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Islam as a civil religion. Political culture and the
organization of diversity in Germany.¹

INTRODUCTION

In the various political cultures of Europe, a range of different models has been developed for the organization of diversity. These models reflect the specific shape of the respective civil societies - and in particular the solutions they developed for the problem of solidarity. It might be helpful to sketch briefly the French and the British solution in order to gain a contrast foil which allows for a better understanding of the specificity of the German model².

In French political culture emphasis is laid on individual integration. This is related to the notion that social solidarity is based on equality (of chances), centrality and rationality. Ethnic and religious ties (which are per se inegalitarian) should therefore play no role whatsoever in public exchange - they are in a very strict sense private matters. The principle of the general, of the nation, was built precisely as an opposite to all cultural particularisms. The nation is, so to speak, a framework for the individual's emancipation (Dumont 1991:142) ³. It is only logical that a policy of equal treatment and punishment of all discrimination was adopted (Costa Lascoux 1991:285) which means that very strict anti discrimination laws were passed whereas the recognition of group rights was carefully avoided. All this might explain the nervousness with which the French public reacts to demands of Islamicist groups that the wearing of the headscarf should be permitted in schools - after all the

places where the basis of equality is laid.

In Great Britain a very different solution to the organization of difference was found: Emphasis is laid on processes of collective bargaining and on collective integration. It is less the state but rather society which develops the mechanisms on which solidarity is founded, namely civil ethics like mutual respect and fairness. This corresponds to a general scepticism about systematic and centralized solutions which could only be guaranteed by a strong state. Rather pragmatically found solutions which take account of the specific circumstances in each case are favoured. This however implies a greater acceptance of inequality and difference on the national level than in France. The debate on the Rushdie affair (before the passing of Chomeyni's fetva) is telling: The Muslims felt unfairly treated by the British newsmedia - and the British newsmedia again expressed the opinion that burning books was a severe violation of the basic principles of civil debate.

Let us now approach the German case by reflecting on a case study - the project to develop an Islamic curriculum. This is a story which as I feel is good for thinking about the German version of organizing diversity. Not that it is typical (what after all is typical?) but it was developed in the context of a particular political culture and therefore bears its stamp.

THE PROJECT

In 1978, three Islamic Turkish groups submitted a petition to the Ministry of Culture, Education and Church Affairs in North Rhine Westfalia demanding the establishment of Islamic religious education in schools. The Ministry's response was a

positive one and it appointed an assistant of the then newly-founded *Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung* to devise a primary school curriculum. Klaus Gebauer, an agnostic with a Jesuit/Catholic family background, set up a commission whose members initially consisted of interested Turkish teachers (picked on the basis of their teaching qualifications), an Islamic theologian, an academic specializing in Islam, and Protestant and Catholic religious education teachers. Later on, additional Islamic theologians were co-opted. Over the last few years, this body has devised a curriculum for the first eight school years and developed a series of school textbooks. The curriculum and the textbooks were presented to various Islamic institutions for assessment: the Divinity Faculty of the Al Azhar University, the Divinity Faculty of the University of Istanbul, and various Islamic Turkish organizations in the Federal Republic of Germany. The remarks of the universities and ministries were by and large positive. The assessments from the Islamic organisations were of a more critical nature. There are good chances that the curriculum and the schoolbooks are going to be introduced in the other *Bundesländer* as well.

INTEGRATION AND CONTROL

The unusual plan by the state to develop a curriculum for a religious minority was at first justified by a structural problem. In contrast to the Christian churches, the Islamic religion is not organized along corporate lines and so does not speak with one voice. As far as the Islamic Turkish groups were concerned, this means that at the time of these considerations there were five sizable Islamic organizations vying with one another. Three Islamic communities, Milli Görüş, the Nurcu and the Süleymançılı, had approached the Ministry of Culture, Education and Church Affairs and they had

forged an action coalition for that very purpose. Apart from the fact that these three groups acted on behalf of only a part of the Turkish Muslims, it became apparent during the second meeting that the alliance began to show crumble when it came round to spelling out actual objectives. "It all started with a meeting which Gebauer had arranged for anybody who was interested. All Hell was let loose... The Ministry could only say, 'Everybody out, we'll do it ourselves', and after this he got a group together." (Zimmermann)

Here we should note that the Ministry's reaction as shown above can primarily be read as a social-democratic profession to integration. The internal divisions in Islam were used by the other Länder as an excuse to do absolutely nothing. Politically, the project is supported by liberals and others on the left.

