

# Multiculturalism in Germany: From Ideology to Pragmatism—and Back?

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Multiculturalism has become an important focus in debates in Germany over the last twenty years, especially in relation to issues of nationality. As Germany still does not define itself officially as an immigrant society, the presence of ethnic diversity presents a number of challenges. Populist and official definitions of citizenship and nationality have still not been extended to cultural minorities and immigrants. In this article, the recent debates and political changes during the Schröder Government (1998–2005) are explored. The article argues that many policies, especially at the local level, have sought to address cultural conflict through pragmatic, but limited, options. It is unclear, however, whether the overall discourse in Germany will turn from a universalist perspective to a 'politics of recognition' of cultural difference.

Keywords: Multiculturalism; Germany; Citizenship; Nationality

So far, neither of the terms 'multiculturalism' or 'ethnic diversity' have entered official political discourses in Germany. Until the 1990s, major debates in public were led by concepts of integration and coupled with immigration policy. Although Germany has been an important destination for immigrants in Europe for decades, the general attitude reflected in state policies until recently has been that Germany is not an 'immigration country' as compared to the United States, Canada or Australia. Since the early 1990s, certain shifts in this debate can be identified and 'multiculturalism' has become a highly controversial term. In intellectual arenas, the North American concept of 'communitarism' was taken as a symbolic field for debating principles derived from the perceived antagonism between ethnic diversity and universal democracy. In the political discourse, too, a similar controversy developed: on one side, Green politics used the term to promote a more cosmopolitan way of (urban) life, while on the other, conservative politics tried to uphold its political understanding of German nationality in contrast to a multicultural understanding of

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society. When the coalition of Social Democrats and the Green Party took over the federal government in 1998, the reform of some major key elements of German nationhood and immigration laws was high on their agenda.

This article presents an overview of the main steps in the debate concerning multiculturalism in Germany. After focusing on some key aspects of the particularities of the German situation regarding ethnic diversity, the intellectual debate on the North American style of integration will be presented as a background. The Green Party was the first to introduce this concept as part of their local engagement in the city of Frankfurt and, later on, in their participation in the Schröder Government. Finally, an evaluation of the recent developments following the reforms initiated by the Red-Green government will be offered, paying particular attention to the varying local policies concerning ethnic diversity.

## Ethnic Diversity in Germany

On a European scale, Germany has been particularly affected by significant levels of immigration. Since unification in 1989, Germany is, by far, the migrant destination country in Europe. Eurostat statistics indicate that nearly 10.5 million people have entered Germany between 1991 and 2000 (as against 3.4 million in Great Britain). In terms of those who have requested and obtained the status of political refugees and who were over a period of time resident in its territory, it appears that Germany has accommodated almost 3.5 million individuals (i.e., as much as the total population of the town of Berlin) during the last ten years.

Since the 1990s, Germany has experienced a cultural diversification of its immigrant population. While the Turkish community remains the largest immigrant group, immigrants from all parts of the world are increasingly present in contemporary German society. Immigration has taken more flexible forms and become culturally diversified. The economic restructuring of major parts of the German industrial landscape from the 1970s onwards was characterised by a rise in the machine-based activity of firms. Consequently, the need for an unqualified workforce declined, and, as such, the active recruitment of 'guest workers' stopped. Turkish male immigrants chose to stay and be reunited with their family by encouraging their wives and children to settle in the wealthier Germany economy. A significant number of Turks and Kurds constitute the prototype of a transnational community with economic, social, political and cultural anchorage in both Germany and Turkey (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003). This situation contributes to the simplified representation by some German media that has stigmatised this way of life as characteristic of a 'parallel company' in which migrant communities have withdrawn into a particular ethnic milieu, thus contributing to their own segregation. Although the effects of the development of these transnational communities on inter-ethnic integration are not known, this pessimistic representation is not accurate (Salentin, 2004).

