion" writ large and to non-Christian minorities, more specifically. What Bauman generally describes as acts of sapping "social foundations of communal

and corporative traditions and forms of life" by the modern state (Bauman, 1991, p. 104), in fact involved substantial interventions into Jewish theological authority structures that increasingly resembled that of the Protestant clergy or, more generally, the ingredients of "religion" in the modern sense of the term (see also Batnitzky, 2011).<sup>4</sup>

In her seminal book *How Judaism became a Religion* Leore Batnitzky observes in this vein that modern concepts of religion and of the sovereign state were "born together" (Batnitzky, 2011, p. 26): "While it may first appear that the notion of religion as a distinct and private sphere of experience is a fundamentally apolitical idea, it is actually predicated on a conception of state sovereignty" (Batnitzky, 2011, p. 26).

If we reconnect this diagnosis to Bauman's conceptual analysis of Jewish assimilation, we can conclude that assimilation was primarily based on the assumption that Jews should abstain from the specificities of *Jewish* normativity and practice in order to merge into a liberally informed conception of the abstract human subject. The legal and orthodox orientation of Jewish Rabbinic and Talmudic traditions were in tension with this conception of the abstract human subject which itself was predicated on a liberal-Protestant understanding of religiosity (cf. Aumüller, 2009, p. 147; Mavelli, 2012; Sorkin, 2019).<sup>5</sup>

On the basis of this case but also in a more general political theoretical manner, Markell brings to the fore an important aspect that is relevant for capturing some of the in-built predicaments of contemporary integration programmes: He contends that politics of recognition require a clearly demarcated subject to be recognized. This subject is contoured *through* the very process of recognition. On the other hand, the subject of recognition necessitates an instance that manages and distributes the "good" of recognition. Since Hegel this instance has manifested itself in the more or less centralized nation-state, which through acts of recognition simultaneously increases its sovereignty. State managed assimilation, or in Markell's terms emancipation or recognition, can therefore be understood as a paradox in the sense that the minoritized community is at once hyper-visible in its difference and constitutes an exception from the norm, and is simultaneously rendered invisible by being transformed into something familiar. Captured in Markell's words: "The imperative of emancipation becomes, paradoxically, that the state must see at all times that each Jew has ceased to be Jewish." (Markell, 2003, p. 146).

It is important to remind that the epistemological ground which animated the assimilatory forces of the modern nation-state was coupled with an imperial knowledge order which classified and hierarchized people along a co-constitutive nexus of race and religion (Masuzawa, 2015; Vial, 2016). The regulations of religious minorities within the borders of European nation-states were, in other words, intimately bound by an imperial epistemic order that hierarchized and racialized Judaism, and Islam for that matter, within secularizing European nation-states and their colonial expansions. It is by now well documented how strongly these divisions were tied to ranking systems according to which Islam and Judaism figured as the last in the ladder of religions, not even credited the status of "world religions" (Masuzawa, 2015). The term "religion" as a concept took shape at the same moment in which the concept of race became a structural element of modern national and colonial states and their instruments of knowledge production, surveying, and governing populations and subpopulations (e.g., Anidjar, 2008; Vial, 2016). The invention of good and bad religion alongside the invention of good and bad human races is thus not coincidental. It is by now well known that in these inventions Christianity was the explicit or unmarked frame of reference. The construction and hierarchization of the world as a structuring feature of imperialism finds an analogy within the emerging European nation-states and their management of religious "minorities". This intimacy could also explain in parts the extensive focus on Muslims as the main target group of integration programs today.

We should, however, be cautious in drawing linear causalities from the nineteenth century to today. Imperialism, formal colonialism and the assimilation, emancipation, or recognition of Jews in the nineteenth century of course differs from the integration of Muslims in post-colonial contexts of migration in Europe today. Assimilation, precisely because of its racist legacy, is rarely invoked as an intelligible political strategy to deal with the growing cultural and religious plurality in Western European liberal secular nation-states today. Like-wise, the persistence of coloniality is neither linear nor always easily discernible. The fact that Orientalist tropes have been kept alive in depictions of Islam and Muslims in Europe, for example, might hint to such an afterlife of coloniality. It is however much more difficult to

show how coloniality and assimilation have persisted in political institutions, programmes, knowledge orders under conditions of institutionalized liberal freedoms and formal equality.