The Ministry could now have taken the easier route by contacting the Office for Religious Matters in Turkey as a possible partner. Officially, the Office represents a 'modern', laical Islam. A complex mixture of partly heterogeneous factors seems to have played a role in the Ministry's decision not to commission the Office with the curriculum development, but rather to take the matter into its own hands. On the one hand, there was a conspicuous lack of information on the part of the Ministry - Klaus Gebauer maintains that they did not know what they were letting themselves in for. On the other hand, Klaus Gebauer, an ambitious young man who saw the opportunity of his life in the project, had been commissioned with it and did evidently all he could to prevent it being taken out of his hands.

Perhaps more important in this decision was the need for control. There was a general feeling that the schools should be opened for Islamic religious education, but also that

certain limits ought to be imposed. More exactly, there was concern that if responsibility were delegated, it would mean giving carte blanche to an unmanageable, non-democratic, political influence.

Behind this need for control there was a twofold estimation of the importance of religion. It is considered both dangerous and necessary. On the one hand, people can be manipulated with the aid of religion. According to Gebauer, religion is in principle a dangerous weapon, and that is equally true of Christianity as of Islam. At the same time, however, it is also necessary. Although he considers "every kind of monotheism" to be misanthropical because of its claim to absolute truth, it is a fallacy to believe that religion could be abolished because, "by and large people construct meaning for themselves by means of religion." Gebauer maintains that from a sociological point of view, the function of religion is simply to reduce people's fear when confronted with the infinite complexity of reality by drawing simple conclusions. Religion is a fact which has to be lived with and the best made out of it, "it should be civilized, not abolished." For this reason, Gebauer finds the French solution, excluding religion from the state domain in the name of laicism, problematic. As religion quite obviously fulfils a basic need, this only leads to leaving a clear field to Islamic groups. He poses the question if it is wise that

"fundamentalist groups can band together in the suburbs of Paris and the French police then has to move in to clamp down on them...Wouldn't it be better to give them their own religious space, something which would also be supported by society at large."

Gebauer believes that the French solution merely leads to the development of ghettos and at the end of the day to a

situation whereby fundamentalism and a discourse of exclusion merely serve to boost each other, strengthen each other and eventually lead to the development of conflicts. In contrast, he sees his project as a way of working towards an open society, an attempt to reduce the force of the dynamics of "resentment, alienation, exclusion, self-exclusion".

While the French solution strikes one as being problematic because it imprudently overlooks the persistence of religion, the British solution, which grants considerable influence to local groups in the development of Islamic religious education, also appears problematic because it fails to take account of the danger of religion.

This line of reasoning makes clear the political culture's suspicion, if not fear, in relation to the problem of solidarity. The German solution to the problem of religious diversity lacks the faith of the British solution in a culture of religious tolerance arising from the interaction of different religious groups, a kind of fair play in their dealings with one another, and therefore a common ground that allows for solidarity. But does not the Rushdie affair show the limits of this model? The German solution also lacks the faith of the French Republican solution that the clear creation of a secular sphere in which every citizen can participate, regardless of origins, culture or creed, can create solidarity. But with the banishment of particularities into the private sphere, it becomes more difficult to maintain a check on them.³

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE GENERAL

Be that as it may, the wish to control religion cannot fully explain the Ministry's project. It would of course have been possible to retain an element of control if the project had been entrusted to the Office for Religious Matters or to German Muslims. Indeed, a positive motive seems to have been decisive. One of the main aims of the project was to secure the influencing power of religion for the integration process. In brief, the project wanted to make a civil religion out of Islam.

