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## A New German ‘We’? Everyday Perspectives on Germanness and its Boundaries

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### Abstract

This study employs the “everyday nationhood” approach to explore how ordinary, ethnically diverse, native-born Germans in Berlin, Dresden, and Leipzig understand what it means to be German and whether outsiders can join that group. It puts findings from qualitative interviews conducted in Berlin in fall 2015 and in Dresden and Leipzig in April 2016 into conversation with two large-scale surveys conducted at about the same time. The interviews complicate the surveys’ finding that Germanness is now based primarily on language skills, citizenship, and workforce participation, as the respondents indicated that phenotype, ethnicity, and religion act as daily barriers to membership. This highlights the utility of the everyday nationhood approach for identifying how social categories are both understood and enacted through everyday practices of social inclusion and exclusion.

**Keywords:** Germany; immigration; everyday nationhood; integration

The question of what it means to be German has a long history of deep exploration by scholars and writers. As Borchmeyer observes, “The problem ‘what is German?’ has been discussed in countless tracts, from Wagner and Nietzsche through Thomas Mann, Adorno and Gehlen, up to this day” (2017, 34). Now, addressing it requires grappling with both Germany’s recently changing immigration policies and the decades of in-migration that preceded these changes. Given this evolving context, it is important to ask, in a way that includes all that purportedly fall within it: how does the category “German” work today? It was noteworthy, then, when in June 2016, a Federal Government press release announced two large-scale studies’ findings on this question, one by Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Research (BIM), titled “Post-migrant Germany III: Migrant perspectives on German identities – attitudes from persons with and without migration-background on national identity in Germany” (undertaken in 2014) and one by the SVR-Integrationsbarometer 2016 (undertaken in 2015), titled “Membership and criteria for societal membership in country of immigration Germany” (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung). The results were presented at a conference subtitled “The New German WE as Mirrored in Social Discourse,” hosted by Minister of State for Migration, Refugees, and Integration Aydan Özoğuz. The press release heralded the survey results, stating that they show “clearly achieved successes of the last years,” chief among them that “Germanness is today no longer based on ancestry,” but much more on language, citizenship, and forms of participation, especially through the workplace. Thus, Germanness has become far more open to newcomers – the “we” is expanding.

In welcoming these findings, the Minister also noted “All the more bitter it is for those concerned when their being German is nevertheless again and again denied on the basis of their name or how they look” (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration). The press release also quotes Naika Forouton, BIM’s Deputy Director:

Our data show that the emotional connection to Germany among people with a migration background is very similar to that of those with German ancestry. Nevertheless, there is currently a political debate in the public realm about the membership of people who are not perceived as German because they have a different phenotype, other names or ancestors who at some point immigrated to this country. It is time to develop a political model that describes plural memberships as a marker of this country of immigration. Being German today has become more diverse culturally, ethnically, religiously and nationally. (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration).

On the one hand, then, the survey's results indicate progress in German leaders' attempts, since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to redefine Germany as a "country of immigration" and to leave behind its long-held ethnic, blood-and-soil definition of citizenship and national belonging. This of course requires not only legal and policy reorientation, but also a shift in German self-understanding. To this end, in 2014, German President Joachim Gauck called on his fellow citizens to recognize and embrace a "*neues Deutsches Wir*" – a "new German we" – inclusive of immigrants (Kade 2014). On the other hand, the barriers to membership in that "we" noted by Minister Özoguz and Forouton indicate that stigmatizing and exclusionary social categorizations and practices continue despite the apparent societal shift toward a more inclusive view of national membership.

This disjuncture between stated attitudes/beliefs and lived experience raises important questions about the nature and development of recent changes in what Germanness entails. That such a wide-scale and profound reorientation of self-understanding would be fraught is unsurprising; asking a nation to redefine itself such that the "we" would now include people previously seen as "them" is a non-trivial request. It requires a notion of what it means to be German, and how an outsider could become one. As the difference between the survey results and experience of citizens "not perceived as German" highlights, this cannot be answered simply by pointing to abstract ideas or legal categories. It is therefore necessary to ask: what are the nation's bonds, what are its boundaries, and how are these boundaries drawn in the social practice of daily life? Addressing these questions requires asking people living in Germany about both their thoughts and their experiences – including, crucially, people excluded from Germanness under the "old" ethno-cultural terms of membership but who meet the new requirements. To this end, using the "everyday nationhood" approach, I held 29 qualitative interviews with ethnically diverse, native-born Germans in Berlin in fall 2015,<sup>1</sup> and then in Dresden and Leipzig in April 2016, capturing elements of individual nuance and experience not accessible to large-scale surveys.

In the following, I begin by offering brief historical context on definitions of German membership. I then introduce my theoretical framework and methods. With this framing, I delve into what my informants told me, putting their answers into conversation with the two large-scale surveys noted above. I conclude by considering the implications of the everyday nationhood approach for understanding inclusion and exclusion in societies where boundaries of membership are in flux.

## Historical Context

Germany's 1913 Citizenship Law used blood (*jus sanguinis*) as the criterion for citizenship and remained the law in West Germany through reunification in 1990. While West German elites avoided promoting overt ethnic nationalism for decades after World War II and the Holocaust, they unabashedly defined Germany as "not a country of immigration" (*kein Einwanderungsland*) (German naturalization guidelines quoted in Koopmans 1999, 629; Brubaker 1992; Greenfield 1992). Facts on the ground contradicted this; as Klusmeyer and Papademetriou observe: "Few advanced democracies have absorbed more persons born in other countries than Germany has since end of World War II," making it one of the most "consistently 'immigrant dense'" countries in Europe (2009, 273). Some were ethnic Germans (mostly from Eastern bloc countries and the Soviet Union) who were offered automatic citizenship based on their German heritage and their

displacement during World War II because of the German invasion. From 1950 until 1992, four million of these “*Aussiedler*” migrated to West Germany. A law that went into effect in 1993 limited such immigration to those born before 1993 (and their dependents), re-categorizing them as “*Spätaussiedler*.” In the 1950s and ‘60s, the West German state also brought in large numbers of foreign laborers to help rebuild the country but called them “guest workers” because they were expected to leave again; many did not. Thus, over decades millions of people were born in Germany as “foreigners” because they were children, and then grandchildren, of the workers who settled in Germany; this stood in stark contrast to the national membership offered during the Cold War to many ethnic Germans born abroad.

In 1992, Brubaker observed that “barriers to naturalization lie not only in the restrictiveness of legal provisions but equally in the political culture of naturalization, embodied in attitudes of Germans and immigrants alike. Without a changed understanding of what it is to be – or to become – German, the liberalization of naturalization policy will not produce a dramatic surge in naturalization” (79). Over that decade, political leaders grew more open to broadening access to citizenship, at least partly because Germany faced an impending demographic crisis: with one of the world’s lowest birth rates, it would need substantial immigration to sustain its way of life. In what Mushaben calls a “paradigm shift” (2008, 31) in 1999, the 1913 law was finally amended by the Law Reforming the Right of Citizenship (in force in 2000) (Hogwood 2000, 127). Notably, during debates over immigration reform, the main left-leaning Social Democratic Party (SPD) pushed for limits on accepting *Spätaussiedler*, while the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) championed their cause. A migration law with integration provisions passed in 2004 and came into force in 2005, the same year the Federal Statistics Office made the state’s long-standing stark binary categories of “foreigners” and “Germans” “obsolete” by developing the new category of “persons with migration-background” (Green 2013, 344). It was not, indeed, until that year that “Germany’s policymakers created the first coherent immigrant integration policy” (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou 2009, 274).