On a structural level, I therefore claim that what connects the grammars of assimilation and/or recognition with the grammar of integration is that the minoritized subject needs to be legible within a certain political order. On a temporal level, integration discourses and the related production of minorities within the nation-state are not characterized by either abrupt ruptures or by straightforward continuities. Nor are they mere repetitions of what went before. Rather, they operate as “recursions”, a concept that I borrow from Stoler to characterize contemporary “imperial formations” as “partial re-inscriptions, modified displacements, and amplified recuperations” of imperialism (Stoler, 2016, p. 27). Stoler urges us to look at imperial formations in their blurred states, where they do not seem obvious at first sight, and to ask how discourses can open up new paths and take on new shapes and forms all the while ensuring that they remain at heart alive and dogged.

Along Stoler's lines we could ask, for example, why the imitate relationship between colonialism and racism has been politically deflected across Western Europe as belonging to a completed historical chapter in the past—at best to be remembered at worst downplayed or neglected. Another illustration of Stoler's conceptualization is the disappearance of “race” from the public and political scene in most of Western Europe after 1945 (except for Britain) as a deflection of persisting forms of racism and for the acknowledgment of racism only in its overtly violent expressions. With Stoler's notion of recursion it would be important to move beyond the question how race could pave its path into other “more innocent” categories of differentiation and hierarchy such as “culture”, “customs”, or “values” (see Balibar & Wallerstein, 1998). Instead, it is important to be attentive to the occlusive politics entailed in the very denial of the continuity of racism and colonialism.

More importantly for my concern, it is important to critically ask why “race” has been increasingly problematized, “religion” continues to exist quite unscathed in everyday use, as a political principle of distinction as well as in academic knowledge production on non-Christian traditions (Amir-Moazami, 2021; Daniel, 2016). It is therefore notable that a particular understanding of religion has, over the long term, inscribed itself in scientific, political and everyday classifications. Today, the mutual conditionality of race and religion makes its presence felt not only in the quasi-natural allocation and ranking of people according to their (assumed) origin, but also in the distinction between good and bad religion. This differentiation fans itself out in the business of integration, namely in the repeatedly evoked divisions into “good” (“liberal,” “secular,” “moderate,” “modern,” “enlightened”) and “bad” Islam (“value-conservative,” “fundamentalist,” “radical,” “disproportionately pious”, see Amir-Moazami, 2021).

The more compelling question than the comparative one (“what distinguishes assimilation from integration?”) for my concern is therefore why integration could step in as the master tool with which to organize immigration societies under current conditions of institutionalized individual rights and liberal freedoms. With Stoler, I therefore raise the question: which methods are used to present specific populations as being particularly in need of inspection under the conditions of anchored liberal freedoms and formal equality, and which do so in a way which makes the violent nature of this inspective mode hardly discernible? How despite formal equality, despite institutionalized freedoms and rights, to which Muslims can also appeal, can institutionally supported ranking systems continue to break new ground? In the following I will therefore pay particular attention to the distinctive *liberal*, that is, proclaimed disembodied vocabulary that surrounds the integration paradigm especially when it comes to Muslim's embodied difference. A critical lens to the secular state allows us to shed light on how such inscriptions and reworkings operate.

## 1.2 | Integration as secular governmentality

The yardstick of Muslim's integration across Europe is rarely a specific notion of national culture, as evoked in concepts like “Leitkultur” (leading culture, see O'Brien, 2016: chap. 3) or “muscular liberalism” (see Mouritsen et al., 2019). Muslims are more frequently requested to demonstrate their loyalty to abstract principles, as the above-mentioned quotation by the former German Minister of the Interior makes clear. The behest “to make

