

# **Beyond Religious Recognition in Europe**

Religious recognition and its relationship to feelings of belonging of Alevi and  
Sunni community members in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna

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## **Abstract**

In this dissertation, I offer a comparative microsociological examination of the relationship between official religious recognition of migrant communities in Western Europe and their members' feelings of belonging. Through ethnographically embedded qualitative interviews with ordinary Alevi and Sunni community members in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna, I examine whether and how their feelings of belonging change in light of official recognition processes. Such processes of religious recognition of Sunni and Alevi communities occur in the context of contentious public and political debates on the place of Islam in Europe and the ability of Muslims to belong. Studies on such incorporation processes have not, however, examined official recognition's connection to the feelings of belonging of individual community members. Historically, Europe has grappled with the incorporation and equal treatment of groups deemed "Other". Muslims have come to constitute the embodiment of difference in Europe, where they have been excluded institutionally and societally. Meanwhile, some European countries have extended or amended their recognition of Muslim communities, including burial provisions, holidays and religious education. The official recognition of Alevi communities from Turkey often proceeds alongside Islam's incorporation. As a minority in Turkey, Alevis look back on a history of oppression and persecution. In Europe, they assert their difference from Sunni Muslims and their compatibility with European values. However, differences within the (attributed) category of Muslims have not been sufficiently taken into account. Therefore, I offer an analysis on the manner in which differentially positioned community members negotiate the relationship between recognition and belonging. I show that, not religious recognition itself, but rather the national politics of belonging within which such recognition is embedded, and in which the position of participants as racialised migrants comes to the fore, impinge on their feelings of belonging. Moreover, Alevis' and Sunnis' starkly contrasting relationships to the Turkish state, which represents the latter, while excluding the former from its definition of a national community and denying them its recognition, are critical to the way in which they conceive of recognition in Europe. The significance of this study is that it provides a nuanced and differential understanding of state-granted recognition of religious minorities in the transnational context of popular and institutional racism, derived from the personal accounts of recipients of such recognition.

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# Chapter 1: Belonging beyond Religious Recognition in Europe

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1. Research question and contribution*

Issues of diversity and difference have been points of contention continuously in European negotiations of its identity, boundaries and political membership. In the course of its history, Europe has grappled with the manner and extent of incorporation and equal treatment of groups deemed Other, in terms of gender, class, race and religion (Anidjar 2013, Asad 2003, Brown 2004, De Genova 2016). The Jewish Question in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for instance, denoted the discussions on the preconditions of Europeans Jews becoming equal citizens, the formation of representative organisations and their official accommodation (Bregoli & Francesconi 2010, Farris 2014, Marx 1919 [1844]). After the Holocaust and with the emergence of post-war labour migration programmes, difference in German-speaking Western Europe came to be predominantly personified by migrants from the south of Europe and especially by those arriving from countries with a largely Muslim population, such as Turkey (Ayata 2021a, b). Migrants from Turkey have been othered both racially and reflecting their attributed adherence to Islam. The place of Islam in Europe has become a central theme in public debates (Göle 2015, 2017). At the same time, those European states with, by now, sizeable Muslim populations have officially recognised Muslim communities to varying degrees in recent years, meaning that they have granted symbolic acknowledgement of their existence and societal relevance, confirmed religious rights, provided for religious practice, education and burial, and granted legal status to representative organisations (Joppke & Torpey 2013, Laurence 2012).

This dissertation offers a critical analysis of these processes of official religious recognition of Muslim communities, which take place against the backdrop of contentious public and political debates on the place of Islam in Europe and themselves form instances in which the terms and prerequisites of Muslims' belonging are negotiated (Bruce 2010, Engler 2014, Peter 2010). Both in the recognition documents themselves and in the debates around them, the issue of belonging comes to the fore; integration efforts or the identification with constitutional values are addressed and enduring connections to countries of origin are to make way for exclusive emplacement in the countries of residence. Yet, religious recognition's relationship to the feelings of belonging of the members of communities who seek or receive such recognition has not yet been examined and studies on such incorporation processes have remained on a public-political or broader historical level. Furthermore, Muslims are often treated as a homogenous group, leaving out diverging recognition trajectories. My dissertation presents an original microsociological analysis of the way differentially positioned community members negotiate the relationship between recognition and belonging. Through ethnographically embedded qualitative interviews with ordinary community members, this dissertation examines the question of whether and how acts and processes of official recognition of different Muslim groups affect members' feelings of belonging to their societies of residence. In particular, I focus on Alevi and Sunni communities from Turkey in three German-speaking countries, in which they constitute large and visible religious minorities.

### *1.2. Research puzzle and significance*

Such a study is of particular relevance as it engages with a complex set of circumstances and thus addresses an intricate research puzzle. In Western European public discourse, religion is framed as a problem with respect to the incorporation of migrants, while it is also conceived of as an avenue to achieve integration (Burchardt & Michalowski 2015). These processes and discourses take place in self-proclaimed secular liberal democracies. It is commonly assumed

that secularism signifies the strict separation of state and religion, and that this is the basis on which liberal Western societies and democracies can function. Yet, Western states, in order to claim non-religiosity, are and historically have been actively involved in the definition of religion. The state is not neutral towards religion, but entertains certain preconceptions about the acceptable, moderate and domesticated kind of religion that it tolerates (Asad 2003, Mahmood 2016, Stack 2015). When it comes to Islam, histories of conflict, Orientalist representations and security concerns shape debates on its accommodation in Europe and its compatibility with European values and identity (Cesari 2012, Haddad & Golson 2007, Korteweg & Yurdakul 2016, Smith 2002).

Specifically, European relations to and representations of Turkey have been historically tension-laden. So-called Moors, Turks and Ottomans have been subsumed as the racial and religious Other in Europe's Orientalist knowledge production about the East (Konrad 2011, Strasser 2008, Tekin 2010). Conversely, the Ottoman Empire and its Turkish successor state have discriminated, persecuted and violently assimilated groups that would not follow the majority Sunni denomination or have been excluded from ideas of Turkishness (Üngör 2011). Moreover, the Turkish Republic emulated and applied Western ideas of Orientalism, civilisation, modernity and race (Ergin 2017, Gökay 2016, Maksudyan 2005, Ünlü 2016, Xypolia 2016, Zeydanlioglu 2008). Alevis, in this manner, form the second largest faith group in Turkey, but they have been repeatedly victims of state-orchestrated or -sanctioned violence. Meanwhile, as the official conception of national homogeneity does not allow for any divisions within the group of Muslims, Alevis have been subjected to assimilation and their demands for recognition have largely remained unmet (Aktürk 2012, Bardakci et al. 2017, Boyraz 2019).

Among the labourers who migrated from Turkey to Western Europe since the 1960s were both Sunnis and Alevis. European states and societies, as well as academic scholarship, however, initially paid little heed to the differences among migrants from Turkey. Alevis

themselves often kept their identity a secret for fear of discrimination by Sunni colleagues or neighbours and ongoing Turkish state surveillance (Sökefeld 2008a). However, since the late 1980s, they have publicly mobilised and sought recognition as Alevi, both in Europe and Turkey. In Europe, not only do they emphasise their difference from Sunnis, but often also distance themselves from Islam altogether (Massicard 2013, Sökefeld 2008b, Suter Reich 2013). Despite the fact that Alevi may assert their distinction from Islam, they still have to position themselves in its relation as members of a migrant community from a Muslim majority country who, like Sunnis, move in the same larger space of politics of belonging regarding Islam in Europe.

Until Alevi from Turkey mobilised as a distinct community in Europe, European states treated them as part of a generalised group together with Sunnis, who were initially conceived of and addressed as guest workers, subsequently as foreigners, and from the 1990s predominantly as Muslims, indicating a correlation, as pointed out above, with the problemising and framing of integration in terms of religion (Kaya 2019, Soysal 2008, Spielhaus 2006). In Europe, while in the first decades of labour recruitment little official attention was paid to the religious needs and identities of labour and forced migrants from Turkey and other sending countries (Laurence 2012), this has become the prime element in debates on integration and security. In early decades, the provision of religious infrastructure had been relegated to sending countries such as Turkey, driven by the conviction that migrants would return soon. Members of the Turkish migrant population who felt threatened by continued Turkish state influence were overlooked. European states now seek to shape and create national versions of a European Islam, which in turn entails new issues (ibid.). Explicit and implicit policies accordingly have evolved from isolation-cum-neglect, through uncoordinated multiculturalism to incorporation and recognition. Meanwhile, communities themselves seek states' recognition, the motives for which, just as the meaning of the recognition, vary between groups. However, as I argue in this

dissertation, recognition processes do not exist in a political vacuum but are related to ongoing problemising of migration, diversity and belonging, which occur in a context of popular and structural racism.

### *1.3. Research gap*

Bringing together transnational, comparative and race-critical dimensions, this dissertation offers a novel insight into the relationship between religious recognition and political belonging. The official recognition of Sunni and Alevi communities in Western Europe often proceed alongside each other, through political-discursive connections, within the same institutional frames or even within the same law. Yet, they are not discussed in conjunction with each other in the literature. All too often, differences between various “Muslim” groups are overlooked and the majority denomination, Sunnism, is taken as a point of reference, which forecloses a more nuanced and complex understanding of these processes. Only a few academics have commented on this problem of a predominantly monolithic treatment of Islam (Brubaker 2013, Dahinden 2016, Mandaville 2009). My dissertation responds to this gap in the literature and thus offers a more complex analysis. The comparison of antagonistic communities, namely Alevis and Sunnis from Turkey, generates seminal insight into different regimes of recognition and offers a rich and nuanced analysis of their interpretation and negotiation within the communities as well as their potential impact on their members’ feelings of belonging. In this way, my dissertation ethnographically examines the meaning-making of recognition of both Alevi and Sunni communities. Both have been excluded in Europe in terms of their racialised Otherness and attributed or actual adherence to Islam. In addition to this, Alevis have experienced oppression and persecution in Sunni-majority Turkey as well as continued prejudice from Sunni neighbours or co-workers and Turkish state surveillance in Europe, a circumstance that has proven critical for their attitude towards recognition in Europe.

Given that the question of belonging permeates religious recognition processes in Europe, this dissertation examines the relationship between state-granted religious recognition and political belonging, taking Alevi and Sunni communities from Turkey as its case study. This is the first study to compare the recognition processes of these two groups, and the perspective of common members of different communities who are the objects of such negotiations adds necessary depth and complexity to the body of literature. In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide an overview of the existing literature on state incorporation and recognition of Islam and Alevism in Europe, in order to point out the research gaps addressed by this thesis in more detail. Thereafter, I will give an overview of the main theoretical concepts applied in this study, before briefly introducing the methods and cases from which I derived my findings. These findings and main arguments will be delineated in the subsequent section. The final section is dedicated to an outline of the upcoming chapters.

## **2. Existing literature and research gap**

While there is a growing body of academic literature on the incorporation of Islam in Europe, it falls short on a number of accounts and omits to engage with certain important questions. First, the incorporation of Islam in Europe is, in one group of writings on the subject, described as an unprecedented challenge. Such a perspective fails to take into account longer continuities of European treatment of Otherness, both within its borders and in its colonies. Concurrently, it threatens to essentialise Islam and Muslims as particularly difficult to accommodate, rather than framing current developments as instances of European production and accommodation of difference. Secondly, writers who assume a critical perspective in defining state incorporation of Muslims as domesticating governance and the application of exclusionary terms of belonging, continue to generalise about this group and run the risk of casting them as undifferentiated victims. Thirdly, the relationship of religious recognition

processes to the feelings of belonging of its recipients from a microperspective has remained so far unexamined. It is these issues that I aim to address in this thesis.