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the most important change in ethnic diversity derives from the arrival of a group of people who are considered German, but understood to be ethnically different from the inhabitants of the Federal Republic. These so-called 'Aussiedler' represent the majority of immigrants in the last decade (approximately 2.3 million between 1990 and 2002). The Aussiedler were exiled from the East and Central European countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and claim to have ethnic links to Germans. Being granted German nationality, they profit from civic, political and social rights without having contributed to the social security system. The Aussiedler are, however, facing problems of integration (language, attachment to certain cultural values, schooling, etc.) due to the lack of socialisation in a modern economy and society (Bade & Oltmer, 1999).

Since the beginning of the 1980s, other types of migratory flows created new dynamics that are less controllable than the 'traditional' forms of migration. Indeed, the nationals of the European Union, who represent 25 percent of the annual immigrants to Germany, are able to circulate freely because they have a right to minimally regulated mobility. Foreign seasonal workers (from Ireland, Portugal, Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries) constitute another important migratory flow. Many of them are transitory or temporary immigrants who do not remain for long periods in Germany, but who return regularly. These migrants constitute an important low-cost workforce in many economic sectors. In the construction industry, these migratory dynamics generated xenophobic reactions against foreign employees during the 1990s. At the same time, the medical sector, for example, could not function adequately without these contractual workers. Taxi drivers, cleaning ladies, male prostitutes, newspaper distributors, kitchen helpers or agricultural assistants are all activities that are predominantly occupied by immigrants resident in Germany for short periods and who work in precarious circumstances. In Frankfurt, for example, it is estimated that there are 10,000 immigrants living illegally, and the size and presence of this population is taboo in public debates (Karpf, 1997).

#### **Immigration Politics Before 1998**

Until recently, the official discourse in Germany, expressed in juridical principles, has not recognised the existence of migrants and ethnic diversity in society (Meier-Braun, 2002). This attitude was especially reinforced in 1973 by the official recruitment ban on foreign guest workers when the slogan 'Germany is not an immigration country' described the political attitude, but not the social reality. In spite of the failure to manage immigration and thus to avoid hosting larger ethnic minorities, Germany set up a very explicit policy of integration. In comparison to other European states where integration from abroad comprises an important cultural dimension, German integration is specifically organised within the framework of the universalist welfare state. Political integration was always understood as the 'pinnacle' of social integration and not as an end in itself (Heckmann, 2004). Social integration within

the welfare state is particularly important in Germany because there is no traditional cultural and linguistic links with many of the immigrants, in particular with the Turks. In this respect, immigrants have generally spoken of having good access to the education system, the labour market and social assistance. Nevertheless, the share of ethnic minorities among the unemployed and welfare beneficiaries remains higher than the German average. The main reason for this inequality is the dissimilar starting point for entry to the labour market where the competencies of most immigrants offer only restricted career opportunities. All the same, this precariousness for ethnic minorities did not involve, until recently, significant residential segregation as observed in other European states.

The main reason for the official neglect in Germany and a de facto immigration policy lies in the often expressed assumption that any official recognition would do nothing but reinforce migratory dynamics. This doctrine identified as the 'policy of dissuasion' (Abschreckungspolitik) saw any acknowledgement of migrants as providing invitation. However, it has to be underlined that this policy is mostly accompanied by a larger debate on how to integrate foreigners. Over decades, the debate was more or less deadlocked by the antagonistic argument as to whether ethnic minorities should either 'assimilate' to the German life style or be 'integrated' as they were already part of the German society. Until the 1990s, the attitude was often dominated by party politics and moral references. In general, more conservative political actors tended towards more assimilative approaches, while progressive protagonists supported integrative positions.

The legislation on political asylum, in particular, got tougher during the 1990s. With constitutional changes (the euphemised 'asylum compromise'), it aimed at reducing the rate of immigration by excluding certain groups from having a general right to apply for political asylum. Churches and human rights organisations such as 'Pro Asyl' did not share the official view that these changes were positive. The number of applicants for asylum decreased once the constitutional restriction was in power. Presently, it remains unclear whether this decline in numbers is due to the new laws or to the changed circumstances of potential applicants, such as fewer political exiles (e.g., because of the end of the war in the Balkans).