The year 2005 also brought Angela Merkel’s election as Chancellor, and upon taking office, she “created expectations both within and outside of Germany by vowing to conduct a national-level dialogue on integration” (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou 2009, 278). The next year, she launched the first integration summit, which became an annual summer event, and shortly thereafter inaugurated the first German Islam Conference (Plamper 2019, 282–283). Over time, the government’s ongoing assessment of integration was negative: in “2010, Chancellor Merkel declared that multiculturalism had ‘failed’ as a principle of social organization, while nonetheless assuring that Islam was a part of Germany” (Bock and Macdonald 2019, 23).

Merkel’s pronouncement set off a debate that reflected a by-then long-standing divide at the elite level. Hogwood explains this division as between proponents of a *Kulturnation* – a nation based on an organic notion of ethnicity – and the *Verfassungsnation*, which grew out of 1970s left-liberal political thought and was popularized by Habermas, defining membership according to constitutionally-based patriotism and praxis (2000, 139). This division shaped what came to be known as the *Leitkultur* (guiding culture) debate in the late 1990s and early 2000s, launched by conservatives who argued that, as a country of immigration, Germany needed to define the values necessary for integration. They framed these as the values of European/Western civilization (Klusmeyer 2001). This prompted a vitriolic debate, with supporters pointing to the way that German multiculturalism had fostered distance and mutual disinterest between “foreigners” and Germans. They also argued that core values like gender equality needed to be accepted by newcomers. Many opponents pointed to the danger, even decades after the Nazi regime, of defining a set of “German” values (Göktürk, Gramling, and Kaes 2007, 288).

Merkel’s 2010 claims reignited this controversy, which was further intensified by two highly publicized books by SPD politicians deeply critical of Germany’s immigration and integration policies and their implications for German society: Thilo Sarrazin’s *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (*Germany Does Away with/Abolishes Itself*) in 2010 and Heinz Buschkowsky’s *Neukölln ist überall*

(*Neukölln is Everywhere*) in 2012. Others responded by arguing that German Islamophobia was reaching dangerous levels (Bock and Macdonald 2019, 9). When Merkel opened Germany's borders to asylum seekers in 2015 (around a million people entered during this period), the debate intensified again. It is worth emphasizing that this does not reflect is not a simple right vs. left divide; as Plamper observes, "since the 2015 refugee crisis, Leftists like the journalist Jakob Augstein and the Berlin SPD politician Raed Saleh have chimed in and tried to reclaim *Leitkultur* for the Left" (2019, 322).

That Sarrazin's book became "the most successful non-fiction book in the history of the Federal Republic" raises the question of broader attitudes (Plamper 2019, 283). Writing in 1999 and noting that "deeply held social and partisan values" were "at issue" (135), Hogwood notes polls indicating "that wide sections of the German public is more in sympathy with a Kulturation or even an ultra-Kulturation stance" than left-leaning elites realized (2000, 140). In more recent research, Germany regularly polls as one of the most pro-immigration countries in Europe and is a popular migration destination. Since 2015 it has also drawn the most refugees and asylum seekers in Europe. However, their reception has been complicated, as is membership for long-settled "guest workers" and their descendants. Surveys show that majorities of Germans are consistently negative about immigrants' integration, responding that they do not adopt German values, customs, and ways of life – and Germans overwhelmingly think they should (Abali 2009; Pew Research Center 2014; Pew Research Center 2019). These findings raise questions about German understanding of the current "we," including: what are the German values, customs, and ways of life at stake (unspecified in the polls)? What does it mean to be "German" – or "not-German" – in everyday life?

### The "Everyday" Approach

In 2006, Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea published the most influential application of the "everyday" approach to date. The study, focused on ethnicity in the Transylvanian town of Cluj, offered powerful evidence for the "elementary observation, if one too often forgotten, that the beliefs, desires, hopes, and interests of ordinary people cannot be inferred from the nationalist (or other) utterances of politicians who claim to speak in their name" (167). Brubaker's innovative approach departed from nationalism scholarship's long-standing focus on the historical development and substance of nationalism – its "when" and "what" (Antonsich 2016, 32) – which attended largely to elites. Comparatively, the extent to which those perspectives actually "are appropriated by ordinary people (to the extent they are so at all) has received less scholarly attention" (Fox and Miller-Idress 2008, 538).

Brubaker et al. developed an "analytical vocabulary" (2006, 8) for studying these ordinary perspectives. At the core is a distinction between ethnic and national categories – such as "Hungarian" or (for this study's purposes) "German" – and groups:

This is of course not a new distinction, but it is too often forgotten. If by "group" we mean a mutually interacting, mutually recognizing collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity, and capacity for concerted action, or even if we adopt a less exigent understanding of group, it should be clear that a category is not a group; it is at best a potential basis for group-formation or "groupness." By distinguishing consistently between categories and groups, we can problematize – rather than presume – the relation between them. (2006, 11)

This allows us to study

from below, the "micropolitics" of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade, or transform the categories that are imposed on them. It invites us to ask how, why, and in what contexts ethnic categories are used – or not used – to make sense

of problems and predicaments, to articulate affinities and affiliations, to identify commonalities and connections, to frame stories and self-understandings. (12)

This distinction thus allows me to question the category of “German” as it is defined from the top-down and to explore both how people use their agency to relate to it in their daily lives and how well it aligns with their sense of groupness.

While Brubaker et al.’s major findings in Cluj indicate the limits on elites’ ability to divide people, they also have important implications for their ability to unite them – as German leaders have sought to do by promoting a more inclusive notion of Germanness and Germany as a country of immigration. If ethnically (or otherwise) inclusive categories assigned “from above” misalign with members’ sense of the group, exclusion may continue. For example, Wallem employs Goffman’s (1986[1963]) “notion of stigma as ‘an attribute that is deeply discrediting for the person possessing it’” to study migrant integration in Germany: “The stigmatised person ‘departs negatively from the normative expectations at issue’ and thereby distinguishes herself from those considered as ‘normals’” (Wallem 2017, 13–14). Wallem finds that non-German names are stigmatized, prompting many newcomers (her case is focused on *Spätaussiedler*) to “Germanise” their names. Through this response, “the mostly implicit and unquestioned assumptions about what it means to belong to the German nation become actually visible” (91). Similarly, in his study of “ordinary people’s views on Italy and Italian,” Antonsich found “[l]istening to the voices of an ethnically differentiated group of ‘Italians’ allows exploring the plurality of registers through which a national ‘we’ can be articulated, as well as being a short circuit in the functioning of banal nationalism when ‘belonging’ no longer coincides with ‘being’” (2016, 37). This disjuncture of “belonging” and “being” arose when children of migrants he interviewed “positioned themselves as ‘being foreigners’”. This is not surprising given the fact that they indeed have to constantly face the majority group’s skepticism about their ‘being Italian’ . . . . The way they look at themselves (self-identification) does not reflect the way others look at them (social categorization)” (Antonsich 2016, 37). Thus, official categories (such as “Italian” or “German”) may fail to create inclusive groupness, as appears to be the case for at least some Germans with migration-background.