Muslims feel at home here”, predominantly functions under the premise of their commitment to the liberal-secular order and its specific grammars. If recognition is thus always conditional upon acts of becoming legible—recognizable for the state in Markell's terms—, then in the case of Muslims in Western Europe we need to interrogate the secular order which governs the borders between proper religion and its alleged transgressions of the political realm. To make this point more tangible, I return to Schäuble's discourse during his dialogical encounter with Muslims. In all of his speeches, Schäuble laid bare the conditions under which he thought that Islam could be recognized on equal terms with Christianity. At a workshop at the *Theologisches Forum* in 2009 he emphasized, for example:

The churches clarified for themselves: the principle of the *liberal-democratic order* has its roots in the *Christian notion of humanity*. With this they went beyond the mere acceptance of democratic rules and *theologically incorporated* the values of this order. It is therefore correct to say that the political and social order of our country is closely related to our Christian-based culture. This is a fact which has to be accepted. To say this is not to discriminate against Islam (Schäuble, 2009, author's translation, emphasis added).

In the same talk, schäuble specified:

The separation of Church and state is based on the understanding of the mutual limitation of religious and state authority. We Europeans have learned throughout the wars of religion that there is not much space for religious tolerance if religious truth claims are coupled with political ones. That is why our state respects the spiritual authority of religion, but simultaneously claims the authority to regulate its coexistence. The constitution guarantees the freedom of belief and at the same time limits it. In this way religious freedom does not release anyone from loyalty to the constitution. (ibid.)

Schäuble re-narrates the well-known success story of Europe's secularization. This narrative conventionally starts with the Investiture Controversy in the eleventh century, then moves on to the religious wars paving the way for the Reformation. The Reformation, in turn, seeded the theological soil for the Enlightenment, and gave birth to a tamed and secularized version of Christianity and Europe's “liberal-democratic” spirit. The secularization paradigm, which Schäuble invokes as the foil for his Muslim interlocutors, functions itself as a historical narrative, that is to say a story about history. This storytelling about secularization portrays Europe's gradual success in emancipating itself from the all-encompassing authority of the Catholic Church. At the same time, it discards all complexities and less friendly aspects of that very past, such as imperialism, colonialism, and totalitarianism. As is well known, these are neither marginal episodes nor can they be detached from their Christian components.

My aim here is, however, not to counter Schäuble's historicism. Sociologists of religion like José Casanova (1994) or political philosophers like Charles Taylor (2007) have amply complicated linear narratives which form a central characteristic of the secularization thesis itself. I rather want to take seriously the manner in which such narratives function as covering the ingrained contradictions on which the integration of Muslims in Western Europe is seated. One such contradiction concerns the intimate relationship between Christianity and the liberal democratic state, and the simultaneous assertion that “religious truth claims” need to be de-coupled from political ones. Another has to do with the more specific arrangement of state, Church, and the nation in Germany: Schäuble's required separation of religious from state authority is confronted with the strong and institutionalized cooperation between Christian churches and the state.<sup>6</sup> These privileges do not resonate with the status of Islam nor with any other religious community in the country. Integration in this example is modeled by a specific notion of Christianity as detached from politics and yet as legitimately constituting the cultural backdrop of the nation. Finally, it is important to be alert to the simultaneous embracing of religious liberty and the coupling of this and other institutionalized liberties with the conditionality of loyalty to the constitution.



Now, the immediate reaction to such a critical reading of benevolent gestures to integrate Muslims into society would be that state organized integration is meant to address precisely such inequalities by fostering the institutionalization of Islam. The recent academization of imam training or the establishment of Islamic Theology Chairs at universities in various Western European countries offers a compelling example for this argument. In the political discourse, in particular, the creation of Chairs of Islamic Theology has often been praised as an overdue step toward recognition of Muslims. In this vein, the then President of Germany, Joachim Gauck, at his visit to one of the first centers of Islamic Theology in 2013 stated that the establishment of Islamic Theology chairs constituted “a mutual act of recognition”. He went on to observe:

Islam in Germany does not only evolve in the proverbial courtyard mosque (Moschee im Hinterhof) but it flourishes in increasingly beautiful mosques in city centers. And now it makes its way into the world of academic education here in Münster as well as in other parts of Germany and thereby encounters the rules of scientific research. Those who take this path confront the present and that means that they are also ready to face critical questions (Gauck, 2013, author's translation).