## Reflecting on Citizenship

The definition of German nationality has hitherto remained a problem, particularly given the horrors of National Socialism and the block this presented politically. To include/understand this block, it is necessary to go back to the definition of German citizenship; it was defined from the time of Emperor William II by the principle of 'ius sanguinis', the 'right of blood' (as opposed to, for example, the 'right of the soil'—'ius soli'—in France). This mode of citizenship, thus, does not confer voting rights to immigrants and their descendents, even after several generations. In the same way, it does not admit that one can 'belong' to two different countries. In this logic, the possibility of having dual nationality is not conceivable. This is why Turkish

immigrants or their descendents, even with those of the third generation, have often not applied for a German passport in order to avoid the loss of their Turkish citizenship. While the 'right of blood' is a disadvantage to the Turkish community, on the other hand, this definition is favourable to those Aussiedler immigrants considered a cultural part of the national community.

The regaining of national sovereignty and German reunification in 1990 led to the return of the question of who could be called 'German'. Converting two societies into one state was seen by many observers as requiring the need to redebate principles of German nationality. With the constitution of the so-called new 'Berlin Republic', there have been difficulties in dealing with a concept of nationalism that historically has been problematic. Intellectual contributions to this debate have shifted focus from the essentialist and nationalist interrogation of the notion of German nationality to what might constitute the keystones of the West German democratic system. The 'return' to Berlin was thus underpinned with the intrinsic fear of reentering pre-Bonn forms of political culture.

As became obvious soon after German reunification, the definition of a German 'us' and a foreign 'they' was not merely of academic interest. In the early 1990s, racist attacks shook the very self-definition of German society as being tolerant. In 1993, the term 'multiculturalism' was introduced with the main reference point being the North American experiences of ethnic diversity. In particular, the Canadian example presented by influential translations of the work of Charles Taylor has been widely discussed. In a book entitled Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition, Jürgen Habermas answers Taylor's main arguments and thereby rejects the main points of a 'communitarist' view of ethnic diversity (Taylor, 1993). Nevertheless, Habermas (Habermas, 1994) articulates a perspective on society whereby the concept of nationality should no longer be linked to ethnicity, but based on a continuing process of civilisation. The cultural embedding of (West) German democracy is not designed to 'culturalise' besides or beyond the advanced welfare state of the postwar period. Instead, Habermas claims that the cultural processes that took place during the development of the West German welfare state, like the emancipatory movements of 1968 and the following years, have established forms of a culture of recognition within the universalist state. Habermas does not follow republican ideas of free individuals committed to a shared (ethnically homogeneous) notion of the state, but argues in favour of a more abstract notion of nationality that is linked to processes of negotiation, communication and a deliberative model of democracy in total (see Habermas, 1994). The position of Habermas regarding national identity and multiculturalism can be regarded as representing a widely shared perspective in German intellectual debate. Habermas has expressed his view in many articles for the broader public via the weekly journal Die Zeit. His point of view was then, more or less, central to a particular discussion on the concept of 'communitarism'.

Most prominent is the analysis offered by Axel Honneth, who has provided a particular approach to North American concepts with his publications (e.g., Honneth, 1993) and reframed the theoretical implications of the communitarist approach. Honneth's articles provide a particular view of the North American approach to 'integration' and 'difference' by claiming that communitarism (which is often identified as the North American approach to this issue) asks the right questions, but does not deliver an answer that is, at least, applicable within the German context. In this way, and compared to Habermas, Honneth and others leave the debate open in terms of the antagonism between universalist equality and cultural difference. In the light of research on the moral basis that binds society together, Honneth stresses the necessity to develop communality within society without building up barriers to modernity, and to set free processes of individualisation and societal differentiation (Honneth, 1993).