### *2.1. Deterministic analyses of Islam's incorporation*

The literature on the institutional incorporation of Islam in Western Europe remains largely polarised between assertions of Islam's incompatibility and criticisms of its state-led subjugation. One group of authors hold that accommodating and integrating Muslims is especially challenging (Joppke & Torpey 2013, Klausen 2005, Koopmans et al. 2005, Statham et al. 2005). According to Klausen (2005), the accommodation of Islam is an unprecedented test of Western governments' ability and willingness to respond to claims of Islamic elites. She argues that issues of state-church relations and the extent of government regulation have only been made apparent through the growing visibility of Islam in Europe, whose states supposedly have few preexisting templates for dealing with religious diversity. Joppke and Torpey (2013) describe the importance of the judiciary in accommodating Islam through the confirmation of individual religious rights, but observe that the inclusiveness of the legal system has led to a political backlash. Multiculturalism, they argue, has been replaced by a civic integration idiom according to which a stronger defence of liberal values is needed. Although the authors hold that this is a paradoxical understanding of liberalism because it undermines diverse identities, they consider it an "understandable response to the challenge of Islam, because the latter requires liberalism in order to exist in the West but hollows out its principles from the outside" (ibid.: 154). Koopmans et al. (2005) similarly argue that Muslims use the equal treatment and rights that they demand to contradict liberal values. Fusing civic and religious functions, Islam is, according to these authors, more resilient to political adaptation. Yet, time may bring about "more 'domesticated' nationalized forms of Islam, whose demands are more easily included within existing frameworks and whose believers share more of the secularized core values of the native majority publics" (ibid.: 178).

## *2.2. Critical counter-approaches*

While the above-mentioned works offer important insight into legal and institutional prerequisites to and the difficulties of religious recognition, their approach is marked by deterministic analysis. A more dynamic view is offered by Rath et al. (2001) who conceive of Islam's institutionalisation and incorporation in Europe as a product of political interactions and decisions, involving a number of factors and agents, within social formations that are permeated by Christianity. Other authors who are critical of the problematisation of Islam, both in academic literature and state practice, approach the incorporation of Muslims in Europe from the perspective of governance. On the one hand, this concerns organisational structures and their relations with the state. On the other hand, it addresses Muslim practices and subjectivities. Both levels of governance, it is argued, aim for a production of national domesticated versions of Islam and of loyal enlightened Muslims, perpetuating exclusionary terms of national belonging and preconceptions about Islam (Amir-Moazami 2011, Engler 2014, Haddad & Golson 2007, Peter 2010, Tezcan 2012). Yet, this focus on state-led subjugation runs the risk of casting Muslims as an undifferentiated group of victims as it neglects the positions of different Muslim groups in official recognition processes. Hence, in contrast to the above-described polarisation in the literature on the institutionalisation of Islam in Western Europe, my contribution offers a more nuanced approach by considering multiple groups and their different positionalities, not only in Europe but also in Turkey, since a mutual impact between the two locales can be observed.

## *2.3. Monolithic treatment of "Muslims"*

In European religious recognition processes, however, both Sunnis and Alevis are discursively, institutionally and legally subsumed under, or at least treated in close relation to, the category of Muslims, based on their common national origin. Their recognition either proceeds or is withheld within a context of the conflation of religious, cultural or national

positions that are problemised as a hindrance to integration, or, in short, in a context of anti-Muslim racism. A number of authors have traced the history and analysed the effects and applications of a racial logic in the designation of groups as “Muslim” (Anidjar 2008, Meer & Modood 2009, Meer 2013, Jansen & Meer 2020). Adding a race-critical perspective to the analysis of Muslim recognition processes in Europe, Hernandez Aguilar (2017, 2018) proposes that Muslim councils, such as the German Islam Conference, produce racialised bodies in their use of ideas about progress and enlightenment as a benchmark for Muslims to achieve. A postcolonial reading is offered by Topolski (2018), who analyses current Muslim councils in light of similar past attempts to divide and rule Europe’s Jewish community. Hafez (2018) argues that the Austrian system of religious recognition is based on a divide between “good”, moderate, domesticated Muslims and “bad”, foreign, threatening ones. Such insight on the racialisation of Muslims and on the application of divide-and-rule for their management greatly influences my analysis, yet different positions traced in these writings, such as moderate and radical (Morsi 2017), still implicitly refer to the Sunni majority, neglecting groups which are subsumed into the category of Muslims but draw their boundaries to Sunni Islam (Ayata 2018).

The existing literature on the recognition of Alevism in Europe is less extensive than writings on Islam, but also less polarised. Instead, more emphasis is placed on the productive and enabling aspect of such public recognition, and on the conditioning of claims for recognition of Alevism as a religion on existing opportunity structures, although criticisms of its use as a tool of governance are also present (Massicard 2013, Sökefeld 2008a, Suter Reich 2013). As already described above, although official recognition processes of Alevi and Sunni communities are politically discussed in conjunction with each other, are treated in parallel or under the same legal categories, they are not compared to each other in academic writing. Instead, the Sunni case is implicitly universalised to apply to all “Muslims” and little differentiation is made within this latter category. To counter this research gap, I explore the

question of how official recognition is negotiated by members of differently positioned communities, who simultaneously both navigate European terms of belonging structured by anti-Muslim racism.

#### *2.4. The recognition of Muslims and the question of belonging*

Among authors on recognition and established recognition theorists, minority religions are seldom considered valid claim makers. Such authors may ignore them altogether or relegate them “to a matter of personal conscience in a way that precluded it from forming the basis of public identity-related claims” (Meer et al. 2012: 132). In this manner, Charles Taylor (1992), one of the foundational theorists on the politics of recognition, submits that Islam has no legitimate claim to recognition by liberal states due to its purported inability to separate religion and politics. Those who enquire into the incorporation of Muslims in Europe through the lens of recognition (Meer et al. 2012; Gianni 2013, 2016), see the problem of their persistent inequality in the insufficient recognition or “misrecognition” of Muslims by European states.

In my thesis, I depart from both approaches. Public discourse as well as communities themselves frame current processes of incorporation of and conferring official status to Sunni and Alevi communities in Western European states in terms of recognition, albeit in conjunction with the notion of integration. Therefore, an approach that lacks engagement with recognition theories falls short of critically analysing and accounting for the kind of discourses, debates, hopes and imaginations that are entertained by recipients of state recognition. Yet, a reintroduction of established and universal understandings of recognition as a prerequisite for full personhood, self-worth, freedom and justice, as is for instance attempted by Gianni (2013, 2016), is not sufficient and cannot explain the persistence of exclusionary terms of belonging despite granted recognition or the divergence of meanings that are attributed to recognition by its recipients.

Thus, while the verdict of misrecognition reached by the above-mentioned authors may be shared by many of my Sunni participants, many Alevi would not agree that theirs is a state of misrecognition. Instead, they would stress the liberatory meaning of being recognised as a faith group with regard to their position in Turkey, while at the same time describing themselves as well-integrated and deserving subjects in the European context. These observations suggest that the difference between integration and recognition is not as pronounced as is assumed, as they both form part of the nation-building repertoire of the state in applying its terms of belonging (Hernandez Aguilar 2017, 2018). Although, as shown above, critical governance scholars point out that incorporation processes form instances in which the terms and prerequisites of belonging of Muslims and the place of Islam in Western Europe are negotiated, the former's relationship to the feelings of belonging of individual community members has not yet been examined.

Such tensions as described above can only be revealed in a microlevel ethnographic study on the ways in which different receivers of recognition vary in their negotiation of this status, which so far has been missing and which this thesis aims to provide. Furthermore, these tensions call for a more differential and nuanced approach to recognition and necessitate the inclusion of critical recognition literature. As I will show in the following section, I propose to approach conceptually the religious recognition of Islam and Alevism in Europe through a race-critical reading of religion, recognition and political belonging.

### **3. Theoretical framework: recognition in the context of (trans)national racial hierarchies**

#### *3.1. Recognition theory and its critiques*

The established understanding of recognition, as proposed by Honneth and Taylor (both 1992), is based on a Hegelian conceptualisation of identity according to which the mutual

recognition of self and other is needed for a positive sense of self, while denial of such recognition means an injury to the self. Feminist scholarship, however, interjects that recognition not only regulates and disciplines but also produces normative conceptions of self, identity and sexuality (Butler 2004). The process of legal recognition is, in this way, fundamentally constitutive of subjectivity, the complexity of which it simultaneously reduces (Brown 2000, Zylan 2011). While a feminist intersectional reading of recognition cannot always fully shed an understanding of identity, self, subject and liberation that is taken for granted and derived from a Western tradition that claims to be universal, postcolonial authors fundamentally challenge the viability of the recognition paradigm in settler-state and racialised settings. Spivak (2010 [1988]) points to the idea that it is not misrecognition or the absence of recognition but, in fact, recognition itself that can be harmful, such as through epistemic violence. Fanon (2008 [1952]) and Coulthard (2014), the latter drawing on the former, argue that the relationship between postcolonial states and “their” minorities is structured by unequal power relations which are perpetuated in processes of official recognition.

Together, these authors question a major premise of dominant recognition theory, namely that recognition enhances human freedom, equality and justice. Furthermore, they argue that official recognition perpetuates the unequal access to national belonging and cannot contribute to the formulation of more inclusive definitions. The problem already lies in the use of recognition as a practice of nation-building in which dominant and racially imbued imaginations of what constitutes a national “we” are applied. Recognition is, accordingly, conferred from a power-majority position upon those deemed tolerable, but not equal.

### *3.2. Racial hierarchisation*

This postcolonial reading of recognition has rarely entered the discussion on the official recognition of Muslims in Europe. When it did (Hafez 2018, Topolski 2018), the diversity within this group has been insufficiently attended to, so that the circumstance of diverging

positions and evaluations of recognition available in Western Europe between groups that assume majority and minority positions in their common country of origin, has not been accounted for (Ayata 2018). This is despite the fact that postcolonial literature, especially Mamdani (2012), has shown the role of inner-group divisions in colonial indirect rule, namely through dividing the native population into collaborating and deviant factions. Here, the literature on the imposed dialectic of “good” and “bad” representatives of racialised groups is insightful (Ayata 2020b, Maira 2009, Mamdani 2002, Meer 2013, Morsi 2017, Topolski 2018). Divide-and-rule was applied both in the colonial context and within the boundaries of Europe to manage racialised religious Others, such as the Jewish community. As the above authors show, state discourse and practice still rely on such divisioning today, as for instance in the so-called war on terror or even in current Islam councils (Hernandez Aguilar 2017, 2018).

Moreover, writings on so-called model minorities, such as migrants from Southeast Asia in the United States (Prashad 2000), explicate the duality and dilemma of such a position. While some members of a vulnerable group may welcome a social location of relative superiority to other denigrated groups in their search for acceptance, both the racial logic behind this as well as their own racialisation, are perpetuated. With regard to another such minority in the US-American context, namely its Jewish population, authors have elaborated on the latter’s movement along the national racial hierarchy and its status as white, but have pointed out the contested nature and contingency of such a status as well as the fact that it comes at the cost of confirming a racist polity, especially regarding Black Americans (Brodkin 1998, Rogin 1996). This results in a dilemma in which Jewish Americans cannot fully embrace or reject the racialised logic of the state, the acceptance of which they depended on at least until the founding of Israel (Freedman 2008, Goldstein 2006, Rothberg 2009).

The explicit connection between Muslim racialisation, as a phenomenon with a pre-9/11 history based on the mutual constellation of categories of race and religion, and racial

hierarchisation is rarely made. Thus, Muslims' standing in relation to other racialised groups has only recently begun to be discussed in the North American context (Husain 2019), while in Europe, where racial constellations tend not to be defined as such in both public and academic discourse (Goldberg 2006), it is hardly addressed. Furthermore, such insight is not applied to dynamics within a single race-religious category as part of its members' racialisation and the cementing of a white/non-white binary. Accordingly, being deemed "good", or rather "better", in relative-hierarchical terms by the white majority, does not lead to full inclusion, as pointed out similarly by critical scholars on recognition (Fanon 2008 [1952], Coulthard 2014, Morsi 2017). Lastly, I propose to add to these elaborations a transnational perspective on the workings and translations of racial hierarchies in new national contexts after migration, in order to explain changing racial subjectivities upon migration, the changing meanings of whiteness across national contexts but within a global hierarchy, and the varying ways in which different migrant groups position themselves and are positioned in their attempts to gain their new resident states' recognition (Arviv 2018).

### *3.3. Politics and feelings of belonging in nation-states*

Building on these concepts and reflections, I understand religious recognition as part of a politics of belonging set in nation-states, whose terms of inclusion and exclusion have been shaped by racialisation and structural racism. As argued by Goldberg (2002: 2), the modern state "has always conceived of itself as racially configured." The power to exclude and include as well as categorise and hierarchise in racial terms is integral to the emergence, development and transformation of the modern nation-state, as well as arguably to the recognition it confers upon "its" minorities (Mamdani 2020, Mills 1997, Goldberg 2002). In many states, reproducing the racial order became an explicit state project at least from the nineteenth century onwards, shown, above all, in immigration and citizenship legislature that reiterated the definition of the nation as white and the exclusion of the non-white from claims to full belonging (Bayoumi

2006, Goldberg 2002, Sharma 2020; Ergin 2017, Ünlü 2016 on Turkey). Following Schinkel (2017, 2018), I consider contemporary policies on integration as another such arena of nation-building. Here, the question is not whether a group is attested to be well or insufficiently integrated, but who is considered a subject to be integrated into what is understood as majority society in the first place, the decision of which is racially inflected.