The solution to the problem of solidarity which is generally seen in German society can be reduced to Schiller's formula of the individual and the general⁶. Unprompted solidarity is possible when the individual and the particular are just as fully realized in the general and vice versa. That is, when the general and the individual are not related mechanically to one another, but dialectically. With reference to the project, this means that in and through the observance of their particularity (i.e. Islam) the Muslim children can be integrated into the general (namely the civil society of the Federal Republic of Germany). Unprompted solidarity is only then possible when the particular is not uncoupled from the rest. Admittedly, this presumes that the general is also contained in the particular and, furthermore, that the particular, Islam in this case, is depicted in such a way that the general can be perceived. This notion is now expressly taken as a central plank of the project. It is a matter of showing "that Article 1 of the Constitution ('the dignity of man shall be inviolable') can be corroborated fully by Islam" (Gebauer). As the mutual respect of human dignity is an essential condition for the establishment of a humane multiracial society religious education serves also the common good.

Two aspects are thus won for the question of solidarity. An

education which presents an Islam interpreted in this fashion will help bring about a situation in which the children will appropriate the basic values upon which the society of the Federal Republic of Germany is based. Or, in Gebauer's words, "a kind of moral cement is turned out, a kind of unspoken and unquestioned common consent about the rules of living together. I say cement because if there is not a minimal level of agreement within a society then it will fall apart, there can be no security in it".

In Gebauer's opinion, the integration of Muslim children into German society is assisted in yet another way by the project. The reference to the compatibility of Islam and the Constitution is a potent argument against those who base a discourse of exclusion on the irreconcilability of 'basic Christian values' and Islam.

" If I can thoroughly prove Article 1 of the Constitution from the Koran, then I have created a great deal of acceptance for Muslims here...If I can demonstrate that in terms of the actual words used the attitude of Islam towards women is in no way different to that of Christianity, and if at the same time I can show that Islam is a tolerant religion, more tolerant than Christianity towards transgressions, then what I have said is that they understand Article 1 better than the Christians who formulated it." (Gebauer)

The reproach of a paternalistic take-over in the best intentions suggests itself here. The project workers counter this argument with a reference to the division of duties. The task of state religious education is not the imparting of religious faith, this is best taken care of by Koran school, confirmation and communion classes, but rather the creation of solidarity. In turn, such a division of tasks gives Gebauer the freedom to interpret.

"The Koran does not get worse in any way because of all my interpreting...And no Muslim will believe such interpretations if they do not appear evident to him. In this respect I'm doing the Muslims no harm, but rather compelling my own society to give up it's foolish arguments against Islam."

If we use the terminology developed by Mary Douglas and her adherents (Douglas: 1970,1978, Thompson/Ellis/Wildavski:1990), then the German solution to the organization of diversity corresponds to that of a hierarchist (while the English solution would be that of an egalitarian, and the French one that of the an individualist). The end in view is the "integration" of the Muslim minority and that means first of all giving it a place in school. Diversity is taken account of, but it is incorporated into an overall scheme; particularities are acceptable, in the public domain as well, but they must not lead to the separation of the various fractions; the attention of the political culture is directed towards the structure and forms of delimitations, these may and should exist, but should not harden and ossify. Concern in this culture is less directed towards the suppression of the diversity of voices than a well-regulated togetherness.⁷ The main anxiety in this culture is the creation of enclaves and ghettos which become separate. On the other hand, a hierarchical solution to the problem of diversity implies an even greater pressure to assimilate than an individualistic or egalitarian one. In France, the differences can thrive more freely because they are not tied into the public sphere; in England they can contribute more to the general because it takes place within the context of a political structure which places more emphasis on pragmatic, ad hoc solutions rather than systematic regulations.

HIERARCHY AND THE EXPERTS

It would be an oversimplification if the impression were to arise that the project was simply an ingenious attempt at assimilation into German society. In fact, integration into German society as it really exists is not so important to the initiators of the project, rather more integration into a civil society still to be developed in Germany. They see their undertaking as a contribution to the development of a heterogeneous culture.