#### Frankfurt as a Test City

Frankfurt and the surrounding region are highly connected to international economic networks, which has also made this metropolis a multicultural city and the percentage of immigrant population is the highest in Germany. Since the Middle Ages, the presence of 'strangers' was always an important component of the local economy, and their emergence had created a local mode of citizenry based on liberal principles of individual freedom and a general cosmopolitanism. During the 1960s, the integration of immigrants and their social circumstances, especially regarding housing, were problematic. The city was then governed by the Social Democrats (SPD) who promoted the modernisation of the inner city, which in turn evoked the protest of social movements against land price speculation and the forced expulsion of the established dwellers. These protest movements later gave birth to a political party. The 'Häuserkampf', the movement of radical protesters, gathered many activists who formed the Green Party; Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Joschka Fischer, the later Foreign Minister, are their most prominent ex-members. The precariousness of the poorly housed guest workers was noticed by the protesters and this issue was an important part of their concerns.

The ecologists were the first to approach the topic of integration and the political participation of ethnic minorities in the local authority. When, at the beginning of the 1990s, certain cities located in East Germany were confronted with racist attacks, the Greens of Frankfurt, in order to prevent further attacks, sought the support of the other political parties to establish a progressive form of multiculturalism (Winter, 2000). It was the intention of the Greens, during their short period in a coalition with the SPD, to make the city a laboratory for their alternative policies and as a springboard to federal power by the end of 1990.

Frankfurt's policy of integration was doubly innovative. Initially, the Greens made the choice to institutionalise multiculturalism at the top of the administrative pyramid by creating an official department specialising in multicultural issues and acting horizontally throughout the entire local administration. Additionally, they established the introduction of a city councillor 'responsive for the questions of integration'. The post was given to D. Cohn-Bendit, who positioned himself 'as

embodying the 'multicultural consciousness of the Greens' with his book Heimat Babylon (Babylon as Home) (Cohn-Bendit & Schmid, 1993). In essence, Cohn-Bendit and the Green approach to multiculturalism can be summarised as putting the emphasis on the 'integration of foreigners' and on the belief in institutionalised forms of promoting ethnic diversity policies.

In Frankfurt, the establishment of the Office of the Multicultural Affairs (AMKA) has been an innovation generated by this Green approach to multiculturalism. The AMKA offers different services with the objective of making integration a principal aspect of municipal administration. The difference, as compared to a traditional administrative service for foreigners, lies in the fact that the AMKA is not a department of another unit in the administration having limited sectoral competence. Instead, it aims at modifying the practices of other units in order to realise a multicultural society. Some 15 years after its creation, the AMKA has found broad support in all parts of the city. Even when the majority in the municipal chamber changed and the Conservative Party (CDU) gained the lead, the newly elected Christian Democratic executive officer emphatically took over the responsibility of the AMKA. While supporting its mission in general, a slight reorientation was initiated (Stadt Frankfurt, 2003).

In contrast to the emphasis put on social aspects of other local integration policies, political participation is the keystone of multicultural policy in Frankfurt. This participation is primarily realised by 'mediation' activities between the municipality and ethnic communities. Interventions of the AMKA are directed towards public spaces where associations and projects of different ethnic groups and social backgrounds can negotiate common issues. The AMKA approach to multiculturalism is mainly based on communication policies. The 'mediation' attitude of the AMKA has been especially reinforced after the September 11 attacks. Fearing the stigmatisation of the Turkish and Muslim communities, the AMKA launched a programme entitled 'the religions of the world hosted in Frankfurt' in which 132 religious organisations of immigrants took part. The purpose of the programme was the promotion of the cultural needs of these communities and the support for activities to bring culturally diverse groups closer to each other. The prevention of intercultural conflict has become a central aspect in the Frankfurt approach to multiculturalism. With this intention, 25 mediators were employed in sensitive districts of the city.