My study employs this approach to explore how ordinary, ethnically diverse, native-born Germans in Berlin, Dresden, and Leipzig understand what it means to be German and whether and how outsiders can join that group. I turn now to my research design.

## Methods

In 2008, Fox and Miller-Idriss proposed a research “methodology that looks not first to political speeches, newspaper articles or history textbooks for the nation’s everyday meanings, but rather puts the questions to the audiences of the speeches, the readers of the newspapers, and the pupils of history – and to those who *don’t* listen to speeches, read papers or do their history lessons” (555). The methods of getting at the everyday are evolving, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observation of patterns of consumption and an expanding list of other social practices, and media analysis, including social media (Goode 2020). This study uses qualitative interviews with questions that address not only “*what* the nation means” to people, but also “*when* the nation matters to them” (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, 557). I put these in conversation with the large-scale surveys noted in the introduction, as the two methods can complement each other to capture both broad patterns and detailed nuances of everyday perspectives and practices.

I designed my interview questions to investigate what the categories of “immigrant” and “German” – so often invoked by elites in framing the problems of German political community – mean, if anything, to regular people in the course of normal life. I began by asking: “Could you tell me where and how you encounter immigrants in your daily life? Could you describe a couple of such encounters? What makes these people recognizable as immigrants?” This allowed respondents to



articulate the characteristics of “immigrants” based on their own practice of demarcating that category’s boundaries. Next, I asked whether the immigrants seemed to follow German ways of life, as they understood them. I again asked for examples from daily life, to allow respondents to define the practices that constitute these ways of life, in their experience, or to reject it as a meaningful concept. I left it to the respondent to decide whether there were any differentiating factors between immigrant behavior and German ways. If a respondent offered an example where the immigrant did not follow German ways, I asked whether that also violated any German values, and if so which, thus asking respondents to explain how they employ value judgments they associate with Germanness.

The respondents’ answers gave a sense of how they understand, experience, and practice the categories of “German” and “immigrant.” The semi-structured interview format also allowed for me to follow up and for respondents to push back or identify and illustrate problems these concepts and categories raise in real life. Their answers set the context for my second set of questions, which asked about recent elite messaging on immigration and integration. I noted that Chancellor Merkel said that migrants “will change our country in the coming years,” that President Gauck had called for a “new German ‘we,’” and that the high-profile writer Jakob Augstein had said that Germany needed to integrate newcomers and “to make Germans out of them ... one can become American, one can become English, but it must also be possible for one to become German.” I thus asked respondents, “In light of what you’ve shared with me in this interview, what do you think it means to be ‘German’? Can someone become German, in your view? Why is this possible or why not? What would be involved?”

I did fifteen interviews in Berlin in November and December of 2015 with native Germans – meaning those born in Germany, regardless of family migration background,<sup>2</sup> or, following the BIM definition, having been raised there from childhood, which was the case for one of my respondents. I asked the same questions of ten native Germans in Dresden and four in Leipzig in April 2016. I selected respondents through snowball sampling, asking each one to suggest further possible respondents. As Fox and Miller-Idriss note above, all non-elite perspectives are welcome in this approach, whether people pay attention to elite messaging or not. That said, the 2015-16 migration influx unsettled Germany, making elite pronouncements on, and debate over, related issues intense and frequent in the media during the period of my interviews.

In Berlin, I interviewed ten women and five men; six interviewees were natives with migration background (MB), meaning at least one parent was born outside Germany. Eight were 35 years and under, seven were older (see Table 1). Only one was originally from the German Democratic Republic (more commonly referred to as (communist) East Germany). In Saxony, I interviewed four men and ten women; one interviewee had MB. Half were from former East Germany and half had moved to Saxony from former West German states; half were 35 and under, and half older. Of the entire respondent pool, two were senior high school (*Gymnasium*) students, three were graduate students, and almost, if not all, the rest had university degrees and were professionals working in the educational/academic, legal, government administration (EU), business, consulting, and nonprofit sectors. None worked in the realm of government immigration policy. All informants are anonymous, and thus have pseudonyms. I do not identify job titles except when necessary.

I chose Berlin for its centrality to German culture and politics and its diversity, with 27.4% of the population of migration-background. I chose Dresden as a further site because it is the base for Pegida (“Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West (Occident)”), an anti-Islam, anti-immigration movement; it was thus a site of challenge to governing elite perspectives. It is worth noting that Saxony was part of the former East Germany and is far less diverse than Berlin. I did four interviews in nearby Leipzig because the snowball method offered that opportunity to further explore Saxon perspectives. These local contexts were clearly important to people’s experiences; indeed, respondents in both Berlin and Saxony regularly noted that life in their specific cities/regions likely differed from other places in Germany. For that reason, I do not claim their

**Table 1.** Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Age	City	Country (if Migration Background)
Amaya	34	Berlin	Lebanon
Amira	17	Dresden	Syria
Anja	37	Berlin	
David	36	Berlin	Israel
Diana	53	Dresden	
Freja	31	Berlin	
Greta	45	Dresden	
Hana	18	Berlin	Lebanon
Ilse	31	Dresden	
Ingrid	43	Berlin	
Julia	26	Dresden	
Julian	30	Berlin	
Jürgen	44	Berlin	
Jutta	25	Dresden	
Katja	25	Dresden	
Kevin	42	Berlin	
Krista	25	Berlin	
Lea	31	Dresden	
Magdalena	31	Dresden	
Maria	46	Leipzig	
Mustafa	34	Berlin	Turkey
Paula	69	Berlin	
Rafael	48	Dresden	
Rüdiger	45	Leipzig	
Sara	26	Berlin	Nigeria
Sebastian	49	Dresden	
Stefan	47	Leipzig	
Tania	27	Berlin	Poland
Ursula	66	Berlin	

experiences and perspectives as generally representative of “Germans”; still, elements of their answers align broadly with the national surveys.

I met with people in a place of their choice, usually their office, home, or a coffee shop. Twenty-six interviews were in German (translations below are mine) and three preferred to speak English. The interviews typically took 45–60 minutes. I recorded the interviews on my phone and processed

the transcriptions using F4analyze software, coding inductively based on the themes that emerged from my respondents' answers. I used the "data saturation" approach – when I heard similar answers again and again and saw consensus across responses – to determine when sampling was sufficient (Saunders et al. 2018).