In my understanding of belonging, I follow Yuval Davis' (2004, 2006) differentiation between larger politics and personal feelings of belonging. The former connotes public and political debates and definitions of the terms and hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion, in the context of which personal feelings of belonging are negotiated. A sense of belonging is frequently equated with the feeling of being at home. Yet, the ostensibly innocent use of this affective term often obscures the power-inflected hierarchy of understandings and definitions of home, in opposition to that which is deemed unhomey (Ayata 2020a, Blickle 2002, Caluya 2011). Hage's (2000) distinction between homely belonging and governmental belonging profoundly informs my analysis. The former describes passive feelings of wellbeing and familiarity in one's place of residence, while the latter denotes having a right over the nation and a legitimate opinion about its terms of inclusion, particularly when it comes to those deemed outside the national community. Entrance to the latter is, according to Hage, barred on predominantly racial terms. The conceptual distinction between homely and governmental belonging serves to make sense of the kind of belonging that official recognition in Western nation-states, sought by my interview partners in this study in a context of anti-Muslim racism, is (not) able to achieve.

#### **4. Brief introduction of methods and cases**

##### *4.1. Research design and process*

This study forms part of a larger research project financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation, led by Prof. Dr. Bilgin Ayata and titled “Affective Citizenship: Religion, Migration and Belonging in Europe” (Ayata 2018).<sup>1</sup> The official status that Alevi and Sunni organisations have achieved vary within and between Western European countries. Of these, the cases of Germany, Austria and Switzerland present especially insightful examples, demonstrating a combination of broader institutional and sociopolitical similarities with regard to their post-war migration history from Turkey and their conceptualisation of citizenship and integration, as well as local differences with regard to status and constellations of Alevi and Sunni recognition. The present contribution is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Alevi and Sunni communities from Turkey whose umbrella organisations have sought official recognition in these countries. Regarding Sunni communities, I focussed on associations affiliated with the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı), the national offices of which operate the highest number of mosques in the countries considered. In one case, I visited a community connected to the Islamic Community Millî Görüş (National View) whose local branch had been instrumental in the initiation and conducting of negotiations with the local government. With regard to the Alevi community, I was able to include all associations who, in their places of residence, have been majorly involved in recognition processes.

Specifically, I conducted my research in three cities with diverging constellations of religious recognition, namely Basel in Switzerland, Hamburg in Germany and Vienna in Austria. This included 71 semi-structured qualitative interviews with ordinary community members. To these were added 18 expert interviews with higher-ranking community representatives, politicians, state officials and academics, which provided background information on recognition processes. Interviews were accompanied, where possible, by my attendance of community events and gatherings. Alongside snow-ball sampling, these

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<sup>1</sup> <https://soziologie.philhist.unibas.ch/de/forschung/forschungsprojekte/affective-citizenship/>.

congregations granted the opportunity to gain access to interview partners by building relationships, familiarity and rapport with prospective participants, as a precondition to leading meaningful interviews. I devoted two months each to collecting data in Basel and Vienna, and spent three months in Hamburg due to an additional community there. Overall, my fieldwork spanned from October 2019 to November 2020, with my final fieldwork session in Vienna preceded by a half-year intermission due to COVID-19-imposed travel and contact restrictions, as well as some additional interviews conducted online in March 2021. I transcribed and analysed interviews using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA.

#### *4.2. Short description of local contexts*

Basel City in German-speaking Northwestern Switzerland is among those cantons which allow for state recognition of religions, as opposed to, for instance, French-speaking cantons that follow a laicist approach. A revision of the cantonal constitution in 2005, furthermore, introduced cantonal recognition as a private law status with lower hurdles than public-legal recognition. For instance, instead of a popular vote and change of the canton's constitution, it "only" requires a local parliamentary majority. This was envisioned as a preliminary step to attain public corporation status for those communities which did not yet possess the necessary institutional maturity. It was meant both as a show of state approval and a tool for integration. Two Alevi associations jointly applied for cantonal recognition and were granted this status in 2012. It allowed for Alevi classes at public schools, albeit self-funded, as well as the inclusion of Alevism in cantonal publications, and also led to the possibility to register officially as Alevi upon moving to the canton. However, the status did not come with financial support or other special rights. The Basel Muslim umbrella organisation, on the other hand, had once unsuccessfully attempted to apply for public corporation status in the late 1990s and was consulted during the revision of the cantonal constitution. However, since then the organisation has not made an application for cantonal recognition. This is due to a variety of

reasons, such as inner organisational heterogeneity of the nearly twenty member associations, lack of practical gains (a Muslim burial section already exists despite lack of recognition) and scepticism as to whether the application would pass local government. This has led to a situation where the local Alevi community has a higher legal status than the local Sunni community.

In 2007, negotiations commenced between the city of Hamburg, the local Muslim umbrella organisation Schura, as well as the local branches of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), the Union of Islamic Culture Centres (VIKZ) and the German Alevi Federation (AABF), in view of reaching an agreement over issues such as school instruction, holidays, burial, chaplaincy, broadcasting and mosque construction. This was enabled by a complex array of factors, such as the endeavours of Schura, political constellations and the previous signing of contracts with the Christian churches and the Jewish community. In 2012, the Hamburg Senate signed two separate contracts with the Muslim and Alevi communities, which were ratified in 2013. Their provisions largely confirmed existing practices, but they constituted the organisations as official partners to the senate. Furthermore, they led to more equal arrangements in the provision for cross-confessional religion classes at public schools, the official recognition of Muslim and Alevi holidays, the establishment of an Alevi studies chair at the university, and a basis for the future attainment of public corporation status. However, local, national and international political developments, especially deteriorating relations with Turkey and, most recently, the resurgence of the Israel-Palestine conflict, altered the contract with the three Muslim organisations into a matter of recurring political contestation.

In Austria, the conferral of legal status on religious communities is not a local but a national state prerogative. The official recognition of Islam through the Islam Law dates back to more than one hundred years ago. Yet, it was only in the late 1970s that a Muslim representative organisation was formalised and approved. The Islamic Faith Community of Austria (IGGiÖ) possesses the same legal status as the Christian churches or the Jewish

community. In 2015, an amended version of the Islam Law was passed, which caused much debate and discontent among the Muslim community. It reflected growing state suspicion and control, such as through the proscription of foreign financing. Further to this, this new law also included a second organisation, namely the Alevi Faith Community (ALEVI), which had gained public legal recognition in 2013. This had been preceded by a major split in the Austrian Alevi community. The community that had been granted recognition defined itself as part of Islam, while the Alevi Federation (AABF), which sees Alevism as independent from Islam, was denied any legal status for more than a decade. Only very recently, in April 2022, nearly a year and a half after my field-stay in Vienna, did it attain the subsidiary official status as state registered confessional community.

## **5. Main findings and arguments**

### *5.1. Religious recognition's inadequacy vis-à-vis feelings of governmental belonging in Europe*

Processes examined here pertain to the religious recognition of Alevi and Sunni communities from Turkey in Switzerland, Germany and Austria, and more specifically to the symbolic acknowledgement of societal relevance in Basel, the confirmation of religious rights and status as contract partner to local government in Hamburg, and the status as public corporation in Vienna. For many Alevis, this religious recognition gave rise to feelings of relief, happiness and gratitude, and profound disappointment where it was withheld. Many Sunnis in Hamburg, unlike in Vienna where the status was relatively old and recent revisions were viewed negatively, or in Basel where recognition was missing, felt a sense of achievement and also considered it a basis for positive further developments. However, regarding their feelings of governmental belonging, both Sunni and Alevi participants' concerns often exceeded these specific acts, status and processes of religious recognition. A sense of full substantive belonging was affected to a lesser extent by the ability to be buried locally, have religious instruction at

school or by publicly recognised holidays. More importantly, it depended on being generally recognised as equal members of Western European society in the case of many Sunni interviewees, or, in the case of many Alevi interlocutors, being perceived as different from Sunnis as well as empowered vis-à-vis and treated equally to the dominant Sunni minority in Europe and oppressive majority in their common country of origin.

Therefore, when talking with participants about their sense of belonging to their resident societies, the first issue to emerge that exceeded religious recognition granted by European states was their position as racialised migrants in a context of anti-Muslim racism within which such recognition processes unfolded. Sunnis especially felt excluded despite recognition, as the latter did not account for nor address their intersecting social locations of race and religion, nor reflect or affect wider societal relations. Even where the highest available form of religious recognition for Islam exists among the three cases considered here, namely public corporation status and a national Islam Law in Austria, Sunnis criticised that recognition does not protect them from Islamophobia and discrimination. In fact, Sunni participants from Vienna expressed their continued exclusion with particular vehemence. Further to this, recognition itself formed an arena in which these dominant terms of belonging needed to be navigated, as they either formed prerequisites to recognition's acquisition, such as in Basel, served to contest and politicise already granted recognition, such as in Hamburg, or led to create a paradox between formal parity and societal exclusion, as in Vienna. A number of Alevis, especially those who, like their Sunni peers, were born and raised and often granted citizenship in their countries of residence, shared these grievances. Others stated their deservingness of recognition based on their integration and compatibility with European culture and values, and in doing so drew their boundaries to Sunni Muslims.

The second major issue which, in this way, exceeded the impact of the specific stipulations of religious recognition granted by European states on participants' feelings of

belonging were their contrasting relationships to Turkey. Recognition in Europe, in addition to influencing their relationship to European states and societies (and for some more so), affected Alevis in the way it changed their position vis-à-vis Sunnis and the Turkish state in both Europe and Turkey, as well as in the way it formed a perceived contrast to their treatment by the Turkish state. Both in Turkey and in Europe, Alevis remain unequal to the established religious groups, Sunnis and Christians respectively, but in Europe they often maintain their focus on their standing vis-à-vis the former rather than the latter. Sunnis, on the other hand, did not reflect on the recognition of Alevis and demanded that their real or attributed institutional or affective ties to Turkey be no hindrance to their recognition, both religious and societal, in Europe.

### *5.2. Religious recognition's entanglement in racial hierarchies in Europe and Turkey*

In order to make sense of both the continued exclusion of both Alevis and Sunnis in Europe, as well as of Alevis in Turkey against which they measure their standing in Europe, I analysed European religious recognition and its negotiation by community members with view to their emplacement in an overall context of racism, racialisation and racial hierarchies. This did not only refer to the racial hierarchies and definitions of national belonging in Western Europe, but also took into account transnational connections to Turkey. The racial hierarchies in Turkey, in which Alevis are officially and violently subsumed under the Turkish-Sunni majority, while their difference vis-à-vis Sunnis is denied and assimilated, inform the different positions assumed by Alevis and Sunnis in European recognition processes, both with respect to the white-Christian majority and among each other.

Many Sunni participants in this study conjectured that, on account of their name, skin- and hair colour they would always be perceived as foreign, always connected to their actual or attributed countries of origin, no matter how many generations ago migration had actually taken place, and no matter if they were, in fact, born and raised in their respective countries of residence and even carried its citizenship. These feelings were occasionally shared by Alevi

participants in their accounts. Some, moreover, lamented that their appearance led to their conflation with Sunni Muslims by members of the European majority society. In stating their distinction from that group and declaring their own compatibility with Western European values of, for instance, gender equality, Alevi often described Sunni Islam as strict, violent, intolerant or oppressive, a perspective shaped by their experiences in Turkey or by Sunni peers, colleagues and neighbours in Europe, but one that also coincides with commonly held conceptions and representations of Islam in European public and political discourse. Hence, when talking about received or withheld state recognition and stating their deservingness of it, Alevi drew their boundaries to a widely assumed image of Islam in Europe. In doing so, they confirmed existing terms of belonging in Europe, arguing for their agreement with such terms in contrast to Sunni Muslims.