The results of Frankfurt's multicultural policy are obvious to many observers, especially to the enthusiastic supporters of the Green Party. Contrary to other German cities, Frankfurt has not seen any racist demonstrations as yet and extreme right-wing groups have not succeeded in establishing themselves as a local party. These positive results of the Frankfurt example have motivated major actors in the Green Party to promote 'multiculturalism' on a national scale; they regard the city as a model to imitate elsewhere. However, some critics point to the fact that the AMKA puts too much stress on communication and mediation, and the other difficulties faced by ethnic minorities, such as the problems of access to the labour market and socio-spatial segregation, are not addressed (Hennig, 1997).

## Multiculturalism as Pragmatism

With the installation of the 'red-green' coalition between the Social Democrats and the ecologists in 1998, the reform of integration policies has been put on the political agenda at the federal level. While local policies in cities such as Frankfurt have developed a progressive multicultural policy that acknowledges the fact of ethnic diversity, the main factors influencing German attitudes are predominantly the product of national frameworks. The introduction of a concept of 'double nationality' was launched as a law proposal shortly after the takeover of federal responsibilities. With this juridical initiative, it was intended to introduce a general shift in integration policies towards a multicultural approach that redefines the basis of German nationality. Political and civil equality have been regarded as a starting point for the broader societal integration of immigrant groups.

It appears that the first attempt to end the *ius sanguinis* principle is not acceptable to major parts of the German population. For example, the election in the state of Hesse was lost by the red-green parties in 1999 due to the campaign of a conservative candidate against the reform of German citizenship. The loss of Hesse has been especially traumatic for the protagonists of reform because this state has been a stronghold for red-green coalitions since the beginning of the 1990s. Cities like Kassel or Frankfurt had been long regarded as pioneer municipalities for multicultural approaches.

As a consequence, the red-green politicians decided not to push through reforms in the field of immigration politics against the resistance of the conservative parties. This led to a process of negotiation that took no less than six years. The compromise reached between all parties was only achieved in 2005. As a result of the consensus, the judicial outcome has neither been a way of avoiding further immigration to Germany, as seen by the conservatives, nor has it provided a package of immigration laws as the essential basis for a multicultural society, as regarded by the government protagonists. In fact, the highly detailed new legislation expresses the antagonistic intentions held by both sides of the conflict. Summing up, the 2005 legislation consists of both more restrictive and more liberal aspects concerning the integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants. This way, the administration responsible for the realisation of the legislative intentions is confronted with the challenge of making sense of these contradictory regulations. In May 2005, the leader of the Green fraction in the federal parliament, Claudia Roth, expressed deep disappointment at the administrative practice to prefer the more restrictive aspects of the law. She bitterly remarked: 'For many foreigners concerned, the laws have worsened their living conditions' (Frankfurter Rundschau, 16 May 2005).

Nevertheless, the consequences of the pragmatic approach to multiculturalism cannot be evaluated yet. The relationship between immigration and integration is the most important aspect of the law. For the first time in German history, the immigrants' right to integration is recognised (via language courses and courses for familiarisation with the political and legal aspects of Germany, German civilisation

and history). In certain cases, participation in these courses is considered an obligation and can be enforced with penalties. This approach to integration is the responsibility of the municipalities, which are financially supported by federal subsidies. Even if this law on nationality has been limited in its intent, the 2005 laws can be regarded as expressing a different view on the reality of immigration to Germany. To a certain extent, the naturalisation of immigrants (especially Turkish) has become easier.

In paying particular attention to the sensitivity of the general public, the reform of the law on immigration addresses an important need in society to discuss the general approach to issues of German citizenship and culture. A major contribution to limit the influence of ideological constructs of 'us' and 'them' has been achieved by the installation of two independent commissions. On the basis of expertise, the commission led by the former president of the parliament, Rita Süssmuth (CDU), has worked out detailed proposals to 'give form' to the impact of immigration and to address the wider interests of German society against the background of demographic changes, economic globalisation and social cohesion (Bundesministerium des Innern, 2001).