There is a lot to say about the underlying presuppositions in such statements. Gauck's speech is infused with teleological and paternalistic undertones. But that is not my point. In contrast to Gauck's optimistic assessment, scholars of Islam in Europe have often been much more critical. They understand the establishment of Theology Chairs as being mainly motivated by the efforts of security institutions to control Muslim milieus and to thereby discipline Muslims by limiting their self-determination (Hafez, 2014; Aguilar & Ahmad, 2018). There is no doubt that state organized initiatives of the academization of Islam in Western European countries have been developed under the aegis of the prevention against “Islamic radicalization.”<sup>7</sup> The security dispositive has, indeed, become hegemonic to the extent that Muslims, and probably also Islamic Theologians, have started themselves to adopt its rationalities (Qasem, 2020).

However, integration programmes directed toward Muslims are not merely animated by the security state that interrogates Muslims through the “racialization of danger” (De Koning, 2020). In the following I rather want to unfold the argument that such acts of racialization need to be conjoined with a critical inquiry into epistemologies of secularism. Most importantly, the powers of the liberal-secular matrix that structure these programmes do not merely operate as disciplining or directly intervening forces. Rather, they work to enable the self-governing of the minority invested in integration programmes. To make this point more explicit, I shall stay, for a moment, with the example of the establishment of Islamic Theology Chairs at German universities.

These chairs were created both with the aim of delegating the organization of Islamic Theology to Muslims and with the goal of entrusting them with the transformative powers of the “secular character of state universities” and their “scientific methods.”<sup>8</sup> Since its inception, the project has therefore oscillated between a commitment to the “religious avowal” (*Bekennnisgebundenheit*) and the imperative to develop a “self-reflexive”, that is, external view of one's religious tradition. This has also encouraged mutual demarcations between the newly created discipline of *Islamic Theology* and that of *Islamic Studies* established in the late nineteenth century with outspoken “scientific” ambitions.<sup>9</sup>

But my point is a different one: The almost naturalized precedence of the secular and the scientific as the general, as opposed to a religious commitment as the particular, carries with it a set of preconditions which remain unspoken. On closer scrutiny one central component of the self-identification as a “secular university”, is to encourage students and teachers alike to disentangle their pious sensibilities from the scientific method of the study of Islam and to thereby become self-thinking citizens. The position paper jointly published by the faculty of Islamic Theology at the Goethe University in Frankfurt declares in this spirit:

The university teaching shall open up possibilities for students to deal with their religion personally, autonomously, and in a scientifically proven way and to make their own decisions and to express their own preferences in questions of belief...Islamic-theological studies as a university discipline do not

transmit a particular denomination, but foster the maturity and autonomy of the students and individuals in a reflexive acquaintance with their belief (Agai et al., 2014, p. 27/28, author's translation).

The appeal to work on oneself in order to become a self-reflexive, scientifically versed and religiously critical subject is here delegated to the Muslim milieu. Enacting the ideal of the secular university, while recognizing the Muslim subject as being capable of becoming an autonomous reasoner is, however, of course not devoid of power.

In her pioneering study, Anne Schönfeld provides a compelling analysis of these chairs in different localities throughout Germany by means of a Foucauldian analytics of power (2021).<sup>10</sup> She elaborates on the ways in which the education to self-reflexivity, maturity and critical distance from Islamic doctrines is in this case modeled by a Kantian ideal of the autonomous subject who is able to liberate herself from religious constraints. Imams, teachers of Islam at state schools, social workers, or Muslims involved in pastoral care have been approached as focus groups through which the ideals of individual autonomy are to be spread to the wider Muslim milieus. Schönfeld shows that these ideals have been adopted wholeheartedly by many of the Muslim actors involved in the Islamic Theology project (Schönfeld, 2021). The political co-optation of such intermediators is, however, only the most obvious component of operations of liberal powers to foster liberal selves. The subtler power techniques involved in the institutionalization of Islamic Theology and Pedagogy, Schönfeld shows, consist of the largely taken for granted and normalized anthropocentric epistemologies of modern education and its related institutions as well as in the ideal of higher education as a space for emancipatory self-formation. This normalization occludes the specificities and power dimensions of a *particular* notion of education anchored in German idealism. In the following, I connect Schönfeld's argument more explicitly to my aim to unravel the deep-seated logics of liberal-secular governmentality which frame programmes of Muslim integration.