I also followed Fox and Miller-Idriss's prescription that researchers of everyday nationhood "need to spend some time in everyday life" (2008, 566), living in Berlin from August to December 2015, during the refugee crisis (*Flüchtlingskrise*, the term used consistently in mainstream reporting at the time). I followed local and national media coverage, televised debates, and other public meetings, and attended both pro- and anti-immigration demonstrations. I visited a majority-Muslim public school, observing a class and speaking informally with students, and volunteered at a refugee center. The issue of immigration was palpable in everyday life, as migrants and refugees were visible on the streets; some slept in parks as the system was overwhelmed. Colorful banners and stickers stating "refugees welcome" appeared widely on buildings and on the back of restroom stall doors. I also saw wariness grow, especially after the November 13–14 Bataclan terrorist attack in Paris. All of my interviews were after that attack. I conducted my Saxon interviews four months after the 2016 New Year's Eve sexual violence committed by migrants against women in Cologne, which prompted public concern and debate.

### Characteristics of Germanness

As noted above, I began my interviews by asking the respondent about their daily experience, if any, with immigrants, including what makes someone recognizable as an immigrant, thus identifying what people see as *not*-German. I used the German term "*Immigrant*" rather than "*Migrant*" in my questions, trying to keep the term as neutral as possible. The most common answer, given by sixteen respondents, was how they look. Ten (two of whom were MB) mentioned darker skin color (two described this as looking "Mediterranean," one as from "the Arab world") and four noted dark eye/hair color. Four said wearing the headscarf and one said Islamic religious symbols. The second most common marker of immigration status was language, noted by thirteen respondents. They pointed most often to a foreign accent, but also to improper grammar or speaking another language in public. Jürgen, a teacher in a Muslim-majority school, noted his students' use of "Kiezdeutsch," a sociolect combining German and Arabic elements. Two respondents mentioned non-German names. Five pointed to behavior. Krista noted that immigrants – particularly refugees – could act "insecure." Greta said they seem particularly work-oriented. By contrast, Sebastian and Rafael noted that they lounged around, often smoking, during work hours. Sebastian added that they "make a relatively aggressive impression. So pushy that one avoids them." Jürgen noted that "among the guys, a lot of machismo . . . it's so generally valid with us at the school that it goes beyond prejudice." Several respondents also noted that you cannot be sure if someone is an immigrant unless you know them.

When I asked how immigrant behavior relates to German ways of life, to explore how lines of group demarcation relate to social practices, six noted that immigrants tend to be louder in public, laughing, talking, and smoking together. Anja told me that "in the sauna, it's always the non-German women who talk. And the Germans HATE to talk in the sauna. They HATE it. They want to relax, they want to be quiet, and the non-German people never pay attention . . . . And I mean that's not bad, it's just a different attitude." Five respondents observed that immigrants tend to ignore German rules, with examples including crossing against the traffic light, violating parking rules, and not observing starting-times at Kindergarten. Eight respondents also pointed to mild but concerning aggressivity on the street, four of them (all women) noting catcalling by men who appeared to be migrants, which Ilse said is "very starkly sanctioned in Germany." Sebastian also observed that "there probably are just as many asocial Germans, but this loitering around, one simply doesn't do that in Germany, no."



When I asked about how immigrant practices related to German values, some answers pointed to immigrants holding conservative, and in some cases illiberal, values. As Amaya explained: “Such values as FAMILY, this family cohesion, and that one looks after one another, this is much more highly valued [by immigrants] and still much more present. One perhaps sees this also with the marriage rates and so on, as there is much more value given to the orderly tracks. We marry, THEN we have children, and so on . . . . You see this very clearly in the care-work. Who in Germany does the care-work? How many migrants go into care professions – whether in hospitals or elder care facilities?” I heard a similar view in an informal conversation with some female students at the majority-Muslim high school. One told me, “Germans don’t really understand us. For example, they don’t really understand why we respect our families the way we do, or why we would need permission for certain things. They just don’t understand.”

Another characteristic of immigrants noted by seven respondents was religiosity: as Kevin put it, “They’re terribly religious.” Ten respondents also identified gender inequality and several expressed concern that this core societal value could be threatened by immigrants. As Ilse explained,

there are simply different ideas of how equality between men and women is regulated or the relationship between men and women. That really is a value, that just this freedom and equal rights in Germany is very close to my heart or is very positive for women . . . . And I notice it in myself, that one has a bad feeling, so to say, I don’t know . . . a large part of the refugee men or immigrants, they’re not all refugees, but they simply have a negative image of women.

In addition, Jürgen noted a lack of a sense of European solidarity reflected in his students’ reaction to the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, which they saw as the cartoonists’ having brought on themselves. Jürgen noted that the students he described as immigrants were mostly born in Germany.

One element of the answers that was particularly striking was how often the first response was a version of “What the heck is the German way? Who represents that?” (Paula) and “that’s very hard to answer” (David and Rüdiger). Fourteen of my respondents initially expressed profound uncertainty and had to consider the question of what German ways of life are. When I asked about German values, eight (six of whom were Berliners) again indicated uncertainty, often combined with some frustration at the very notion, with answers such as: “What IS German? What ARE German values? I don’t know what that is” (Ingrid); “What are German values?” (Jürgen); “German values? What are German values? Please and thank you? I don’t know, no” (Amira); “If there even IS a German culture!” (Jutta). Sara explained,

No one knows what being German [*Deutschsein*] means, what German culture is, what German values are, German behaviors. Most people could at most name some meals, yeah, one eats potatoes, or makes this and this, but somehow what goes beyond that is something that really isn’t tangible. Because of that one doesn’t even know what one is supposed to be conforming to, or what this pressure to conform consists of at all, these expectations, and how they would be fulfilled.

While I was struck by how regularly I heard this response, when properly contextualized, it is not surprising. Mushaben points to a research project into German identity she launched in 1989, noting that while she discovered some things that, post-WWII, people thought should *not* be German, “[b]y 1990 I had yet to discover a text beyond the Basic Law explaining what it *should* mean to be German in a positive sense” (2008, 2). She identified similar implications to Sara’s: “I have long wondered how one could expect Turkish guestworkers to ‘assimilate,’ given the reluctance of postwar citizens to specify the contours of their own Germanness” (3).

Overall, my respondents' answers made clear that the category "immigrant" is complicated and ambiguous, and that there are some who fall within German groupness, at least broadly, and some who do not. One demarcation was between expats and immigrants: as Anja put it, "There shouldn't be a distinction, but there is somehow." Indeed, Anja's partner was originally from Spain and Freja's from the United States, and both laughingly told me they didn't even think of them when I first asked about immigrants. "Expat" status seemed to be Western: as Sara observed, "in the European context, a 'migrant' is not usually someone who came from France." Anja particularly saw Americans, numerous in Berlin, as expats. Class and educational differences also seem relevant. As Julian noted, his baker is Turkish, but his "circle of friends came together from an artistic intellectual sphere where many people from Australia, and Brazil, and Canada, and France encounter one another, and also Israel." Stefan pointed out that it's hard to know after how many generations one stops being an immigrant. Ingrid also observed that "migration background" typically means "Muslim background." Maria explained:

We distinguish between the so-called "fancy foreigners" (*Edel-Ausländer*), in other words the great ones, and the foreigners that we really don't want . . . . An American woman who comes here, it's clear that she belongs to us. Two French women who come here, it's clear that they belong to us. This means, then, that the common notion of what an immigrant is, is Syrian, Afghan, Kosovar-Albanian.