Recognition for Alevi thus meant the acknowledgement, protection and official confirmation as a group independent from Sunni Islam, set into relief by their history of persecution and discrimination in Turkey. Yet, the circumstance that Alevi often view recognition processes positively in this regard, and by virtue of their designation and self-presentation as integration models, should not hide the fact that they, too, form part of European racialisation. Sharing the same “migration background”, Alevi fall into the racial category of “Muslim” from which they seek to free themselves, but which, at the same time, may grant them European state attention. In order to counterbalance their position in the Turkish racial hierarchy, they need to submit, and themselves contribute, to their role as the compatible counterpart to Sunni Muslims in Western European hierarchies of racialisation. The inclusion of Alevi in this research, who are victims of European racism but who often make sense of their recognition in Western Europe against its lack in Sunni-majority Turkey and therefore speak of recognition in terms of gained visibility and independence, showed how tension-laden the reception of such recognition is.

Many Sunnis called out their persistent exclusion from European racialised imaginations of national belonging, which either impeded their recognition or persisted despite them being officially recognised. While Sunnis perceived the acknowledgement of their compatibility with dominant conceptions of European values and ways of life, such as secularism, democracy and gender equality to be denied, Alevis read their recognition as a confirmation of their compatibility with such values that are, at the same time, stances for which they have been persecuted in Turkey. In doing so, Alevis declared their deservingness of recognition and explained the its significance for them by reference to Sunni Islam and the Turkish state in both Europe and Turkey. These differences in responses given by members of the two groups were informed by power inequalities between them and perpetuated by the manner in which they subsequently have felt treated by European state representatives, translating into a hierarchical placing of these groups, representatives of which are ranked and rank themselves according to their more or less accepted Otherness. Access to equal belonging in Europe is, in this way, not enabled through official religious recognition, as community members negotiate their belonging against dominant definitions, which they either confirm or contest.

## **6. Chapter outline**

In chapter 2, I will lay out the theoretical and conceptual framework of this dissertation in more detail, delivering the theoretical backing to the concepts of recognition and belonging as well as of race and religion that were already briefly introduced above. I rely on a differentiation between feelings and politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2004) as well as between homely and governmental belonging (Hage 2000). I will present established theories on recognition, followed by pertinent feminist, intersectional and postcolonial critiques thereof, which allowed me to make sense of the expectations and disappointments regarding recognition

status that I encountered in the field. I will mark out the constitution of the nation-state and the way in which it circumscribes belonging to it, also pointing to the role of recognition in this. Afterwards, I will present religion and race as mutually constituted categories, historically used to distinguish self and Other in processes of colonial expansion and to define inclusion and exclusion in modern nation-states. I will relate the concepts of racial hierarchies and whitening, arguing that such processes remain meaningful across national contexts in the course of international migration.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to a detailed description of my methods and methodology, conducted in three major steps, corresponding to the three main methodological choices underlying this thesis. First, this is the inclusion of both Sunni and Alevi communities, who have very different relations to the Turkish state and histories of state treatment and whose comparison reveals differences in their members' meaning-making of recognition processes in Europe. Furthermore, such a comparison reveals the workings of the racialised category of "Muslim" itself and its role in the production and reproduction of hierarchies of belonging. Secondly, multiple locales were considered, exhibiting different constellations in matters of religious recognition. This brings to light major continuities in participants' concerns, but also shows how these are inflected differently in each context. Thirdly, the main method of data collection was ethnographic interviewing, including semi-structured qualitative interviews embedded in and supported by participant observation, the value of which lies in showcasing the different ways in which community members themselves negotiate and navigate state recognition and relate it to the question of belonging in unequal power settings. I thereafter describe my method and process of data analysis. The issue of researcher positionality is discussed throughout the chapter but receives its own section at its conclusion.

In chapter 4, I will provide a detailed summary of the sociopolitical backgrounds, histories and developments with regard to the institutionalisation and recognition of Alevi and

Sunni organisations in Western Europe up until the current day. First, I will provide an overview of the institutionalisation and incorporation of selected Alevi and Sunni organisations in Western Europe, as well as, subsequently, an in-depth introduction into the three cases examined in this study. Based on my argument that recognition processes take place in and are fundamentally structured by transnational contexts of institutional racism and racial hierarchisation, I will thereafter outline the ways in which race is configured in the state histories and structures as well as national imaginations of Germany, Switzerland and Austria, especially in relation to the post-war migration from Turkey to these countries. In this vein, I will also relate some observations on the racial configurations and hierarchies of the Turkish state and society, and especially Turkish state relations to Alevis, which inform the (self)positionings of Alevis and Sunnis in processes of their recognition in Europe.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are devoted to one case study each. Here, I will develop the main argument of this dissertation by extensive recourse to the interviews conducted with Sunni and Alevi community members in the three locales. I will show in the course of the following chapters how, in talking about recognition processes, participants often draw on, refute and reiterate dominant European definitions of belonging, as well as make sense of their European status through comparison with their contrasting state treatment in Turkey. I will argue that participants' accounts of religious recognition speak of a production and reproduction of racial hierarchies of belonging in these processes, which foreclose recognition's ability to bring about or substantiate a sense of governmental belonging in racialised religious minority subjects. I will also demonstrate how each of the three case studies constitutes a supporting instance of this argument, albeit in varying ways, as the differing forms and constellations of recognition present in these three cities provide for different contexts and inflections.

In Basel, where the Alevi community possesses the available recognition status that the Sunni community lacks, this circumstance was presented by many of my Alevi interlocutors as

a reflection of or even reward for their successful integration, while the fact that Sunnis are missing such a status was seen by the Alevi interviewees as a testimony of Sunnis' insufficient efforts to achieve integration. Moreover, such a reversal of the hierarchy of recognition as compared to the situation in Turkey lent recognition in Basel much of its significance for Alevis, despite its lacking practical benefits. Alevis' possession of an official status, albeit largely symbolic, which the Sunni community is devoid of, granted Alevis a sense of well-being, visibility and security. Sunnis, on the other hand, argued that their lack of official recognition went hand in hand with the fact that societal recognition was also withheld from them. Without the latter, the former could not be achieved and would, in any case, be without meaning. Despite the fact that Basel Alevis in general viewed their societal position positively, especially upon their official recognition, and that Basel Sunnis entertained a more negative perception of their societal standing, members from both groups perceived themselves as subjects of integration demands, a reality that speaks, I argue, of their lacking governmental belonging.

In Hamburg, both Alevi and Sunni communities have received the same recognition status as contract partners of the local government. However, the contract with the Sunni (and Shiite) communities has repeatedly been the target of political attacks and contestations, amounting to several calls to cease the contract altogether, which have grown louder in recent years. Issues of country-of-origin politics and communities' personal and institutional ties to these countries, in particular Turkey and Iran, have been at the forefront of the disharmony. Implicit in these debates is the call for undivided loyalty and support of the German legal and value system, which any show of support for Turkish politics casts into question. Many Sunni participants therefore regarded the contract as a first step, but criticised its misuse as a tool of politics and even as a disciplining device, as the threat of its cancellation was repeatedly employed in order to police belonging. Alevis, meanwhile, remained anxious to assert their distinctness from Sunni Islam and to make themselves heard in common forums, feeling that

the Sunni position is persistently more powerful due to foreign state-backing that they themselves have always lacked. While relations between local government and the Alevi community have been praised on both sides, the former's approval has hinged on the latter's ability to portray itself as modern, secular and democratic. However, an overly open show of conflict between Alevi and Sunni representatives over country-of-origin politics was not desired by the state in settings where matters pertaining to religious recognition are discussed, as these are aimed to cut foreign ties.

Sunnis in Vienna described their situation in Austria as a profound paradox. On the one hand, their representative organisation has been in possession of a public corporation status for over four decades, placing them legally on par with Christian churches. On the other hand, they have experienced increasing discrimination, both as individuals and as an organisation. The Islam Law, which has been revised twice since 2015 to include stricter measures on foreign financing and personnel, for example, was not regarded as a collection of rights but as a tool of control in the stipulations of which the community itself had little say. Members of the Austrian Alevi Federation, which situates itself as an independent non-Islamic faith and has long been denied recognition, argued that the persistent refusal of official recognition was to be explained by the state's aim to use Alevis and their criticism of Sunni Islam as a means to divide, tame and control "Muslim" communities. Recognition, they contended, is conditional upon agreeing to be subsumed under the Islam Law together with Sunni Muslims, and in this way reiterates Islamification already experienced in Turkey. Therefore, both members of the unrecognised Alevi Federation and the Islamic Faith Community perceived recognition as a means to domesticate Islam rather than a conferral of true acknowledgement. Conversely, for members of the recognised Alevi community, who define Alevism as a Muslim denomination and exist as the second religious society alongside the Islamic Faith Community under the Islam Law, recognition, above all, signified their equality with and assertion against Sunni Islam. This was

viewed as the return for their struggle against Sunni monopoly and their ability to make state and society aware of their representation of a different, more progressive and compatible Islam, as against Sunni radicalism and Kurdish politics. Yet, they thereby assumed the position of “good Muslims”, whose stance regarding the position of Islam in Austria is circumscribed.

Chapter 8 provides a comparison of these three contexts, both within Alevi and Sunni communities and cross denominations. I will present the differing significances and impacts of official recognition on Alevis and Sunnis across the three case locales, as well as describe the diverging meanings and implications of official versus societal recognition. I will argue that, underlying all three empirical instances, namely negotiations of integration discourse, of demands to sever country-of-origin ties and of perceived domesticating governance, is the microlevel reckoning with national politics of belonging structured by racial hierarchies that preclude equal belonging. This pertains to the requirements of Western European definitions and boundaries of belonging that both Alevis and Sunnis have to navigate, as well as to those that have existed in Turkey and which have historically excluded Alevis. Hence, while many Sunnis challenge racism and integration requirements in Europe that permeate their official recognition there, many Alevis consider the discrimination experienced by Sunnis in Europe and Turkey as more severe than white European racism and assert their compatibility with European values and culture as grounds for their deservingness of European recognition.

Chapter 9 places the main findings of this dissertation in a nutshell by way of conclusion. It discusses their implications, specifically recognition’s role in nation building and the European Question, and attempts to formulate possibilities for belonging and recognition in contexts of entrenched structural racism. It points to the shortcomings of this thesis and proposes questions and avenues for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Religious Recognition in the Context of (Trans)National Racial Hierarchies**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual framework of this dissertation. It discusses ideas and debates pertaining to the notions of recognition, belonging and religion. Although this study is a microsociological one, examining the ways in which ordinary Alevi and Sunni community members negotiate available and granted recognition status in relation to their personal feelings of belonging, it requires a discussion of its macrosociological context which has revealed itself to be decisive for answering my research question. Rather than acts and stipulations of official religious recognition themselves, their positioning within and indeed reiteration of national politics of belonging marked by racial hierarchisation impacts community members' feelings of belonging. Treating Muslims' othering in Europe as a form of racialisation, I argue that the racially informed configuration of the state and its terms of belonging forming the context within which recognition is sought, granted and withheld, and also impinging on the very contents and discourses of recognition, prefigures the kind of belonging available to racialised religious minority subjects and conditions the negotiations of belonging that they engage in. Furthermore, I argue that the racial hierarchy extant beyond the European context of religious recognition, in migrant religious community members' country of origin, shapes the different meanings that a European recognition status has for them.

This chapter consists of five thematic sections. The first section will treat the issue of feelings and national politics of belonging. Feelings of belonging are negotiated within a larger politics of inclusion and exclusion which also impinges on recognition processes. The conceptual distinction between homely and governmental belonging (Hage 2000) serves to

make sense of the circumstance that while racialised minority subjects may feel at home in white nation-states to a certain extent, they are ultimately barred from equal participation in defining the terms of belonging. In the second section, I present official recognition as one way in which nation-states treat diversity within their borders. While it has been theorised as a multicultural practice, such a reading is seldom extended to the incorporation and claims-making of Muslims in Western states to whom integration discourse is applied instead. Recognition's current use by Western European states with regard to their Muslim populations in conjunction with an integration paradigm, which problematises the alleged deficiency of racially othered groups in society, suggests that a critical engagement with the concept of recognition is required. In the next section, accordingly, I introduce the main assumptions of established recognition theory as well as their feminist, intersectional and post-colonial critiques. The latter especially challenge the premise of recognition's inherent beneficiality for racialised minorities and propose that recognition reiterates rather than transcends existing power relations between minorities and majorities and the politics of belonging in Western nation-states.