The anthropocentric ideal of knowledge as grounded in the rational human faculties alone goes back to the Kantian concept of "rational faith". Rational faith bears the function of securing compliance with the moral law and yet expects the individual to use her own reason in order to become religiously mature. For Luca Mavelli, the secular episteme thus derives first and foremost from the centrality of a specific modern conception of personhood, grounded in the ideal of the autonomous, reasonable, knowing, and non-coerced subject.<sup>11</sup> Recalling Foucault, Mavelli invokes here the "Cartesian moment". This led to the prevalence of an epistemic framework according to which the detachment of the self from sensuality and affective embodiments, and later also from God, was the condition for developing a truthful intellect. Mavelli calls this the "withdrawal of man in the individual space of cogito" (2012: 44). This withdrawal enacted a number of dualisms which are characteristic of Enlightenment thought as well as of modern conceptions of "religion" (body/mind, belief/reason, feeling/knowledge etc., see Vial, 2016). The secular episteme thus understood exceeds the conventions of religious separation from political authority to encompass a vision of rational and justified hierarchy (see Asad, 2018, p. 15).

Most importantly for my concern, Mavelli connects these ideals of the secular subject and its withdrawal from the "transcendental other" (God) to what he calls the "withdrawal from the empirical other" (Mavelli, 2012, p. 45). He traces the gradual transcendence of the senses from Aquinas via Descartes to Kant and to the founding figures of the Sociology of Religion, Weber and Durkheim, to today's thinkers who endorse "public religion" (like José Casanova) or "post-secular society" (like Jürgen Habermas). Religion, according to this lineage of thought, ideally functions as a moral compass for the individual and for society. It contributes to the democratic flourishing on condition that it is neatly distinguished from other spheres of society (economy, arts, and most urgently the state). Mavelli quotes sociologist José Casanova claiming in this vein: "Only a religion which has incorporated as its own the central aspects of the Enlightenment critique of religion is in a position today to play a positive role in furthering processes of practical rationalization" (Casanova, 1994, p. 233, quoted in Mavelli, 2012, p. 21). While Casanova has thus himself been critical of the secularization thesis as putatively fostering the privatization of religion, he remains imbricated in the ideal of functional differentiation according to which "religion" inhabits a distinctive place in society.<sup>12</sup>

This by now hegemonic understanding of religion as distinctive from other subfields of society, and as constantly rationalized through critique, Mavelli claims, was one reason for the contemporary lack of any ethically

committed dialogical encounter with Islamic traditions within Europe: "Europe, ..., has overall neglected the possibility that *its transformation* could be a necessary and possibly enriching component of its encounter with Islam" (Mavelli, 2012, p. 63, emphasis in the original).

Read through Mavelli's lens, the establishment of Islamic Theology at Western European universities provides an interesting perspective from which to understand the tacit operations of secular power underlying discourses on Muslim integration. The work that this conditional recognition does in anticipating the integrated Muslim subject as a knowing, reasonable and self-reflexive being, differs from the disciplinary components of the security state. Integration via secular governmentality also works differently from the act of setting Muslims apart as exceptional and strange organisms, no matter how strongly they try to become alike (as in the assimilation paradox conceptualized by Bauman). The secular governmentality of integration as the institutionalization of Islam rather works as an enabling force, one that guides the subject in her self-governance and self-transformation.

### 1.3 | Integration as secular translation

Integration as the requirement of self-reform functions as a mode of secular translation which is by no means restricted to the university, but rather structures discourses of integration animated by secular governmentality more generally. A prime example of the epistemic salience of requests of secular translation are Habermas's deliberations on the role and place of "religious speech acts" in liberal secular orders. Alerted by the global "religious revival", Habermas grants the religious realm its necessary yet contained space under the condition that it does not exclude "the possibility of cognitive content—whilst respecting the principle of *precedence* of secular reasons and of the institutional translation reservation." (Habermas, 2009, p. 145, emphasis added). "Religious citizens" should thus not abstain from normative truth claims. However, they should justify these under the reservation of *translation* into secular reason, inscribed into the secular contract, which the state both guarantees and controls. In another article he invokes the regulative authority of the formally neutral state implicated in the call for loyalty to the secular contract by stating that "the constitutional state confronts its citizens with the demanding expectations of an *ethics of citizenship* that reaches beyond mere obedience to the law." (2008: 27, emphasis added).