Note the overlap between "expat" and "fancy foreigner," and that all the "immigrant" countries Maria offered as examples are Muslim-majority. Similarly, Ursula told me

There are immigrants, and immigrants – people with low levels of education, such as for example in Berlin or Kreuzberg, and in other big cities, that partly segregate themselves, because they feel insecure, and want to stay amongst themselves, and feel discriminated against by the Germans, and as a counterreaction say, we have the better values.

In other words, "There is a very clear distinction between foreigners and *foreigners*" (Maria).

The BIM study asked more directly what it means to be German. It included three different surveys, the first of which asked about the qualities respondents most associated with Germany, using the open-ended question: "And what characteristics best describe this land for you?" Because of the high variety of answers, the researchers grouped them under overarching terms. They found that both persons with and without migration-background identified "secondary virtues" – virtues that promote the smooth functioning of society but are ethically neutral unless acting in the service of a primary virtue – as what they most associated with Germany. The top answer for both categories of respondent was virtues that fall under the overarching concept of conscientiousness/sense of duty (*Pflichtbewusstsein*) such as reliability, punctuality, and accuracy (15.8% of non-MB and 17.8% of MB), followed by industriousness (*Strebsamkeit*), encompassing the qualities of being hard-working, determined, etc. (11.7% of non-MB and 7.7% of MB) (Canan and Foroutan 2016, 32).

My informants' responses regarding whether immigrant behavior conformed to German values and ways of life allowed me to identify what people saw as falling in these categories, and they pointed to the same kinds of secondary virtues that BIM found. Orderliness was noted most frequently (9), followed by punctuality (8), reliability (3), strong work ethic (2), and doing things properly (2). Some respondents also noted constitutional values. Mustafa said, "In my eyes, the values of the society are established in the laws." The constitutional value that the most respondents (8) identified was gender equality. Three pointed to freedom of religion and two to freedom of expression. Sara and Amaya both noted that these are really universal values, and three said they are better understood as part of the European value system than as German values. Indeed, Kevin expressed disgust at the thought: "If I may say it, I would NEVER say GERMAN value system."

(Kevin also noted that he despised anything that could be taken as nationalism, saying that while he has no problem if an American hangs a flag, “When I see that in Germany I need to puke, I find it awful.”)

One complication regarding German groupness that emerged from my interviews was its relationship to (former) East Germans, as two of my informants in Saxony – neither of whom had migration background – said they *themselves* did not feel German. As Maria explained,

I don't see myself at all as German, honestly. So, if someone asked me, I would always say I'm a Leipziger, I'm a European. So I see myself not at all as German, because we have, the Germans have a problem with our own national awareness, no, and the East Germans have even more of a problem with it. So we had, so when I was young, until I was nineteen, we also had our own national anthem. And then our tears rolled down at the Olympics when our national anthem was played and not the West German, no, so. So in this respect we already have a very split relationship overall to this being German, yes. I find a lot of this being German not particularly worth emulating.

Greta similarly told me: “The people that lived for a long time in the DDR [German Democratic Republic (East Germany)], so I was seventeen at the time of reunification, they probably rather stayed a bit in their hearts as citizens [*laughing*], and didn't, so before I still had big problems identifying myself with Germany. It's now a bit better. Since I had a child, I've found most things quite good.” This view is not uncommon: *Deutsche Welle* reported the Forsa Institute for Social Research and Statistical Analysis's finding “that eastern and western Germans still don't feel like they belong to one nation” (2013).

It was not ideological support for the East German regime that prompted my respondents' reaction; Maria, for example, had a file kept on her by the Stasi – the notorious East German political police – and remembered her parents warning her as a child never to repeat what she heard at home. It rather had partly to do, in Maria's terms, with a “complete experience of loss ... . One lost everything from one day to the next, the entire political system, lost everything. One had to build everything again.” This led to a sense of insecurity that it could happen again. Moreover, as Stefan, who was from the West but moved as a university student to the East right after the Berlin wall's fall, told me, “the merging of the two systems ... wasn't really a merging, it was a takeover, with my side on top, being from the West.” Both Maria and Stefan talked about how people who were in their late twenties or older at reunification had a very hard time pursuing or keeping careers, as Westerners came to take the jobs of purged East Germans (especially the most influential and lucrative ones), to reclaim property, and to take advantage of cheap rents. Stefan said that the Westerners did this quite insensitively.

Not only did some East Germans not identify as Germans, they felt that the way that the government was dealing with issues of immigration was alarmingly similar to how the East German regime had treated its citizens. My question about whether one can become German was prefaced with the quote from President Gauck calling for a “new German ‘we.’” Sebastian answered,

Why does a Federal President or a Chancellor take the liberty of telling us that we need to develop a new “we”? That's simply legitimized by nothing ... . A new we would mean that before that we had the wrong we ... . What we fear, what many in Saxony or in Germany fear is not so terribly much the migrants, but rather the EXAMPLE of the migrants, how the government is perceived as autocratic, un-legitimized, aloof, with the big forefinger, “you can choose, so you can give your opinion, but in the end the right answer needs to come out, namely the one that we as the government have.” And the whole thing supported by the media. And do you know that this reminds us of a time twenty-five or thirty years ago? Where it was just the same, and exactly, because it was already like this in the East, because we know how it was when a government sets itself up to tell us the opinion, or wants to instill in us the

“right” opinion through the media. Exactly, that we in the East still remember that relatively well, which in West Germany was already, I don’t know, seventy or eighty years ago.

Sebastian told me that those in his social circle agreed with him, but that most people would not share such views publicly for fear of being stigmatized as far-right. The East German resistance to being categorized as “German” thus warns against a blanket “ethnic” definition of the divides at play.

Overall, my interviews point to a number of qualities relevant to defining German groupness (leaving aside here the issues some Saxons expressed with self-identifying as “German,” as their “Germanness” is not questioned socially). They are not only valuing (or not) the secondary virtues, but also skin color, religiosity, language, names, Western or non-Western origin, education, class, levels of social conservatism, and preferences regarding noise levels. The extent to which these demarcate boundaries around Germanness is important to gauging who can *become* German. I turn now to the findings on that question.

### Can You Become German?

As noted above, the 2016 studies offered hopeful news, in that they indicated that language, citizenship, and participation have become the most important requirements for being German, which are in principle available to people of any background. The BIM survey asked respondents, “do you personally consider the following things very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, or very unimportant to be German” (one of two versions of the question said “truly German,” but researchers concluded this did not influence results). These were: “to be able to speak German,” “to have German citizenship,” “to be able to speak accentless German,” “to give up the [Muslim] headscarf,” and “to have German ancestors.” The only answers that a majority of respondents saw as important were speaking German (98.6% of respondents with migration background, and 96.5% of those without) and citizenship (67.9% of MB, 81.4% of non-MB).

The SVR’s question was different, but related, asking “In order to belong to this society, it is important ...”, offering the following possibilities: “to have secure employment,” “to have German citizenship,” “the Christian faith,” “to have been born in Germany,” and “to have German ancestors.” The only answers more than half considered somewhat or very important were solid employment (89.2% of non-MB and 93.3% of MB respondents) and citizenship (64.8% non-MB and 62.1% MB) (Sachverständigenrat deutscher Stiftungen für Integration und Migration 2016, 4).