In the fourth section, having established recognition's embeddedness in national politics of belonging marked by racial exclusion, I introduce the dimension of religion and secularism, given this study's examination of official recognition of religious communities in secular states. I present Western secularism as a context in which religious communities are governed but can also make claims. At the same time, I argue that it needs to be understood as a particular ideology with normative conceptions, portraying religion and especially Islam as intrinsically irreconcilable with secular values. In order to substantiate this, I present a critical genealogy of the division of the religious and the secular in Europe, which I argue to be coextensive categories in the definition of which an image of the inferior Other within and outside the borders of Europe has always played a constitutive role. Similarly, the categories of religion

and race have developed and existed in mutual entanglement, which sheds light on the racialisation of Muslims in the West. I forward an understanding of Muslims as a group that, in Western Europe, is racialised on the basis of allegedly innate religious, ideological and cultural alterity as well as physical markers and national-territorial origin. This forms the basis on which I propose that processes of official religious recognition in Western Europe are set in, themselves reproducing, racial hierarchies of belonging that have historically informed and have been informed by nation-states' formation and perpetuation.

The final section is devoted to the notion of racial hierarchy. After delineating the academic debates on the hierarchical positioning of racialised groups, tracing its processes, changes and implications, I will introduce the historically and currently applied governance practice of dividing a racialised group such as Muslims into “good” and “bad” representatives. Religious recognition in Europe not only confirms a white/non-white binary but also compels a hierarchical structuring within the race-religious category of Muslims between the more and the less compatible and integratable. In this vein, I also introduce a transnational lens. Racial hierarchies in migrants' country of origin continue to frame their negotiations of recognition in Europe, their positioning vis-à-vis one another and towards European majority society. The conclusion will tie these five strands together to propose that official religious recognition's positioning in the context of transnational racial hierarchies, perpetuating exclusionary national politics of belonging, precludes its ability to contribute to a sense of equal belonging in members of racialised religious groups in Europe.

## **2. Politics and feelings of belonging in nation-states**

### *2.1. Feelings, politics and dissimilarities of belonging*

Following Yuval-Davis (2004, 2005, 2006), belonging can be conceptually divided into personal feelings of place-belongingness and politics of belonging. In fact, belonging spans the divide between the personal, individual and intimate on the one hand and the structural and political on the other. In other words, “[b]elonging is where the sociology of emotions interfaces with the sociology of power, where identification and participation collude” (Yuval-Davis 2004: 2016). Belonging from a personal emotive angle is often defined as the feeling of being at home, where home is understood as “a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment” (Antonsich 2010: 646). Korteweg and Yurdakul (2016: 20) define belonging as the feeling of being at home in one’s country, involving the ability to move safely and freely within its spaces as well as the comfort and joy of living in this particular place. Moreover, it signifies the ability to voice discontent without having to relinquish one’s belonging (ibid.). This implies not to be caught in a differentiation between those whose belonging is uncontested and those whose actual home is believed to be elsewhere.

In this way, personal negotiations of belonging are always circumscribed and informed by politics of belonging. The latter refers to wider structural and hegemonic practices, processes and discourses of inclusion and exclusion, maintaining and reproducing the boundaries of belonging, as well as “their contestation and challenge by other political agents” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 205). In this manner, state-effected acts of religious recognition of groups form part of a larger politics of belonging in which the inclusion of religious minorities and migrants has continued to be a matter of debate. Meanwhile, individuals’ differential situatedness affect the ways in which they are impacted by politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011a). People with similar migration histories may entertain diverging feelings of belonging based on the intersection of personal social locations such as class, age, ethnicity or gender (Waite & Cook 2011, Wessendorf 2010). While the term diaspora creates the impression of a homogenous and monolithic national community abroad, there exist different emotional relationships to the

country of origin as well as the country of residence due to diverging migratory trajectories, motivations, forces and power constellations between various religious and ethnic groups. Migrants from Turkey, for instance, tend to be generalised as Muslim and as strongly attached to their country of origin, neglecting denominational and socio-political differences, the recognition of which in Europe bears on their feelings of belonging to their resident countries.

## 2.2. *Homely and governmental belonging*

A sense of belonging is frequently equated with the feeling of being at home. Yet, this ostensibly innocent use of the affective term “home” often obscures the power-inflected hierarchy of understandings of what home should look like, as well as the fact that the ideal of a home is constituted in opposition to that which is not deemed homely (Caluya 2011, Hage 2000). In the German-speaking context, the concept of *Heimat* serves to draw boundaries between Germans and those perceived as foreign. Comfort and well-being suggested by the term *Heimat* stand in stark contrast to its exclusionary implications and colonial histories. According to Blickle (2002), the term *Heimat* is politically mobilised in a reactionary way whenever Germany’s national self-definition is in a process of transformation. Recently, *Heimat*-discourse forms the political reaction to anti-racism claims and serves to legitimise the militarisation of Europe’s outer borders (Ayata 2019a, 2020a, 2021a, 2021b).

Migrants in German-speaking countries may still appropriate the term *Heimat* to signify “the region, city or even part of town they inhabit” (Schmitt 2010: 167). Homemaking can be understood as empowering migrants and non-white residents and citizens in countries and cities of Western Europe by claiming ownership over physical, social and political spaces (Staheli & Nagel 2006). Both homemaking practised by migrants and domesticating practised by the “host” society and government are competing “expressions of the quest for the homely and familiar in contexts of increasing ethnic diversity brought about by transnational migration” (Hunter 2016: 249). However, the inequality of power positions from which a home can be

claimed imbues such expressions with varying import. Attachment to cities and even specific urban neighbourhoods exists within wider exclusionary structures and discourses that position some as decision makers over the make-up of “their” nation (Hage 2000). The power over the definition of home and its inhabitants thus remains unequally distributed.

The majority of academic writing on migrants’ feelings of belonging tackles its modes and determinants, but pays less attention to what extent migrants and their descendants feel that the state also belongs to them. According to Hage (2000), there is at least a dual mode of national belonging: homely belonging, as described above, and governmental belonging. The latter denotes having a right over the nation and a legitimate opinion about its management, particularly concerning those deemed outside the national community. Not all inhabitants of the nation can feel it to be their own to the same degree. Although non-white inhabitants may feel quite at home, they are not empowered to have an equal say in the management of the country. They may strive to accumulate a sense of national belonging through language, certain behaviour, length of stay or legal status, but this does not translate into governmental belonging, as the latter is naturalised and essentialised as something with which one is born, rather than something that one acquires. “The aristocratic logic ensures that, regardless of how much capital one accumulates, how one accumulates it will make an important difference to its capacity to be converted into national recognition and legitimacy” (ibid.: 62). A substantive feeling of belonging, in this manner, not only includes the feeling of being at home, but also and above all the ability to have a say in the terms of inclusion and to voice discontent without having to relinquish one’s belonging (Korteweg & Yurdakul 2016: 20). As is argued by Modood (2011: 54), being a full citizen means “to have the right to not just be recognized but to debate the terms of recognition.”

### *2.3. Racial definition of nation-states*

Many nation-states are defined based on racial terms of inclusion and exclusion. According to Goldberg (2002: 2), the modern state “has always conceived of itself as racially configured.” Race, or more specifically the power to exclude and include as well as categorise and hierarchise in racial terms is, as Goldberg contends, integral to the emergence, development and transformation of the modern nation-state. In fact, the founding moment of the modern nation-state can be traced to the late fifteenth century, when the Castilian monarchy, on the one hand, ejected or forcibly converted Jews and Muslims within its own boundaries, groups that I will later show to be racialised, and on the other hand, took colonies in the Americas (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991, Mamdani 2020). As argued by Balibar (1991), this moment initiates the reciprocal determination of racism and nationalism and their official utilisation by the state. It transformed “antagonisms and persecutions that have quite other origins into racism in the modern sense” (ibid.: 52). Reproducing racial order became an explicit state project in many nation-states at least from the nineteenth century onwards, shown above all through racist immigration and citizenship legislation (Bayoumi 2006, Goldberg 2002, Sharma 2020). Immigration and citizenship restrictions enact national sovereignty and give judicial effect to the idea of the nation-state “as a bounded territory with limited, racialized membership” (Sharma 2020: 76). Moreover, as will be elaborated further below, migration and citizenship regimes have been conflating race, expressed in the language of one’s own or one’s ancestors’ country of origin, and religion (Bayoumi 2006).

In present-day postcolonial Europe, where former colonial subjects live within the borders of old metropolises and increasingly attain their formal citizenship, national belonging continues to be founded on the idea of nativeness and essential national homelands (Sharma 2020). This means that “[w]hile some Migrants are able to become National Citizens, because of the racialized and territorialized grounds for Native standing, it is impossible for Migrants to become National-Natives” (ibid.: 275). Tropes of insurmountable cultural differences that

characterise this new racism (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991), remain intact after settlement into a new country, even across generations. A state's self-proclaimed national majority can claim the nation-state to be its own and reserves for itself the legitimacy to define its cultural character, deciding who represents this culture and who does not. Accordingly, a "regime of tolerance solidified the structure of the nation-state by defining the relation between the national majority and minority", casting the two groups as permanent (Mamdani 2020: 2).

In this vein, there may be a more or less profound toleration of Muslims in Europe, as European states agree to institutionalise Islam to various degrees, albeit on the condition of its reformation, while they are not perceived to be of Europe or allowed to determine the idea of Europe other than as its counter-image (Asad 2003). "It is precisely because Muslims are external to the essence of Europe, that 'coexistence' can be envisaged between 'us' and 'them'" (ibid.: 164). Those adhering to either liberal or right-wing politics use a narrative of exclusion of Islam from Europe, the only difference being what kind of toleration is needed. Similarly, according to Hage (2000), both white supremacists and white multiculturalists conceive of the nation as defined by white culture, where the presence of non-white residents and citizens can only be additional and conditional. The racial definition of nation-states and the hierarchisation of groups according to their ability to belong, shape national politics of belonging that form the context of and influence debates and processes of religious recognition. The religionisation of contemporary politics of belonging after 9/11 and the transformation of multiculturalist discourses and politics into "multi-faithism as a naturalized discourse of legitimate diversity" (Yuval-Davis 2011a: 114), work in congruence with a racialised definition of belonging.

### **3. State accommodation of difference: Multiculturalism, integration, recognition**

#### *3.1. Recognition as a multicultural practice*

There are a variety of ways in which states can encounter groups within their boundaries, conceived of as different from the imagined national majority. A concept that has gained prominence in the late twentieth century among scholars studying the state accommodation of difference in Western liberal states is multiculturalism (Kymlicka 1995, Young 1990). Many policy measures can be termed multicultural and countries have not followed a unified approach, nor have individual countries applied concerted measures across time throughout their counties. “Practically everywhere governments have dealt with immigrant and ethnic minority incorporation through a rather disordered closet full of measures” (Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010: 2), such as in the field of education, social services, media and public funding. In general, the aim of such measures has been to reduce discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and overcome barriers to participation in society, allow access to public services, recognise cultural and religious identities and open up public spaces for their representation. Hence, official recognition has been an item of multicultural policy. Moreover, authors like Charles Taylor (1992) and Tariq Modood (1998) locate it firmly within the theory of multiculturalism.

While questions of multicultural state accommodation and official recognition of diversity overlap in the writings of these two authors, one of the issues that differentiates them is their engagement with official treatment of *religious* difference, and especially Islam, in Western liberal states. Taylor (1992: 62) explicitly excludes Muslim claims-making from legitimate recognition politics and his conception of multiculturalism, on the grounds that liberalism cannot accommodate Islam where there is “no question of separating politics and religion in the way we have come to expect in Western liberal society.” In fact, the issue of minority religions is often considered an invalid category of public claims-making and therefore either ignored or dismissed as a matter of personal conscience “in the political philosophies of otherwise multiculturalist theorists” (Meer et al. 2012: 132). Modood (1997) regards this refusal

to include minority religions and especially Muslims into scholarly debates on multicultural claims-making for recognition as testimony to the fact that prejudice and even racist hostility against Islam is exhibited in scientific theory. Meer et al. (2012) similarly observe an insufficient recognition or “misrecognition” of Muslims by European states and regard this as contributing to their enduringly unequal standing in society.