It goes without saying that contrasts between "religious" and "secular" speech acts are less neat than Habermas suggests. In his critical remarks on Habermas, Asad pointedly argues that if religion needs to be translated, it first has to be defined in order to be recognized as religion. He goes on to argue that Habermas's request to translation only works if "religion" is compatible with liberal sensibilities and ripped off from everything that exceeds rational cognition. Religion, Asad goes on, is then "split into two: on the one hand, there is the language and practice inherited from Christianity that define the secular state (religion 1), and on the other hand, there is the language and practice of liberal believers who live in a secular society and have redefined their religiosity (religion 2) so that it is entirely compatible with if not entirely equivalent to the secular." Christian privileges masked in the generic notion of "religion" are even more salient in the context of Germany where Christian institutions could successfully secure an integral place in the political landscape and in the public sector (Lewicki, 2014: chap. 6.1).

It is questionable how, faced with unequal points of departure, Muslims should culturally sublimate their religious convictions in public discourse and turn into universally versed citizens. Habermas himself draws attention to the asymmetrical conditions of the allegedly religiously blind constitutional state. He justifies this with an empirical argument which comes strikingly close to the historicist narrative of Schäuble in his interrogation of Muslims as integration candidates. Habermas claims that the truly completed secularization processes were initiated in the wake of the Reformation and the Enlightenment and thus centrally enabled by Christianity. "Traditional religions", as he calls them, would "need to catch up on certain points that is to say, they would need to learn to accept the body of secular epistemes".<sup>13</sup>

Whilst Habermas not always explicitly singles out Islam as the chief candidate for the catching-up process, it is quite clear at whom, in liberal Western European contexts above all, this requirement is aimed. For he simultaneously

states that the Catholic Church, following a laborious process, has already successfully met the precondition for secular reason. With reference to Muslims, Habermas stresses in contrast: "Many Muslim communities still have this painful learning process before them. Certainly, the insight is also growing in the Islamic world that today a historical-hermeneutic approach to the Koran's doctrine is required." (Habermas, 2008).<sup>14</sup> The Muslim subject is thus incorporated into the social fabric of the nation - framed here as a set of universally available constitutional principles—on condition that Islam's modernizing capacities are unleashed. And yet, by invoking over and over again Europe's "Judeo-Christian" tradition, Habermas demarcates the limitations to this incorporation (see Asad, 2018, p. 49).

Contrary to assimilation, integration here functions in similar ways as liberal accommodation: The other is not absorbed into an imagined social body but she is acknowledged in her difference while being transformed into something familiar through the monitoring functions of the liberal state. Integration as secular translation is one-directionally oriented: the subject in need to integrate via translation has to sublimate her pious sensibilities into a secular language so that *her* way of life transforms while not substantially affecting the whole into which she is asked to integrate. Or put in Asad's words: "Habermas does not regard translation as a challenge to expand the receiving language and way of life." (2018: 10).

#### 1.4 | The secular embodiments of integration discourses

The call for secular translation fostered by an "ethics of citizenship" in the Habermasian sense as a precondition for the successful inclusion of "religious citizens" (i.e., Muslims), brings me back to my concern to pay attention to the affective attachments of secularism that structure integration discourses. In the remaining section of this article I therefore want to recall *secularity* which Mahmood has conceptualized as a contingent set of practices, sensibilities and affects. Secularity thus understood is fed into *political secularism* understood as state practices of governing religion.