My respondents did not emphasize employment specifically as an element of Germanness, but in line with the above findings, they saw German language fluency as important. As noted above, a number of them also indicated that an accent was stigmatizing (BIM’s survey found 48% of MB and 39.1% of non-MB found this important). Jürgen said about his Kiezdeutsch-speaking students:

for them it would be nice if they had a clear picture of who they are and it is not clear. Because they’re not perceived as Germans by anyone. You wouldn’t label any of my students in my case, except for two, who are obviously German Germans, you wouldn’t label them German from their looks, from the way they talk, it’s, you would think they arrived two years ago or something.

Moreover, a German university professor (not one of my respondents) who grew up in another EU country with one German parent told me that because he has a very slight accent in German, people don’t consider him a real German.

When I asked my respondents directly whether a person can become German, three said yes, with citizenship and/or a passport. Nine said, no, for reasons I explore below. Of these, five said

people shouldn't need to adopt a German national identity, as diversity is preferable. The other four said it should be possible but isn't currently. And fully nineteen of the respondents expressed uncertainty about what it means to be German. Rafael's response is fairly representative of the non-MB interviewees:

It's a relevant question, whether one really can become German in the classic sense. I don't know. I also don't know if one as a German could become Italian, or indeed, Northern Italian, a German could become somehow, but a German could not become a Southern Italian. That is, I find the question is not possible to answer unequivocally.

Amira's answer is fairly representative of the MB respondents:

What are Germans? So, I, I have asked myself that every day, what Germans are. And people also ask me if I am German, and I can never say. I sometimes say I am Syrian, I sometimes say I am German, I sometimes say, I'm both. You can abide by German rules, you can live here, you can have a passport, have your ID, you can be registered here and nevertheless not be German, because you don't feel German, because it isn't your homeland. I don't really feel myself to be German, even though I was born here, I have my passport, I was born here. I live here and still I don't do that. What is German? What is that?

Paula's view was that, "Germans avoid saying who they are the way the devil avoids holy water. They DON'T WANT TO SAY IT. They say, well, we are EUROPEANS. Yes, okay, we speak German, but we are EUROPEANS. That was the way out." She later added that for Germans to be able to decide how they want things in their country, "they need to KNOW THEMSELVES. And they don't."

As noted above, BIM researchers Canan and Foroutan recognized that despite the positive findings, many people who are in formal-legal terms German continue to be denied recognition because of (as they put it in the study itself) "certain difficult or unalterable characteristics" (2016, 45). Two elements of German identity emerged from my interviews as particularly relevant for filling in this explanation – religion and phenotype/ethnicity. I take each in turn.

### Religion

"It is not easy to become German, or to *stay* German," according to Amaya. She began wearing a hijab at age twenty-five in graduate school. She shared what happened next:

My right to be German was withdrawn just because I wear a headscarf ... . Before I wore the headscarf I NEVER heard the sentence "Oh you speak good German!" Or such things. Or "Where do you come from originally?" No one had ever asked me, because of my visual features, blue eyes, and so on, are always immediately associated with European, being German, as always. I never heard that. But since the moment I put the headscarf on – two faces of the society! So people who before were neutral or kind to me distanced themselves or reacted differently ... I was then still a student. Really, from one day to the next things changed so much, whether the behavior of the professors, or also some fellow students. It matters so much. Naturally it is an obvious statement, but ultimately it didn't change me, or my way of thinking. And yes, it hurts.

I asked whether it is possible to both be German and wear the headscarf. Amaya answered, "Yeah. Never. It's not possible. I have friends who are converts. They are BI-O-DEUTSCH! ["organic" German, with German ancestors; I return to this below] But as soon as they put on the headscarf – it doesn't go together! You cannot be German and voluntarily wear the headscarf."

Hana, a high school student preparing to go to university, shared a similar experience to Amaya's when I asked whether, as a woman who covers, she felt a tension with German society about being fully German:

Definitely. Yes, yes. Definitely. So, I think I will never be German in the eyes of other people because they see the headscarf. Because they think I'd only be integrated when I don't wear it. But there one sees also this rigidity, this closedness, that it is simply that, yes, either you live by my values, or you are, you don't belong. And when I began to wear the headscarf, that was when I was exactly fourteen, a lot changed for me. I IMMEDIATELY noticed this tension between me and my environment. So, I always say, I never had this inner tension, this inner conflict. The teachers spoke so negatively. So, they said, yes, now you're ruining your future, now nothing will come of you anymore, what are you going to do with your grades, now you won't be able to get respectable employment anymore. And that was quite disappointing, because the people were the ones I had looked up to, that imparted knowledge to me that was so valuable for me, that determined so much in my life for me. And then to hear these people speak that way, that was sad, even though I always told them, for me, I do have this being German, this feeling of being German. What I have around my religious identity, that's really, I always say, like a magnet that has two positive sides [*makes a gesture of magnets bouncing apart from each other*]. So both are positive, but somehow they go apart. They, yes, the strength between them, one just can't merge them when two poles are positive, and that's exactly how I feel.

Amaya spoke similarly about the diminished career opportunities for women who wear the headscarf. Moreover, she said, other aspects of societal life in Berlin were closed off to those who cover:

I can't go swimming with my children in the summer. Why not? Because I have a full-body swimsuit. It's made out of swimsuit material. Like professional swimmers use. They also wear them long, to swim faster. I can't go into the pool with it ... the rules say one must wear normal swimwear. Normal here is naturally a swimsuit, and a bikini [ ... ] It is incomprehensible. So, by whom am I excluded? And for example such a family outing to the swimming pool is something truly WONDERFUL. Is that not a sign of integration?

The headscarf also came up in eight other interviews. Of these, six expressed no problem with it. Kevin even mentioned ruining a relationship with a fellow teacher after he challenged her statement of intolerance toward hiring teachers who wear the headscarf (note that this was a Muslim-majority school); he also observed a marked anti-Muslim attitude among the teachers, especially those over the age of fifty. Three respondents spoke more critically of the headscarf (possibly coincidentally, all were women over the age of 40, two from Saxony). Ursula considered it a matter of education: "When someone studies or succeeds in rising educationally, then you have less and less of the headscarf." Paula was the most openly hostile to it:

Now since everything is very loaded in Germany, also the headscarf is very loaded. In the United States it doesn't bother me the LEAST BIT. Yes. For it's a cultural thing, you know, people, some wear headscarves. HERE it's a religious statement. And THEN I get aggressive. Because I HATE religious statements. Yes? I hate them in every – I hate them among the JEWS, I hate them with the CHRISTIANS, and I hate them with the MUSLIMS. Yes? ... if your damn headscarf is a sign of your BELIEF, well, then, I want nothing to do with you ... . It's a living provocation, for EVERYONE.

When I asked what message she saw the headscarf as sending, Paula said it was "political, because in Islam the religion IS political," and it says "I'm a religious Muslim. Yes? And I don't CARE about



your laws. I follow MINE because the Prophet has given [them] to me right away. Yes? And they are not YOUR laws and I don't CARE. That is the statement. That, that's the subtext."