### *3.2. Recognition in conjunction with integration*

A common trope that is applied instead of multiculturalism or recognition when it comes to European states’ treatment of their Muslim citizens and residents is integration (Lenard 2010). This is even more noticeable in European political discourse, in which there have frequently been calls to depart from past multiculturalism even when no concerted multicultural policies had existed, and to embrace a more rigorous integration (Joppke 2007, Schinkel 2017, Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010). The “death” of multiculturalism has been pronounced repeatedly since the early 2000s across Europe, “suggesting that a particular liberal ideology had dominated politics since the 1970s, had failed miserably, and moreover had produced a dangerous social condition in which Islamic terrorism could flourish” (Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010: 1). Instead, integration of ethnic and religious minorities has become a guiding paradigm of national domestic policy throughout Europe, assigning members of such groups the obligation to adopt dominant values and cultural practices and to actively demonstrate their desire to belong. Although integration has replaced previous allegedly multicultural policies, recognition continues to be sought by communities and is granted variously by states (Joppke 2009). In fact, as I will also show in the course of this thesis, the official religious recognition of Muslim communities and their so-called integration in Western liberal nation-states often work in conjunction, as both state representatives and community members themselves conceive of recognition as a means or reflection of integration.

I follow Hernandez Aguilar's (2017, 2018) critical reading of the integration paradigm. He identifies integration as a form of racial historicism, a term adopted from Goldberg (2002) to describe the idea of an alleged need for the civilising improvement of inferior "races" based on the assumption that Western-Christian specificities are universal ideals and truths. As this racial historicism is presented as a departure from pseudobiological conceptions of race, it allows to claim commitment to universalism while silently elevating whiteness to the desirable standard and norm. In this way, while suggesting the possibility for progress, the final stage of integration remains unattainable. Similarly, Schinkel (2017: 2) posits that the concept of integration, although ostensibly seeking to achieve inclusion, "allows for the identification of what does not belong." This is because the decisive issue "is not the difference between the 'well integrated' and the 'less integrated'; it is the difference between those for whom integration is not an issue at all, and those for whom it is" (Schinkel 2018: 5). This differentiation, argues Schinkel, hinges on racist exclusion, so that even non-white citizens may still be subject to demands for integration. Integration problematises the very being of immigrants and their descendants, "pitting 'society' over against individuals that are racialized in particular ways" (ibid: 3).

### *3.3. Need for critical recognition theory*

The framing of Muslim identity politics and calls for inclusion in terms of integration constitutes, according to Gianni (2013, 2016), a form of misrecognition. Yet, I hold that the continuity of integration demands together with processes of recognition cannot merely be termed a wrong or lacking application of the otherwise wholly benign concept of recognition. Especially when dealing with racially and religiously othered groups, whose inclusion in the realm of recognition and multicultural claims-making has been questioned even in scholarly writing, and with view to the fact that recognition and integration debates work simultaneously in reality when it comes to groups from Muslim-majority countries, an engagement with race-

critical and postcolonial recognition literature is needed to enquire into recognition constellations themselves and the very terms of recognition in Western liberal nation-states.

A critical reading of recognition has rarely entered discussions on the official recognition of Muslims in Europe. Morsi (2017) applies insights from Fanon (2008 [1952]) to the case of Muslims in the post-9/11 era, but speaks of recognition in abstract societal terms, not considering actual official processes of recognition nor the European context. Authors who do issue a postcolonial critique of European recognition processes of Muslim communities, namely Hafez (2018) and Topolski (2018), attend insufficiently to the diversity within this group, not accounting for the diverging positions and evaluations of recognition available in Western Europe between different groups subsumed in the category of “Muslims”. Therefore, the following section, after outlining established Hegelian conceptualisations of recognition, introduces feminist, race-critical and postcolonial interpretations of the recognition paradigm, which inform my analysis of official recognition processes of Alevi and Sunni communities in Western Europe and their relationship to community members’ feelings of belonging.

#### **4. Recognition theories and their critiques**

##### *4.1. Hegelian conceptualisations of recognition*

Hegelian conceptualisations of recognition assume that mutual recognition of self and other is constitutive of one’s subjectivity. The sense of self develops by being recognised by the other, while denial of such recognition means an injury to the self. Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor are main contributors to the academic debate on recognition since the 1990s and, more specifically, to its Hegelian theorisation. Mutual recognition for Honneth is an ethical requirement because it forms the precondition for individual and social freedom, personhood, full autonomy and a positive self-relation, while its lack can have adverse psychological effects.

Taylor (1992) similarly regards recognition as a way to and a reflection of autonomy, not only on an individual level, however, but also in relation to groups. Taylor pairs this with the concept of authenticity, the notion that one's own identity and way of life is specific to and originating only in oneself. The identities that demand recognition are those that are authentic, meaning inwardly generated, while inauthenticity, according to Taylor, should not be recognised. For both Honneth and Taylor, recognition is a moral imperative because it is not only a subjective need but also a prerequisite for successful identity formation. According to Taylor (1992: 26), inasmuch as misrecognition can inflict real harm, "[d]ue recognition is not just a courtesy we owe to people. It is a vital human need."

Among Honneth's and Taylor's most prominent critics is Nancy Fraser. Fraser (2000) charges the previously described conception of recognition with the reification of identities and the displacement of redistributive struggles. This mistakenly places economic injustice and the social-structural basis of discrimination as merely secondary to identity misrecognition. Fraser (2003) is critical of a focus on identity, ethics and psychology because it leads to a neglect of institutions and precludes the possibility of a democratic adjudication of justice claims. Hence, struggles for recognition, she argues, need to be reconceptualised to entail the recognition of the status of individual group members as full participants in society. Accordingly, misrecognition should not be conceived of as a hindrance to self-realisation but as institutionalised status subordination, which prevents a certain group from equal participation. Fraser, however, cannot fully depart from the intellectual tradition in which Honneth and Taylor are firmly established. She engages in a normative interpretation of recognition as enabling justice and participation, grounded on Rousseau, Kant and Hegel (Balzer 2014). Furthermore, she continues to conceptualise recognition as a constitutive part of human nature by treating factors of difference such as gender, class and race as distinctly and independently determining people in their full subjectivity, thereby endowing each person or

group with only one ground for recognition or misrecognition and generalising about the implications of recognition for diverse members of an identity group (Yuval-Davis 2011b).

#### *4.2. Feminist and intersectional critiques*

In contrast to this, feminist writers such as Butler (1990) contend that there does not exist a subject that retains its identity prior to its entrance into the contested cultural field and which awaits the recognition of this pre-formed identity. The act of recognition needs to be understood as a constitutive-performative act, which brings a subject into being in the first place through a power-inflected process of appellation and submission to norms of recognisability. Subjectivation is a power exercised on the subject, but also a power accepted and even desired by the same (Butler 1997). The reason for this readiness to be subjected is a desire for recognition, a fundamental desire for social existence itself, of which power takes advantage (Butler 2004). Rather than being singular and ultimate, recognition as a mode of subjectivation is a repetitive process, in which recognisable and intelligible subjects are constituted continuously. The subject status needs to be constantly regained and confirmed.

Writing specifically about legal discourses and institutions, Zylan (2011) argues that these not only respond to, regulate and discipline but also produce normative conceptions of self, identity and sexuality. In this way, the process of legal recognition is fundamentally constitutive of subjectivity (*ibid.*: 37). At the same time, being subjected is not synonymous to being determined, as it leaves room for and even forms the basis of agency. Law's approval, however, comes at a price, namely self-discipline and participation in the construction of a truth regime (*ibid.*: 277). While various modalities of subject formation and forms of power such as race, gender or class simultaneously oppress and produce individuals, rights can only address each subject location independently (Brown 2000). As a consequence, in law and in court, people never appear as the "complex, compound, and internally diverse subjects that they are" and their suffering is thereby fractured (*ibid.*: 237-8). By making a legal claim, social actors

accept the rules, procedures and categories of law. They thereby “sacrifice the nuance of ordinary experience in favour of a formalized, truncated account of the facts” (Zylan 2011: 51). This limits forms of representation and possibilities of existence, as boundaries and complexities are being disciplined (McLaughlin et al. 2011).

#### *4.3. Post-colonial and race-critical readings*

These feminist intersectional readings of recognition are beginning to cast into doubt a major premise of dominant recognition theory, namely that recognition is innately good, enhancing human freedom, equality and justice, and that only misrecognition or the absence of recognition can be a source of harm. Instead, they already point to the idea that recognition itself can inflict injury, such as through epistemic violence (Spivak 2010 [1988]). Furthermore, the implication of recognition in issues of subjectivation and power is already indicated. However, Butler continues to think and write within universalising Western epistemological premises which conceive self, subject, justice, freedom, equality and recognition at the implicit exclusion of the racial other (Mills 1997). As Weheliye (2014) observes, Butler neglects to engage with black feminist scholars’ attempts to abolish the configuration of the human as Man in the Western humanist sense in order to imagine other forms of life. Accordingly, hegemonic powers offer to grant access to the spheres of full humanity through recognition, making subjugated groups compete for these limited resources, “leading to a strengthening of the very mechanisms that deem certain groups more disposable or not-quite-human than others” (ibid.: 13-4).

In this vein, critical race and postcolonial scholars reveal the implicit racial exclusions in the conceptualisation of self and equality as well as the racial hierarchies and power inequalities structuring the positions of recogniser and recognisee. Fanon (2008 [1952]) critically analyses the affirmative relationship between recognition and freedom established by Hegel and scrutinises its applicability to colonial settings. He challenges recognition’s

conception as a source of freedom and dignity for the individual who becomes a full subject only by virtue of mutual recognition, and instead posits it as a field of asymmetrically distributed power, whose structures it cannot transcend. Fanon argues that colonial subjects come to identify with and internalise white recognition, limiting the possibilities of their freedom and becoming the measure against which they compare themselves among each other.

Drawing on the deliberations of Fanon, Coulthard (2014) offers a critical appraisal of the theory and politics of recognition in contemporary Western settler states. As recognition remains something that is granted to subaltern groups by a dominant entity, its “failure to significantly modify, let alone transcend, the breadth of power at play in colonial relationships” is already prefigured (ibid.: 30-1). Hence, the politics of recognition as they unfold today reproduce “the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power” (ibid.: 3). As argued similarly by Balaton-Chrimes and Stead (2017: 9), race “continues to structure the relationships of recognition and accommodation” in settler and non-settler postcolonial Western nation-state contexts. “What the state demands is recognisable difference: not too much, not too little” (ibid.: 11). Recognition within such systems precludes any radical alterity that exceeds or undermines the status quo on which nation-states base their legitimacy (Povinelli 1998).

#### *4.4. Recognition in national politics of belonging*

On an epistemological level, dominant recognition theories leave conceptions of subject and self intact, as well as the legitimacy of the political community in which recognition takes place, inclusion into which allegedly needs only to proceed more justly and liberally. They assume the possibility of adequate recognition relationships in existing national arrangements, where existing power asymmetries can be sufficiently managed and overcome both by virtue of recognition as well as with recognition as a means to an emancipatory end (Balaton-Chrimes & Stead 2017). In this, they do not question the kind of equality to be achieved in political

systems founded on racial exclusion (Goldberg 2002), in which non-whites are only the objects of social agreements (Mills 1997). The idea that more recognition will lead to more equality and inclusion in nation-states needs to be fundamentally questioned. Without addressing the generative structures of the racial boundaries of nation-state belonging, state recognition may not only be insufficient to amend inequalities but may even serve to cement these structures.

All the while, subaltern groups cannot easily turn their back to recognition, although that is what Coulthard (2014) advises. It is one of recognition's dilemmas that it is made difficult not to want and to pursue. As posited by Spivak (2015 [1993]) and Brown (2000), political imagination is historically limited so that we are constrained to need and want rights despite the fact that they do not serve our enfranchisement. Moreover, recognition claims can aim to debunk dominant conceptualisations of the nation, contesting unequal distribution of national belonging and the boundaries of national community as well as offering "alternative accounts of nation" (Busbridge 2018: 7). However, the issue is not only whether subaltern groups can and do contest dominant national imaginings and assert their right to belonging in claims for recognition, but to what extent they are capable of displacing hegemonic conceptions in doing so. The differentiation between homely and governmental belonging of minority subjects residing in racially defined nation-states, introduced above, elaborates on this unequal distribution of the power to define the terms of belonging.