The seemingly all-inclusive abstract whole of the civil society and the constitutional state are themselves loaded with embodied social conventions which the Habermasian idea of ethics of citizenship indeed indicates. The self-reflexive citizen, capable of governing herself by critically reflecting upon theological sources, able to step out of her "life words" to enter the "common civil society", indeed, conjures a *particular* understanding of religion (religion 1 in Asad's words), predicated on prototypical Protestant ideals of internalized and privatized belief. This ideal requires embodied dispositions, specific sensibilities and learned corporeal practices (see Scheer, 2012).

The invocation to distinguish belief from reason, the senses from the cogito, in short, the imperative of metamorphosing into a comprehensive "secular episteme" derives not only from a *particular* tradition. It also encapsulates *particular* sensorial and embodied features. Integration into general principles through the cultivation of an "ethics of citizenship" is thus principled on *embodied* practices, which form the backbone of the secular episteme and which are at the same time unmarked and concealed through claims to unproblematic translatability and universality. If the secular episteme requires to distinguish between belief and rationality, between faith and science, body and mind etc., the request to translate one form of life ("religious") into another one ("secular") thus comprises a whole range of sensibilities, dispositions, emotions, and bodily techniques which exceed what Habermas calls the "cognitive content" (2009: 145).

It is against the naturalization of the alleged universality of such embodied traditions that Muslims as subjects of integration are repeatedly reminded to catch up, meaning in this case learning to translate Islamic normativity into the seemingly general, universal realm of secular reason. The embodied components of the liberal-secular matrix bring us back to the subtle corporeal inflections of integration discourses. It is no longer "culture", or an organically or ethnically construed "national entity", into which minoritized populations are asked to integrate. Rather, it is the supposedly disembodied abstract liberal-secular order that structures the grammar of integration discourses. According to William E. Connolly it is precisely through such ongoing acts of articulating and defending secular political claims that the affective attachments that passionately bind people to the secular form of life are upheld (Connolly, 1999; see also; Hirschkind, 2011). The recurrent discursive reiteration that Muslims can only be properly integrated if they properly

secularize materializes Connolly's assumption of the performative nature of secular speech acts in liberal public spheres. For it is namely through the one-sided focus on the other's body that the allegedly disembodied contours of the liberal-secular nation-state gains currency, while its own corporeal incentives are concealed by the language of abstract universal principles.

Such a conceptualization of the liberal-secular matrix which animates integration discourses on Muslims in Western Europe approaches secularism less as a determined set of embodied dispositions or as based on a fixed notion of religion. What is determined, however, is the authority of the state to guard the borders between what counts as properly religious and what intrudes into the political realm. Even more, by determining the conditions under which the (Muslim) other is integratable, the secular state enhances its authority to organize religious plurality. The implicit and often concealed embodied components of the defense of liberal and secular orders and their indeterminacy confront Muslims as a minoritized religion with a set of in-built predicaments, to which I will now turn in my conclusion.

## 2 | CONCLUSION

The state monitored institutionalization of Islam in Western Europe reveals an interesting double effect which is symptomatic of the liberal-secular underpinnings of integration discourses more generally: The affirmation to become part of the social fabric requires the subject of integration to simultaneously affirm and transform her difference. The Muslim cum secular subject that is imagined is thereby a subject that is able to bracket belief from politics and passions, to transcend her sensualities and to embrace an ideal of secularized religion, while constantly reflecting on its limits. Such integration projects are therefore predicated on and productive of secular sensibilities based on prototypes of "good religion" (Vial, 2016), whose own embodied normativity is concealed through the ongoing interrogation of the other. If integration therefore generally operates as a functional mechanism of modern nation-states, the integration of Muslims, in particular, secures the authority of the secular state to define and to simultaneously prescribe adequate forms and limits of religious expressions.

Recurrent appeals to mutuality or to universal principles conveyed in integration discourses do not make the coexistence of plural forms of life and social practices easier for minoritized religions. Rather, they mask the unequal conditions under which religion is regulated and shaped, including the powers of the secular state to decide on the legitimacy of religious life in public. Moreover, these appeals place the responsibility for institutionalized inequalities onto the individual who is charged with (self)improvement in order to become an acceptable and legible subject of the nation. I would even argue that calls for mutuality and transformation of "both sides" frequently stabilize the secular fabric of the nation-state: The degree to which "we" change depends on the ways in which transformative abilities of the other is recognizable for "us".