Nevertheless, it is symptomatic of the hierarchical political culture of the Federal Republic that Civil Servants/experts took responsibility for the task. This is consistent with a deep-seated belief in German political culture that the common good is most effectively served by those who are best informed in a discourse free of domination (Schiffauer 1993:196). It is deemed necessary that these best informed people are taken away from what is often termed "the pressure of the street". An important condition of this is that they are made financially independent and enjoy the status of irremovability - and they can therefore in principle be neutral. In brief, it is the Civil Servants/experts drawing a salary from the state who can be most trusted with finding out what is best for everybody.

The confidence of the expert that he stands above matters is expressed unabashed. The project workers claim that they are best able to interpret religion in such a way that it is in accordance with the common good. Their neutrality allows them to take up the stance of a religion researcher or an ethnologist who does not share the beliefs of those he is investigating, but who can explain and deduct and who is moreover in a position to grasp the rational part of the religion in question. Such a method rules out running round the world preaching that there is no God. "In so doing, I would only create more insecurity, if I had any effect

whatsoever. Anyhow, this would only achieve the opposite of what I want to reach, namely a sensible, rationally functioning democratic society."

In reality, it is easy to believe that Klaus Gebauer does his utmost to establish a sympathetic understanding - indeed, the spirit of the project is marked by the serious attempt to do justice to Islam. However, paradoxical situations arise time after time. Klaus Gebauer has enough distance to see the irony when he as a German liberal imagines how as a Muslim father he would treat his daughter.

"sometimes I feel rather odd when I write texts and commentaries for educational purposes. I often notice that I act as if I were a Muslim. I almost certainly still make mistakes, but from my own feeling and awareness I have learned in the meantime to feel like a hodja."

The feeling of superiority at least to religious traditionalists comes from itself:

"I believe that my interpretations are just as valuable as Mr Kaplan's... since mine foster Islam in Germany more than Mr Kaplan's I believe mine to be in accordance with Islam because Islam calls on the faithful to further the cause of Islam." (20).

The obligation of the middle-man to stand over groups in society becomes most apparent when the project workers speak about German institutions which, in their opinion, are opposed to their vision of a civil society. It expresses itself in the pride, for example, in which it is reported how the churches, who initially gave notice of their hostility to the project, were misled by the fact that the Islamic lessons were not classified as religious classes but as lessons in the native

language. This is also manifest when, in the higher interest of the establishment of an open multicultural society, Klaus Gebauer attempts to show that Islam is even in compliance with the Basic Law when it is in actual fact not in his opinion - for example in it's treatment of those religions not in possession of holy writings ("in this respect I am not loyal towards German society when I interpret to such an extent.")

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

The mediation between the general and the particular is made by means of education (Schiffauer 1993, Norman 1991:19ff). By attending classes in Islamic religious education, the children internalize the basic values of the Federal Republic. Furthermore, they are brought up to be citizens in a position to act responsibly, that is in accordance with the common good. This notion determines not only the context of the mediation but also it's methods. The way this knowledge is imparted has even greater consequences for the teaching and dogma of religion than it's interpretation along the lines of the Basic Law which, even if it is occasionally far-fetched, only refers to single parts.

The aim of the lessons, which at the same time determines their inner structure, is as follows. Firstly, to provide the children with an Islamic identity ('formation of identity by use of tradition'). Secondly, to enable the children to apply their knowledge of Islam to their situation in the Federal Republic and thirdly, to acquire the ability to enter into a dialogue with Christians in Germany, in other words the ability to present their own beliefs and defend them - "to know enough about their own religion so that they don't portray themselves as a minority of little worth". The aim is therefore to achieve a fusion of religious knowledge and everyday life. The aim is, explains Fredi Zimmermann, "to give

the children the opportunity to decide for themselves, to find their own way. Not to say: 'Now you must do this', but to open everything to the child and show him what is possible and the children can say for themselves when they grow up - and that's why I want that..."(Zimmermann)

In other words, it is not only a question of knowledge, but also the of ability to apply it to the special situation in the Federal Republic and to defend it discursively.