Having established recognition's embeddedness in and reiteration of national politics of belonging marked by racial exclusion, accounting for its conflation with Western state's integration agendas towards Muslims and migrants as well as conditioning its influence on feelings of belonging, the following section aims to elaborate what has so far only been implied: these observations apply despite the fact that this study analyses the official recognition of *religious* communities in secular states. For this to become evident, the following section offers a critical genealogy of Western secularism and the category of religion that reveals their mutual

constitutedness and the decisive role played by racialised conceptions of non-Christian groups within and outside Europe.

## **5. Religious recognition in secular states and the role of race**

### *5.1. Governance and claims-making through secularism*

The recognition of organisations as religious communities with official status and privileges, as well as discourses that frame the integration of migrants as both hindered by and achieved through religion, take place in the context of self-proclaimed *secular* liberal democracies. In the common usage of the term, secularism denotes the separation between religious and political spheres and authorities (Casanova 2009b). Yet, while secular states claim religious neutrality, they are, and have historically been, involved in the regulation and management of religious life and may even exacerbate interfaith inequalities (Mahmood 2016). Hence, in order to conceptualise the religious recognition of communities by the secular state, one needs to depart from the common but “erroneous understanding that liberal secularism abstains from the domain of religious life” and instead realise that “secularism has historically entailed the regulation and reformation of religious belief” (Mahmood 2009: 858).

A number of authors have conceived of religion as a category of secular state governance. As stated by Mahmood (2016: 3), secularism is “the modern state’s sovereign power to reorganize substantive features of religious life, stipulating what religion is or ought to be, assigning its proper content, and disseminating concomitant subjectivities.” It is “a discursive operation of power” that generates and naturalises the public, private, political and religious spheres, their boundaries and content (ibid.). By “authorizing as ‘religious’ all those practices and institutions that they are unable to control directly”, governments “appeared to concede sovereignty but in fact perform[s] it by setting the parameters of what is admissible as

‘religion’” (Stack 2015: 8). In this manner, to lay claim to the category of religion “is to accept government's power to authorise” (ibid.: 10). For those who want to cooperate with the state and enjoy its recognition, the latter reserves the right to transform and educate them according to its ideas in order to achieve its own recognition as an authoritative power (Tezcan 2012).

In this way, secularism is a discourse of power through which national governments both legitimise and obscure themselves, presenting themselves as neutral towards religion, yet producing religion as a problem. It can become a means of othering and perpetuating inequality from a position of alleged universalism (Anidjar 2008). Historically, religion-making has been a violent exercise of coloniality, as argued by Mandair and Dressler (2011). Yet, at the same time, and as can be observed in processes of religious recognition, minority groups within the nation-state can draw on religionist discourse and the secular pledge of religious neutrality and equal treatment “to reestablish their identities as legitimate social formations” (ibid.: 21). Claiming recognition can be an act of citizenship and may be interpreted by the concerned communities as a struggle for visibility, emancipation, independence and acknowledgement. The category of religion is a means through which the nation-state and its social order are constructed and maintained, but it also allows marginal groups to gain recognition and acceptance if they organise and present themselves accordingly (Owen & Taira 2015).

This is especially relevant for my case study of the official recognition of Sunni and Alevi communities, whose members either migrated from Turkey to Europe or are the descendants of such migrants. The laicist discourse and system which the new Turkish Republic adopted from the West upon its foundation in 1923, superseding the religious rule of the Ottoman Empire, work to normalise a particular notion of legitimate and illegitimate religion (Dressler 2011). The Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs, established in 1924 as both secular-political and theological authority, distinguishes between religion and culture, between allegedly objective essentials of true (Sunni) religion and contingent (Alevi) additions (ibid.).

Furthermore, Turkish legal discourse and practice participate in the definition and demarcation of religious and secular spheres as well as in the production of knowledge about Alevism, as they try to establish its relationship to Sunni Islam (ibid.). While in Turkey Alevism has been excluded from hegemonic definitions of religion, both Sunnis and Alevis in Europe need to navigate preconditions to their recognition that are often framed in terms of compatibility with secular principles, such as their membership in religions that are distinct from (foreign) politics and compliant with constitutional values. In this, Alevis' defence of secularism and democracy in Turkey serves them as argument for Alevism's recognition as religion by secular governments in Europe, whereas Sunnis call out the latter's pledge to equal treatment of all religions. However, while especially Alevis in Europe appeal to Western secularism in their search for recognition, which they contrast with the religious bias of the Turkish state and the unequal distribution of its recognition, secularism in Europe similarly contains normative conceptions about religion in general and non-Christian groups in particular, as will now be shown.

### *5.2. Secularism as ideology with normative conceptions about religion*

Western secularist discourse commonly assumes an evolutionary understanding of history in which religion constitutes a superseded stage of development (Casanova 2009b). The alleged religious decline in the West and the concomitant triumph of secularism are part of a normative-teleological theory of modern development originating in the Enlightenment (ibid. 2009a). The secular is thereby portrayed as a natural, reason-based substratum that remains when religion is taken away (ibid. 2009b). In this manner, "secularism has the function of confirming the superiority of our present modern secular outlook over other supposedly earlier and therefore more primitive religious forms of understanding" and "turns the particular Western Christian historical process of secularization into a universal teleological process of human development" (ibid.: 1054). Therefore, secular liberal principles "are not neutral

mechanisms for the negotiation of religious difference and remain quite partial to certain normative conceptions of religion, subject, language and injury” (Mahmood 2009: 861).

Debates about the validity of satire on religious figures are a good illustration of this. In Western European debates, caricatures of religious figures have often been viewed as an example of the secular-religious impasse between freedom of speech and blasphemy (Mahmood 2009). Muslims in particular have been accused of their inability to accept caricatures as legitimate expressions of free speech and of their inappropriate outrage at such satire. While caricatures of Muslim religious figures often apply racist tropes, racism is not termed as such, but is instead legitimised as secular, and hence neutral, critique of religion (Doughan & Tzuberi 2018).

This discursively upheld incommensurability between the secular and the religious, especially Islam, is naturalised while the role of Christianity as constitutive of the social imaginary of Europe is obscured, thereby maintaining “self-serving secularist claims that only secular neutrality can guarantee individual freedoms” (Casanova 2009a: 226-7). Such claims and understandings form the basis of debates on the compatibility of religion and certain religious groups with national-secular views, values and principles, which in turn provide the context in which processes of official recognition of religious communities unfold. In order to be able to assess critically this discursive and political context in which official religious recognition of Muslim communities takes place, the following paragraphs offer an outline of the genealogy of secularism and its coconstitutive relationships with religion and race.

### *5.3. The division of the religious and the secular in Europe*

In both political and academic discourse (Joppke & Torpey 2013, Klausen 2005, Koopmans et al. 2005, Statham et al. 2005), it is argued that recently increasing religious pluralism in Europe, particularly through migration from Muslim majority countries, challenges

Western European secularism, necessitating its assertion and defence, especially because Islam is believed inherently to fuse politics, law and religion. Moreover, the enlargement of the European Union eastwards, especially the debated inclusion of Turkey as a self-proclaimed modern-secular as well as Muslim country, has reintroduced questions of the role of Christianity in European identity. While Christianity, or Judeo-Christian culture, is stated to define European identity and the context into which migrants, particularly Muslims, are expected to integrate (Topolski 2020), it is assumed that it was successfully domesticated and no longer intrudes public reason, discourse and statecraft. Yet, European secularism did not develop in a vacuum that was then externally challenged through migration or a possible accession of Turkey (Yegenoglu 2012). When Europe engages in politics of civilisational identity, using secularism and Christianity as tropes with which Muslims are conceptualised as “external to the essence of Europe”, it obscures the constitutive role that the Other has always had since the very invention of the concepts of religion and the secular (Asad: 2003: 165).

A critical genealogy of the secular and the religious reveals them to be dialectical twins. They are no opposite immutable essences, but “interdependent and necessarily linked in their mutual transformation and historical emergence” (Mahmood 2009: 836). A number of authors have convincingly argued that the dual notions of religion and the secular emerged simultaneously as particular Western Christian, or even Protestant, categories as products of a specific understanding of self-separation and self-reflexivity (Anidjar 2008, Casanova 2009b, Mandair & Dressler 2011). Anidjar (2008) holds that Christianity is not simply a religion among many others, as if there was something that religions naturally have in common, but instead, is that which invented the religious as separated from secular spheres, in the first place. Religion and its twin concept of secularism both emerged from Western Christendom, which applied this differentiation upon itself, terming itself as a religion instead of a whole complex sum of diverse institutions. Religion is, in this manner, a category which was discursively and conceptually

severed from categories of politics, economics and race. “Like that unmarked race, which, in the related discourse of racism, became invisible or ‘white,’ Christianity invented the distinction between religious and secular, and thus it made religion” (ibid.: 47).

This invention and definition of religion as the counterpart of the secular was globalised through colonisation, beginning in the early modern period, and subsequently entered into tension with other ways of drawing categorical boundaries (Mandair & Dressler 2011). In this way, a variety of non-Christian beliefs were assimilated into the Western Christian category of religion, always maintaining Christianity as the model to which those others should aspire (ibid.). This exclusion through inclusion makes them recognisable and comparable “as a measure of their historical difference from the West even as they are denied the ability to overcome or reform themselves except through a developmental process based on Western patterns” (ibid.: 15). They are at the beginning of an evolutionary ladder from religion to the secular, the uncritical religion as the distinguishing mark of the non-West. Hence, Christianity fashions itself as just one of many religions, albeit the only one able to critique and emancipate itself and submit to secularism, enlightenment and modernity (Anidjar 2008). In this way, the self is obscured behind the label of universalism and secularism, while the terms themselves already imply Othering and hierarchisation.

According to De Genova (2016), framing migration and Muslim presence as a problem to be solved by Europe is only possible when the European Question, meaning the constructed and discursive nature of Europe and its colonial foundation, is silenced. Secularism, in this vein, is not neutral or devoid of religion, but both are mutually constitutive. The secular-religious episteme is the product of a particular Western-Christian mode of conceiving of the world, which has historically served to classify and govern populations at home and abroad. From the outset, this was a comparative imaginary informed by colonialism and the Other within, in the same way as ideas of East and West are intrinsically co-dependent, maintaining a hierarchy

between the West and the rest, between groups also marked as racially different (Said 2003 [1978]). Within the borders of postcolonial Europe, the application of the category of religion to others, and relatedly state's granting of official religious recognition, remains a project of power and secular governance that is racially imbued (Anidjar 2008). This points to another profound entanglement of categories, namely those of religion and race. Establishing the profound interconnection between religion and race is important to discuss religious recognition's relationship to feelings of belonging, which is conditioned by its emplacement in the politics of belonging of nation-states, themselves informed by ideas about race (Goldberg 2002, Mills 1997, Sharma 2020).

#### *5.4. The mutual development of categories of religion and race*

Early disidentification practices of medieval Christendom established differences in body and practice between Christians on the one hand and Jews and Muslims on the other, as internal and external others respectively. As described by Thomas (2010: 1747) with regard to the European Jewish population, by the thirteenth century these differences were understood as intrinsic, and by the fourteenth century “visual and literary images of blackness had become familiar markers of not only territorial distance between groups of people, but also cultural differences between those within the same territory.” Both Muslims and Jews were pictured as black or featuring other identifiable physical characteristics associated with animals and, in the case of Muslims, understood as synonymous with Moors or Turks (Meer 2013: 387-8, Love 2017: 39). As argued by Thomas (2010), this construction of others' racial inferiority through Church doctrine formed the basis for the denial of socio-economic rights, which runs in continuance with the emergence of the nation-state as a socio-political entity and the latter's exclusive terms of belonging.

In this way, what would today be described as racialisation of religious Others has in fact always taken place, even if the concept of racism might not yet have existed at the time to

identify discourse as such. Thus, the emergence of the category of religion is linked to the emergence of the category of race (Jansen & Meer 2020). By using the term race-religion constellation, Topolski (2020) seeks to reveal the coconstitution of the categories of race and religion. Similarly, as argued by Anidjar (2008), it is not that religion is an older and race a modern category but rather that the two are contemporary and co-extensive. Yet, their use as discrete categories obscures this intersection. Race and religion have collapsed or have been opposed at different times to serve different efforts in defining “Europe”, the West or Western Christendom which, at the same time, rendered invisible their own role in creating these categories (ibid.). The implicit racial meanings of religions or implicit religious meanings of racial positions are not static, but have changed over time. As will be shown further below, the racial designation of Jews in Western Europe and North America, for instance, has altered considerably and remains a point of contention. Yet, a deep entanglement of racial and religious locations endures until today (Husain 2019, Topolski 2020).