### Returning to Ideology?

The debates on multicultural society have been influenced by the appearance of terrorism from 2001. Restrictions on the laws proposed by the red-green government linked immigration issues to anti-terrorist initiatives. It is not yet clear in terms of to what extent and in which way the activities undertaken against the spread of Islamic terrorism influence the life world of ethnic minorities. Stronger controls and explicit regulations have so far only been used to address the activities of the so-called 'hate preachers' who can more easily be prosecuted and expelled. According to the reports of the Minister of Internal Affairs and the secret services, terrorism from Islamic extremists has been identified as the most important threat to the German state. It remains an open question as to whether this directly restricts the political and social rights of ethnic minorities. Unlike France, Great Britain or the Netherlands, attacks and riots against Islamic groups have not occurred in Germany, although the public discourse is still opposed to a more liberal attitude towards multiculturalism.

The obstacles to broader acceptance of the term and the implications of multiculturalism derive from other contemporary developments in Germany. A key factor remains the attitude of the conservative part of the population on how to deal with the question of German nationality and the construction of otherness. Although the conservative approach in stressing the necessity for restricted immigration and the obligation of ethnic minorities to adapt to German culture continues, the modernisation of the CDU has led to a fragmentation of positions. While prominent actors like the long-term Secretary General, Lorenz Mayer, the Bavarian Prime Minister Edmund Stoiber and the prominent 'conservative neoliberal' Friedrich Merz have pleaded on many occasions for a 'German Leitkultur' ('guiding culture') that ' gives guidance to immigrant groups, other protagonists of the CDU follow a more pragmatic approach. Conservatives of the metropolitan areas in the Rhine-Ruhr, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Saarland have developed a double speak, paying lip service to conservative ideologies of German nationality, while at the same time supporting policies at the local and regional level to solve, or at least handle, problems of a society already characterised by cultural diversity.

This modernisation process of the CDU is reinforced by two important societal developments. First of all, the concept of German nationality is seen by young professionals as being backward in an economy that is integrated into global networks. The federal elections in 2002 were lost because the voters in the big cities could not make any sense of the concepts offered by the CDU in multicultural urban settings. The globalisation of the economy has also led to a pro-active attitude among German industry with regard to the integration of ethnic minorities. It is no coincidence that most globalised cities like Frankfurt and Stuttgart explicitly link their multicultural policies to the requirements of a transformed international economy.

The example of Hamburg, however, shows that in certain German cities, populist tendencies including open racism still prevent progressive multicultural policies. Hamburg represents, to some extent, the 'tip of the iceberg', but dynamic and xenophobic tendencies also exist in other German cities, especially in the former East Germany. An example is the list 'For Cologne' led by well-known néo-Nazis in the local elections in 2004, which gained the support of 5 per cent of the voters, while the city is generally considered to be cosmopolitan and tolerant.

#### Conclusion

In this article, the concept of 'multiculturalism' in recent debates in German society has been explored. German society is more than ever confronted with how to define 'nationality'. This has become evident in the light of German reunification when 16 million 'other' Germans entered the advanced West German democracy, but it becomes even more obvious with regard to the varying attitudes towards 'ethnic diversity'. No longer does the concept and notion of 'guest worker' cover the social reality that is implicit in these words. On the contrary, the development of a pragmatic approach to multiculturalism becomes a major issue given many societal challenges, including demographic changes and globalisation. Political modernisation lags behind with regard to the implications of these processes on wider society. The example of Frankfurt shows that a policy of local integration can, to a certain extent, contribute to the realisation of policies that can transform the local political culture and attributes towards ethnic diversity. However, in spite of the establishment of advisory councils and the creation of committees of experts and other forums, which can be seen as characteristic of a phase of transition, German society as a whole is far from those North American examples based on 'communitarist' citizenship, even if German democracy today is more 'sensitive to difference than at all other times of its

history' (Habermas, 1996, p. 172). Multicultural integration is regarded as being most efficiently guaranteed through the development of widespread political and intellectual consensus in Germany, by social measures specific to the welfare state and a political framing in a parliamentary democracy with limited forms of direct participation.

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