In practical terms, this is translated into action by the development of a pupil-centred education. The fundamental educational consideration is to 'pick up' the children where they already are. "It is not a question of trying to put something into the children's heads, you can't put anything in anyway, you have to bring it out of them. But what is in doesn't come out and something happens in this process which I can gauge because I am there at the time." It is generally presumed that experiences in early childhood are stored in the form of pictures. "If you want to recall the child's basic experiences, early socialization in childhood, then you have to show the typical experience pictorially." This was the background to the development of picture-based lessons. The children are shown pictures and they then begin to interpret them. The teacher picks up on the children's interpretations, draws general conclusions from them and then associates them with one another. The picture sequence 'Cleanliness is part of faith' serves as an example (see illustrations).⁹ In the pictures, connections are made to situations which the children already know (Landesinstitut: 76) : personal hygiene, cleaning teeth, washing clothes, ritual cleansing, the park etc. The children's interpretations can then be taken up and related to surahs in the Koran (surahs 4, 43,5,6 on ritual purity and surahs 74,4 and 5 on cleanliness are quoted.) By means of these pictures, a connection to the situation in

Germany is made (and incidentally, socially responsible actions, in the form of ecological values, are imparted.) Finally, the children should be put in the position of being able to speak for their religion - in other words to be able to stand up to offensive expressions of racism which characterize Muslims as dirty. In the concept of the lesson unit it states:

"This series of lessons is concerned with preparing the pupils for the Islamic understanding of cleanliness in everyday life and ritual purity by means of concrete questions and problems of cleanliness. They should be made aware that everyday cleanliness and purity are obligations which through their footing in the Islamic tradition represent more than just hygienic or esthetic demands. It should be made clear to the pupils that the keeping clean of the body is necessary to the maintenance of good health and that in this way they can and should act for their own good. They should learn that cleanliness is a command of Allah" (Landesinstitut: 77)

In actual fact, through the way of teaching this subject matter a certain reading of Islam is taught. Inasmuch as society is presumed, it is set as something of primary importance. The question to religion is then as expected: what can we learn from religion to deal with the contemporary situation in society? Thereby almost automatically a historical way of reading will be adopted. The question is posed: What kind of position did Muhammed take up in another social situation and how can this position be applied to today's society.¹⁰ Simultaneously, a discursive, argumentative handling of religious tradition is trained. A model for this explanation in relation to the emotive subject 'position of women' looks something like this : Islam took up a progressive position in relation to women during Muhammed's time and should therefore today take up a progressive position. When this historical way of reading is employed, "you can make out

of Islam a very peaceful, very morally stable frame of mind which is even more humane than the Christian and Jewish religions, because strictly speaking it doesn't punish people for transgressions. What it says is this - mankind is basically good. Of course, it sometimes has problems staying good and that is why it has to be guided" (Gebauer). Accordingly, the main opponent is a scriptural reading of the holy texts. "What I'm saying is that I cannot accept a law which people claim comes from God. In doing so, they close the door to the possibility of getting to know the origins of this law."

The way in which it is taught is not only practised in relation to Islam - a similar position is practised towards the Christian churches. The state defines the teaching method, and by defining the 'how' of religious learning it has an effect on the spirit of the religion : "We forced a Bible-orientated method on the Catholic Church. They didn't want it. So the Catholic curriculum for secondary schools was developed in 1985 under my guidance. The Protestant curriculum was ready two years beforehand and consisted mainly of us saying - on the one hand, this basic experience, on the other, the Biblical tradition and the story of it's effect. So then we selected certain Biblical quotations for certain situations in life and said : this has to be connected. Because of the duty of religious education to be a school subject, we can't allow that basic elements for the decision are not made public." (Gebauer)

Since in all of these cases the medium is the message¹¹, a practical syncretism¹² arises from this. In fact, the question of religious confession is reduced to a Protestant, Catholic or Islamic colouring of a civil religion whose most important content should be humanism, tolerance and the assumption of responsibility in society.