For her part, Greta worried about

these democratic basic values like equal rights, acceptance of homosexuality, same-sex lifestyles, acceptance of the special relationship with Israel ... it probably really is more about Islam, in that I don't find it so democratic. [*long pause*] Clearly, ultimately people that are here also have their rights to live here as they want to, but I think I'd have a problem now when even young girls have to wear the headscarf, for example. That would somehow, that would interfere with my feminist wishes.

When I asked whether the recent newcomers might enrich society (recall this was during the migration wave), she said, "it's a bit uncomfortable for me, it's hard for me, to see this whole ... medieval, in my opinion, often medieval Islamic culture as enriching ... . When it's about Islam, I have, I have a problem, I have to admit that."

The other notable religious issue that came up in my interviews was the celebration of Christmas as a marker of German identity. Ingrid told me that in her child's multicultural Berlin daycare all the children, including Muslims, sang carols together. In Dresden, Jutta noted that at Pegida rallies, one overhears worries about not being able to celebrate Christmas in churches anymore. Maria said it was hard for her to accept that schoolchildren were now officially celebrating Muslim holidays and that some Christmas markets were being called "winter markets" to avoid offending Muslims. The issue also came up when I went with three Berlin teachers for a drink. Two of them sharply criticized a mostly-Muslim school (where one of the two critics taught) for having a hallway Christmas tree. The third teacher, who also taught there, took strong issue with the criticism. He said, "Hey, I like Christmas, and I like Christmas trees. I'm an atheist, but I like Christmas trees." Two against one, the discussion got heated, with the tree's defender saying in frustration, "It's just a f\*\*\*ing Christmas tree! You can't be serious! It's Germany, we have Christmas trees!"

This secular attachment to Christmas stood in contrast to the extent to which at least some with migration-background hold religion as their primary group identity. The schoolgirls that I talked with informally attended the school with the disputed Christmas tree. I noted, "You all keep talking about the Germans as one category that you don't identify with, and also talking about 'us.' You said your backgrounds are from Lebanon, and Turkey, and Albania, and Palestine, but you still talk about 'us.' Who is 'us'?" A girl answered, with non-verbal assent from the others, "Religion. We identify as Muslims."

Why are religion and its symbols such flashpoints with regard to German identity? Two religiously observant respondents, one Muslim and one Catholic, gave similar explanations. In Amaya's view,

Islam and Germany don't fit together. That is I believe primarily because ... many Germans are not religious. That always when one sees people that are somewhat ... spiritual, it doesn't always have to be a religion, who are close to something spiritual, that one can't explain with logic and with science and so on and that many people don't concern themselves with, maybe [they find it] suspicious and it therefore scares them. And because many Muslims lead visibly religious lives, I mean not just with the headscarf, but also fasting for Ramadan, or actually sticking to not drinking any alcohol, not eating pork, so actually living according to religious rules, I think for many that's too much spirituality.

Maria explained it this way:

People are not even Christian, they're nothing. They find – so I need to constantly justify myself for being a Christian. They say, you are intelligent, how can you believe such shit?

THAT's how we're confronted, and how should, how should the East Germans, who have no religion at all begin to deal with someone that prays five times a day? Yes, and keeps Ramadan and so on, that also wears it outwardly, that he lives his faith. They just learned during the DDR period to absolutely not wear faith on the outside ... I think that this is possibly another reason for Pegida, the fear of religion.

She added that she didn't need to explain the difference between "sky" and "heaven" to her Muslim coworker, "But I need to explain to an *Ossi* [slang for East German] what the difference between sky and heaven is, because it isn't existent. So. And that is something, where I would say, that could contribute to greater fears."

The headscarf issue raises the larger question of whether certain religious identities are stigmas incompatible with German groupness. In the SVR survey, among immigrants, 30% of Christians, 51.3% of Muslims, and 58.9% of Turkish Muslims said that people of their ancestry are excluded from German society (note that the SVR question was about exclusion from "society," not the "nation," which in Germany cannot be assumed synonymous). That a majority of Muslims answered this way is important, and not captured by the BIM study's questions. In the BIM survey, only 32.2% of MB respondents and 39% of non-MB said that it was necessary to reject the headscarf in order to be German. Clearly, the BIM survey authors were sensitive to the situation of native-born MB Germans, as they noted that migration background seems to have led these respondents to a "more open understanding of being German," reflected in that, of all those polled, they gave ancestry and accent the least importance for Germanness (Canan 2016, 42–3). The authors argue that this might be because these respondents have been both included, formally and legally, in the German nation, but also have experienced societal exclusion. This explanation suggests that the survey answers were not based on lived reality, but on beliefs of how things should be. The question's phrasing did not ask about generally governing social norms, but whether respondents "personally consider" these important for being German.

### *Phenotype and Ethnicity*

When I asked what makes immigrants recognizable, Sara responded, "I find the question across the board difficult, in itself, because I always ask myself, what ARE immigrants? I mean, I myself am a Black German, was born here in Germany, but I'll never be seen as German." As noted above, the issue of phenotype was flagged in the larger surveys' press release, but respondents were not asked about it directly.

Amaya used a word that was new to me and is in fact a neologism: "biodeutsch." "Bio" means organic; an apple in the grocery store would have that label. "Biodeutsch" describes a person who is not of migration-background – essentially an "organic" German. The term originated among MB Germans to poke fun at this notion, but has become more fraught lately, as it has been deployed in right-wing political advertising (Goldmann 2017). That such apparently biological elements factor into German identity became clear quickly. Sara told me "I was born here but nevertheless people speak English to me on the street. Constantly. Yes, well because the people can't imagine that I know German." A bit later, she said: "But to be German, well ... yes, I am also still not German. I probably never will BECOME German." She reported being regularly asked, "where do you COME from?" And then I say, 'from Bielefeld.' And then they say, 'But where do you REALLY come from?' One has to always explain how it is that one is here." Likewise, to contextualize and explain some of its findings, the BIM study uses an example from an earlier qualitative study where a native MB-German was repeatedly questioned about where they came from (Canan 2015, 165). Sara contrasted her experience with relatives in Britain, who "feel themselves British, they ARE British, no one asks them where they come, it's totally normal, so ... that is just a different understanding of belonging, that here just is still understood very ethnically, genetically."

Mustafa, whose father is Turkish, also reported experiencing this. When I asked him if one can become German, he responded:

That is a VERY interesting question, in that it touches on the absolute crux of German identity. That it ... doesn't exist. That is, it exists only at the individual, but not the collective. That is a very big problem in Germany – therefore one also can't become German because one doesn't know what that actually is supposed to mean. In principle, what German is can only be defined negatively. And this is somewhat harming this identity debate, because ... I had the feeling in the 1990s that certain political personnel had raised the hurdle extremely high: absolute faithfulness to the law, powerful in the German language, and still further criteria. And I listened to all that, and thought yes, it's true, I am, I am, I am, I am. Am I now German? I am a German citizen. But nevertheless I am discriminated against on the street. If this is still the case, then something is going wrong in Germany. In the USA, by the way, that never happened to me. It was very interesting to have a comparison, because in the USA I was considered a white European. No one discriminated against me.