The (Muslim) other is not so much distinguished and separated from the rest ("our society") in her distinctive otherness. Rather, a small dose of her difference is recognized and thereby incorporated into the body social. It is a tolerable amount of difference which does not urge "us" to engage with the other's embodied sensibilities nor with our contingent, partly contradictory and exclusionary arrangements of state, religion and the nation including persisting "imperial formations" (Stoler, 2016). Such incorporations of minoritized difference into the social body, or into the allegedly universal abstract whole, fulfill the liberal promise to accommodate difference and to thereby immunize the liberal-secular project from critique.

Minoritized religions are thereby faced with the inherent predicament of having to exhibit signs of their difference—"presenting oneself as knowable" (in Markell's words 2003: 31) and of simultaneously merging into the allegedly unmarked whole. Precisely because the liberal-secular matrix of integration is not fixed but contingent on habituated social conventions and their discursive reiterations, integration can turn—just as Bauman put it for assimilation—into a lifelong examination (Bauman, 1991, p. 113).

A critical investigation of integration discourses therefore urges us first and foremost to shift the focus from the particular to the seemingly universal - from religious to liberal-secular embodiments, from the interrogated subject

to those who set the framework of the interrogation (here integration), in short, from the marked minority to the unmarked majority.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, [https://www.bildungsserver.de/onlineresource.html?onlineresourcen\\_id=31629](https://www.bildungsserver.de/onlineresource.html?onlineresourcen_id=31629), or: <https://www.oezdemir.de/themen/islam-einbuergern/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Schäuble (2006), former Federal Interior Minister and founder of the Deutsche Islam Konferenz (German Conference on Islam), author's translation.
- <sup>3</sup> In her book on political and academic discourses on assimilation, Jutta Aumüller shows that the biologicistic somatic groundings were also apparent in the first US studies on immigrant assimilation that emerged in the late 19th and early twentieth century (Aumüller, 2009, p. 29).
- <sup>4</sup> The Prussian Edict of 1812, for example, referred to Jews as: "Persons of Jewish faith" (jüdische Glaubensgenossen) (Markell, 2003, p. 136).
- <sup>5</sup> In her seminal intellectual historical analysis, Leora Batnitzky (2011) examines closely how these transformations were pushed by Jewish intellectuals.
- <sup>6</sup> The influence of Church representatives as advisors for state-Muslim dialog was also manifest in the preparations for the DIK (see Tezcan, 2012, p. 60).
- <sup>7</sup> It is telling, for example, that since 2020 the so called "Islamkolleg" at the University of Osnabrück has received financial support from the Ministry of the Interior, that is, the institution also centrally responsible for national security.
- <sup>8</sup> See also the recommendations in the *Scientific Council of Germany*: January 2010: [https://www.bmbf.de/\\_les/WissenschaftsratEmpfehlung2010.pdf](https://www.bmbf.de/_les/WissenschaftsratEmpfehlung2010.pdf).
- <sup>9</sup> This tension is thoroughly documented in Schöller and Khorchide (2012) and in Rohde (2020).
- <sup>10</sup> The study is part of Schönfeld's PhD thesis conducted at the *Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies*. It will be published as a book in 2022.
- <sup>11</sup> Mavelli's genealogy goes even further back to Aquinas who centrally fashioned the idea of a possible separation between faith and reason.
- <sup>12</sup> It is this point that has triggered a controversy between critical secular studies scholarship around Asad and more conventionalist sociologists of religion like Casanova (see Scott & Hirschkind, 2006).
- <sup>13</sup> Habermas, indeed, lists a whole catalog of characteristics at hand to "religious citizens" in order for them to successfully catch up with modernity (2009: 143f).
- <sup>14</sup> Some professors of Islamic Theology departments have adopted the same narrative. The Professor of Islamic Pedagogy in Osnabrück, Rauf Ceylan, for example, bases his habilitation thesis on the argument that Islamic organizations in Germany were culturally lagging behind progressive understandings of religion as free choice and individuality and should be assisted in catching up (Ceylan, 2014).

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