CONCLUSION

What now is the German vision of the organization of diversity which emerges from this case study? In a way one might say that in Germany the catchword is taken more literal than in France or in Britain: More diversity is admitted in the public sphere than in France and more organization is considered to be necessary than in Britain. On the one hand there is the strong idea that a group which is part of German society should have a right to be represented in the public - the idea being that a stable identification with the society as a whole is only possible if the particular (in this case the religion) is a recognized part of the whole. This, by the way is one of the reasons of the very hesitant attitude of the German public to admit new groups - integration into German society takes usually one to two generations longer than in other European Cultures. On the other hand there is an emphasis that this process should take place more systematically (and therefore more centralized) than in Britain in order to avoid too much heterogeneity and therefore inequality. There is a strong concern about the controllability of the process of integration - the central fear being the development of ghettos (i.e. environments that by definition escape control). In fact German politics have been quite successful in this aspect (and the critique of the French and the British solution refer to the fact that both, albeit for inverse reasons, lead to the establishment of

ghettos). The price for this on the other hand is a tendency to patriarchal solutions and correspondingly a higher expectation of conformity demanded in Germany than in the other two political cultures.

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The didactical unit "Sauberkeit gehört zum Glauben" (Cleanliness is part of faith), in: *Dinimizi Öğreniyoruz* p.30-37. The headings in English: 1) God loves the clean ones; 2) Ayşe is a clean child; 3) Our clothes also must be clean; 4) Without *abdest* one cannot pray the *namaz*; 5) Let us not pollute our environment

1. This article is primarily based on interviews with Klaus Gebauer the spiritus rector of the project described in this article and with Ferdi Zimmermann, who is in charge of the training of teachers in the context of this project. I would like to thank them for their kindness and willingness to help.

2. The French and the British models have been frequently compared. See among others: Kepel (1993), Neveu (1993); Nielsen (1992), Schiffauer (1993), Melotti in this volume. Still recommendable: Troeltsch (1925)

3. The institution which, in my opinion expresses this idea most clearly is the omnipresent *concours* (competitions and selection tests): It is an absolutely rational, universal and egalitarian procedure for the distribution of social positions.

4. Due to it's very nature, the Office is in fact a conflict field between the various Islamic fractions in Turkey.

5. The German fears can probably only be explained in terms of the history of mentalities. Namely from the development of the German idea of state as an answer to the religious wars. It was in fact an historical experience, namely the inability of any of the religious groups to create solidarity on the basis of absolute truths, which found it's echo in the German idea of state and found it's way into the architecture of the state. "I said to myself that if I can prevent one single bloody, religion-based conflict in Germany, then I will die a happy man." (18)

6. Schiffauer (1993:195). Schiller formulates this concept in his: "Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen" (1966:193-286). See also: Dumont 1991:128-159.

7. In order to prevent misunderstanding, it should be pointed out that this type of organization of diversity seems to me to be characteristic of German political culture in general. The same conviction of an ordered plurality underlies German

federalism. The right wing position would doubtless object that the integration of Muslims is going too far - the Muslims being too different to be integrated. On the other hand, the social liberal position would claim that the migrants could enrich society without problems arising for the existing order.

8. Cemalettin Kaplan is the initiator of a radical Islamic community which in 1983 split from the National View and which advocates the establishment of a revolutionary theocracy in Turkey.

9. I picked this particular sequence because it shows the imparting of a value which is highly regarded in German culture - and which also represents a code for clichés about immigrants.

10. Gebauer: "My Turkish families can't understand anything by Islamic truth in its literal sense as far as their life here is concerned. Even in the most simple things. Unless they abstract from concrete things which are in it and then look at the general. If I have an admonishment from the Prophet to the people of Mecca - to respect the property of orphans, for example - then it is a statement which a Turkish child from Cologne cannot identify with at all. First of all, I have to see what the word 'orphan' means in this context. What does embezzlement mean in its general substance, and then I get a moral code which is usable."

11. This was well recognized by the Islamic critics. A report by the Süleyman movement states: "The main points of criticism lie in the fact that the good intentions of the curriculum (for example, from the imparting of religious knowledge and the acquaintance with religious practice to the bringing up to be a good Muslim) are undone by the disastrous pedagogical conflict with its tendency to base everything on society." (Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren, 1988)

12. It is rewarding to compare this type of 'pedagogical' syncretism which prospers in Germany with forms of syncretism which are developing in other political cultures. See Baumann's differentiation of 'convergence' and 'encompassment' as two syncretic processes he observed in London (Baumann 1993)