He gave an example of this discrimination: he and his wife, a German Catholic with a high-status professional job (as he also has) wanted to rent an apartment in a fashionable, upscale Berlin neighborhood. They decided she should go first to meet the landlord, who was very pleased to rent to her. Arranging the lease required a second visit, and this time Mustafa went along. Upon meeting him, the landlord hesitated, and asked him if he had some kind of “background;” Mustafa replied that his father was from Turkey. Ultimately, the landlord decided to go ahead and rent them the apartment despite apparent misgivings.

In Germany, Mustafa explained, I am a “visible minority, simply due to my hair color and due to my name.” He further related, “I deliberately gave my son a Turkish name, because I said, due to his looks he'll be discriminated against anyway, so it's better that he already has this name, so that as a kid he can already deal with it.” Ultimately, he said, “In my case, I ALWAYS already feel myself to be German, I didn't need to think about it, for me it was always clear that one can be both German and Muslim, and what all else, left-handed, soccer player. But these overlapping identities, these ideas are very difficult to imagine in Germany. So, there is always a negative definition, a single identity that is ETHNICALLY defined.”

Anja told me about a friend who was born in Germany, and whose parents are from India, who is “perceived as non-German,” though she considers herself German, and that Anja's boyfriend also “looks non-German, I mean one hundred percent, you can tell that – most people actually think that he's Turkish or Arab, which is like half of his origin.” Anja went on to say both “are discriminated against because of their, the way they look, or their names, you know,” which she found upsetting. I asked Anja if a person conformed perfectly to German values and ways of life could become German, and Anja answered, “Well they still wouldn't *look* German. And there will always be people who, unless you're blonde and have blue eyes or green eyes, being you know the standard traits, they wouldn't accept you as being German.”

I was struck by how often informants mentioned blonde hair and/or blue eyes in the context of German identity. It wasn't that people considered this stereotype accurate; as Julian, who had dark hair and eyes but no MB told me, “I mean, Germans are not [all] blonde and blue-eyed and tall”; nevertheless

There's of course that people have this stereotype of Germany, which is blonde and etc., and as soon as you don't look like that, people from Eastern Europe say “you could be from Poland” ... Others say, people from France take me as French, Turkish, it doesn't matter. You know? So, I've a little bit more beard, usually, so everything is possible. I don't need a hat, a scarf – what is it called – a headscarf?

He told me that people often address him in English too. Ultimately, though, he said that if one speaks “clean German” identity is no longer an issue.

An informal conversation with a refrigerator repairman at my Berlin apartment corroborated what my respondents told me about non-ethnic-German names being an obstacle to being considered “German.” I gave him our landlord’s first name, and he said, “That’s not a German name! That’s a Jewish name!” I said, “He’s German.” He said, “No, no, that’s a Jewish name. Maybe Israeli.” I said, “Maybe his mother is American, but he’s German.” The repairman kept shaking his head.

A number of my non-MB respondents acknowledged this situation. Rüdiger said that especially in Saxony, people are unused to seeing a Black German, and recognized “the feeling that if someone is Black, they can’t be German” – though he thought this was not usually based on racial animus. Informants also noted that this understanding of identity was deeply problematic for admitting newcomers. As Krista said, “being German is still such a biological thing somehow, which one somehow is from birth or is not at all. And that is a huge mistake. That is an absolute mistake.” Magdalena suggested the need for a changed understanding, such that the “‘German’ is not fair-skinned and very classic as we still know it from Hitler, this whole Aryan [notion], but rather that the German has very many faces, that the German is Black, that the German also looks Asian and nevertheless is German ... this is just something I don’t see yet in Saxony.” Kevin called for an American-style constitutional patriotism, which is “precisely NOT the blood-and-soil-patriotism” that in Germany “sells itself as natural.” Ingrid similarly argued, “So we need to GET THERE, as in Great Britain or in America, not this BLOOD ideology, but rather that one can simply BECOME.”

## Conclusion

When I invited Berliners for interviews, several people who met my criteria for “native” Germans told me they were *not* native because one of their parents had been born outside of Germany, and I had to convince them that they fit my study. Coming from the United States, I had simply assumed my category’s relevance, but ran up against a sense from many that they did not belong to this group. This was not based on their self-identification – many in fact noted that they did feel German – but rather, social categorization excluded them.

This complication is illuminating, and points to the importance of using the everyday nationhood approach when studying cases where official definitions of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are shifting. In particular, it is vital to investigate the perspectives of the previously excluded or marginalized, to find out where and how the boundaries of membership are drawn in social practice. This is difficult to capture or appreciate as an outside researcher observing the situation, as what needs to be accessed is a sense of newly “included” people’s *lived experience* with regard to membership. Indeed, my MB respondents met the qualifications indicated by the surveys as by far most important for German membership: native language skills, citizenship (they volunteered this information), and among non-students, solid employment. Nevertheless, these respondents regularly reported that wearing the headscarf, their phenotype (dark skin and/or hair) and, in Mustafa’s case, his name, were stigmas excluding them from being considered German. Some non-MB respondents expressed initial surprise when I noted MB experiences of marginalization in follow-up questions, but many also either stated that they had seen this kind of exclusion happen to people they knew (and one clearly agreed that the headscarf *should* be a stigma), or acknowledged that notions like “Germans are blonde-and-blue-eyed” continued, for reasons they did not fully understand or support, to influence the German sense of groupness.

Such qualitative interviews can thus bring to light not only the evolving, sometimes conflicting ways that people with and without “migration background” define the category of “German,” but also how it is practiced and contested in everyday life through complex social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that may otherwise be overlooked. As my respondents reported, they may happen in one-on-one conversations with high school teachers or professors, in the way one is regarded in the

hallway or spoken to on the street, when apartment hunting, and more. They may also happen more publicly, such as at the local swimming pool. The latter points to the ways that certain marginalizing practices like banning full-body swimsuits from pools and teachers from wearing headscarves actually may be officially sanctioned; indeed, Mustafa, who has a law degree, said the housing discrimination his landlord considered is legal. It is also worth noting that some of my respondents pointed to social class and education as relevant to understanding group boundaries, but they were all educated in the top tier of the German school system (the *Gymnasium*), which prepares students for university study, and many had graduate degrees. With their high social standing, they could only speak to one side of that situation, viewing a stigma from the outside. That my study offers an incomplete view of the role class and education play emphasizes the necessity of hearing everyday perspectives from different segments of society to develop an accurate picture of the dynamics of membership and belonging.

Ultimately, my findings point to the need for further qualitative research with people living in Germany, as well as to the vital contribution of the everyday nationhood approach for exploring social practice in cases where membership is in flux. Inclusion and exclusion cannot be adequately assessed from legal standing or elite pronouncements as they are also, and most importantly, lived experiences.

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## Notes

- 1 The Fulbright Association supported this research and the Department of Diversity and Social Conflict at Humboldt University Berlin hosted it.
- 2 The term "migration background" is now contested, as some argue that it applies badly to people with no personal migration experience; "post-migration" is an often-employed alternative.

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