##### *5.5. The racialisation of Muslims in the West*

As shown above, in contemporary European secularist discourse, religious, and especially Muslim, identity is considered a personally adopted opinion and therefore supposedly cannot be the target of racism, but merely of legitimate secular critique of religion (Jansen & Meer 2020). Yet, as argued by Meer and Modood (2009: 345), “no one chooses to be born into a society in which to look like a Muslim or to be a Muslim creates suspicion, hostility or failure to get the job they applied for.” Balibar and Wallerstein (1991) coined the term new racism, which they see arising from a postcolonial era in which the division of humanity takes place within European political spaces. In this manner, the idea of insurmountable religious and cultural differences, assuming that “individuals are the exclusive heirs and bearers of a single culture”, must also be understood as racism (ibid.: 23). Specifically,

this includes “an image of Islam as a 'conception of the world' which is incompatible with Europeanness and an enterprise of universal ideological domination” (ibid.: 24).

Moreover, the racialisation of Muslims in Europe does not merely draw on perceived religious, ideological and cultural differences, which are considered as innate, unchanging and determining, but also includes the conflation of Muslimness with national-territorial origin and exterior attributes, as already mentioned above. Said (2003 [1978]) famously showed the extent of the vast colonial project of Orientalism in which the arts, scientific disciplines and governments aimed to represent, study and rule the East, ultimately coinciding with Islam, the most Other of all religions and the diametrical opponent of secular Christianity, the West or Europe. Through Orientalism the essentialised, racialised difference between Christians and the rest, particularly Muslims, was established, not only othering customs and beliefs, but also locking Muslims into a particular appearance and geographical origin.

A large section of the US-American social scientific literature conceives of Muslims as a racialised group, often citing post-9/11 counterterrorism policies as a political backdrop (Jhutti-Johal & Singh 2020, Kazi 2019, Love 2017, Selod 2018). As Bayoumi (2006) shows, the post-9/11 monitoring and profiling based on country of origin stands in a long legal tradition of racial classification, and especially the racialisation of Muslims. This also leads to mistakenly attributing a Muslim identity to non-Muslim groups. In this manner, Arab Jews (Arviv 2018) and Sikhs (Jhutti-Johal & Sing 2020) are mentioned in the literature on the post-9/11 racial profiling as groups who are taken for Muslims.

Similarly, the European racial category of “Muslim” subsumes groups such as Alevis who have a conflictual relationship with the Turkish state and Sunni Muslim majority. The latest report by the German immigration ministry on Muslims in Germany (Pfundel et al. 2021) groups Alevis into the category of “Muslims”, the latter being identified on the basis of their names and the country in the Near and Middle East or North Africa in which they, their parents

or grandparents were born. Meanwhile in Turkey, (Sunni) Muslimness also forms a racial category in conjunction with Turkishness, yet one that assumes the power position of whiteness at the exclusion of others such as Kurds and Alevis (Ergin 2017, Ünlü 2016). Hence, while both Sunnis and Alevis from Turkey navigate anti-Muslim racism in Europe, the latter also continue to reckon with their racialisation and exclusion by Sunnis in Turkey and Europe. This, as will be discussed in the following section, creates a differential positioning of racialised groups in European hierarchies of belonging.

## **6. Racial hierarchies of belonging in Europe and Turkey**

### *6.1. Hierarchical positioning of racialised groups*

The conception of a racial hierarchy has preoccupied US-American social scientific literature for more than a century under the category of race relations (Parks 1950). It assumes the existence of a black-white binary as well as groups between these two poles whose racial definition and location is historically and contextually contingent. Bonilla-Silva (2002), for instance, speaks of a tripartite hierarchy constituted by whites, honorary whites, and collective blacks. While the racial map is changing, as well as the contents and meanings of racial categories, the binary between black and white is deemed stable (Brodkin 1998). In this manner, scholars have observed different processes of movement along this racial hierarchy, specifically the “whitening” of groups previously deemed non-white. Although these groups can support or oppose this process, whitening remains a predominantly white activity, requiring the hegemonic sanction of a group as white (Gans 2012). Classical examples for this in the US-American context are constituted by Irish, Polish or Italian immigrant groups. Relatedly, the so-called model minority status of Asian Americans has been discussed (Prashad 2000). Conceiving of this hierarchy as a neat top-down structure would, of course, be too simplified, as there exist

simultaneous hierarchies along various social locations such as race, class and gender (Song 2004). However, the concept of a racial hierarchy remains useful for its insight on the movement towards and barring from whiteness, not in absolute but in relative terms, which so far have not been applied to different groups within a single race-religious category.

Of particular interest to this study is the changing racial placement of Jewish Americans, as this group similarly forms a racialised religious minority. Brodtkin (1998) connects the change of American Jews' racial assignment with their upward class mobility and changing state policy, as well as varying scientific and public discourse about race in general and Jews in particular. The case of Jews in America also shows that being and becoming white is a matter of boundary-drawing to blackness. Brodtkin (*ibid.*) argues that Jewish male intellectuals contributed to constructing Jewish whiteness by contrasting Jews as a model minority to African-Americans, Italians and Puerto Ricans. Moreover, the fact that by the turn of the twentieth century Jewish entertainers were major blackface performers shows that they were negotiating the racial constraints of a country to which they had fled and on whose acceptance they depended (Rogin 1996). Yet, drawing a linear trajectory of Jews' racial placement in America from formerly non-white to unquestionably white does not do justice to the reality of a fragile, contingent and contested process (Freedman 2008). Persistent anti-Jewish racism speaks of the limits of assimilation to whiteness (Adams Parham 2020, Berkovits 2018).

Furthermore, (contingent) accession to whiteness may afford material and social benefits, but also results in a dilemma and comes at a price (Goldstein 2006). Jewish Americans have been unable fully to reject or embrace the racist power structure of white America, uncomfortably caught between a need to distinguish themselves from and the wish to show support for black Americans (*ibid.*). Climbing the racial hierarchy has also necessitated downplaying or denying their persistent discrimination, as testifying to being racially discriminated makes one part of a racialised lower class, thereby impeding one's ability to

respond systematically to discrimination (Fox et al. 2015, Tehranian 2018). This dilemma of whitening, the inability to either fully reject or embrace it, is also applicable to the recognition of one's acceptable difference, as shown above.

As this insight about the hierarchical positioning of race-religious groups refers to the American context, the question of its translatability to Europe, where the separation between blacks and whites has occurred less on Europe's own soil than in its colonies, arises. Racism continues to be seen as something foreign to Europe and, in treating the Holocaust as a point of reference, a thing of the past (Goldberg 2006). While the tension between Christian secularism and Islam is admitted to be a European concern, racism is not, thus obscuring the coconstituted development of race and religion and its role in the (self)making of Europe (Anidjar 2008). Foner (2015) attempts to collapse these boundaries by asking whether Islam in Western Europe is comparable to race in the United States. Yet, the question of where Muslims stand in the European racial hierarchy, which exists despite being widely denied, is rarely posed. When it is, "ethnic" and religious locations are regarded as distinct and not understood as a co-determinant constellation (Bleich 2009, Gesthuizen et al. 2021). Furthermore, as pointed out by Ponce (2018), the European concept of "ethnic" hierarchy does not refer to political-structural disparities, but has been relegated to a strand of social-psychological research on attitudes and perceptions of members of different groups towards each other. Ponce (2018) does not significantly depart from this strand of research, stating that Muslims are ranked near the bottom of "a racial-ethnic preference hierarchy" (ibid.: 22). Writing once more on the North American context, Ponce (2020: 2801-2) observes that black Americans at times draw boundaries to Muslim Americans, showing that "other recognised minority groups systematically marginalize Muslims to secure their position above the very bottom of an accepted racial-ethnic hierarchy."

Not only do I apply these observations on the positioning of Muslims in national racial hierarchies to the European context and assume a deeper understanding of the co-constitution

of race and religion, but I make them speak to the issue of differentialising *within* the race-religious category of Muslims as part of their racialisation and their official recognition. I argue that the internal divide of racialised groups between “good” and “bad” representatives, which processes of their recognition spur on, elevates one over the other, but ultimately entails their persistent debarment from the status of whiteness in the racial hierarchy of belonging.

## *6.2. Divide and Rule: The “good” and the “bad” of racialised groups*

In their conceptualisation of a new racism in Europe, Balibar & Wallerstein (1991: 24) already note that its implicit civilising mission goes hand in hand with the “practice of assimilating dominated populations and a consequent need to differentiate and rank individuals or groups in terms of their greater or lesser aptitude for - or resistance to assimilation.” More recently, other authors similarly note that an important aspect of the racialisation and governance of groups is a constructed dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, the “good” and the “bad” within this group (Maira 2009, Mamdani 2002, Meer 2013, Morsi 2017, Topolksi 2018). This governance practice of divide and rule has a distinctly colonial pedigree and, in that context, was already applied to Muslim populations (Mamdani 2012). In the Dutch colony of Aceh, for instance, a double strategy was put into practice: tolerance of religious Muslim life on the one hand and brutal oppression of any political movement challenging colonial rule on the other. Those “traditional chiefs”, who were collaborating with the colonial authorities, were rewarded and those rejecting the colonial rule were cast as “political Islam” and heavily punished (ibid.). Drawing on such insight and connecting practices of colonial governance to the governance of internal religious others in Europe, Topolski (2018) analyses the current European state management of Muslims in light of the history of state treatment of the European Jewish population. She compares current Muslim councils to Jewish representative bodies from the seventeenth century onwards. Jewish communities were forced to create vertical

institutions, through which select “good” Jews, designated by the authorities, were allowed to intercede with the latter as representatives of their community.

Both the treatment of colonial others and racialised religious minorities within the boundaries of Europe form, as pointed out by Mamdani (2012: 39), the historical antecedents to the current policy of distinguishing “Europe’s ‘good Muslim’ from its Muslim political adversaries.” In light of the racialisation and securitisation of Muslims in discourses on terrorism, not only in Europe but also in North America, authors have shown how differentiation is regularly made between “good” moderate domesticated Muslims, and “bad” radical, politicised, threatening, foreign ones (Maira 2009, Mamdani 2002, Morsi 2017). In this manner, racialised religious groups such as Muslims are internally divided into deserving and less deserving factions. As has been powerfully shown by Fanon (2008 [1952]) and applied to the case of Muslims in the war-on-terror era by Morsi (2017), such ascriptions are internalised by racialised individuals and form a discursive restraint that necessitates them to talk back, thus limiting their possibilities for self-representation. Muslims in the West are compelled to negotiate hierarchies of deservingness, often based on their supposed level of integration, modernity, secularisation and value compatibility.

Defining whiteness and creating the terms of inclusion into and exclusion from it, distinguishing groups into those with supposedly greater or lesser capacity for inclusion, have historically been major elements in processes of nation-building. As has been shown, being white is intimately tied to national belonging. In contrast, being deemed “good” by the white majority, or rather “better” in relative-hierarchical terms, does not lead to full inclusion and equality, as also pointed out in critical scholarship on recognition (Coulthard 2014). Meanwhile, as shown above, minority groups themselves may confirm their better adaptedness and compatibility in acts of boundary drawing to other, more denigrated minority groups. The case of Jewish migrants in America already suggested that a history of persecution informs attempts

to seek recognition and affirm one's belonging in the new place of residence, necessitating a navigation of the different racial hierarchies existing in the host country. For Alevis, although full belonging in Europe remains unattainable, their change of relative status with regard to Sunnis, under whom they have been oppressed in Turkey and have continued to be discriminated in Europe, is what makes recognition in Europe meaningful. The relevance of these transnational connections will now be demonstrated.

### *6.3. Global and local, national and transnational racial hierarchies*

As shown above, the racial category of Muslims also includes groups who are taken as Muslims based on national origin and "foreign" appearance. Alevis have common national origins with established Sunni Muslim communities in German-speaking Western Europe, which often leads to their racialised conflation with the latter and who, in some cases, also consider themselves Muslim. However, they draw their boundaries either to Islam in general or to Sunni Islam more particularly, attempting to distance themselves from common conceptualisations of that group in Europe by stressing their compatibility with European values of secularism, democracy and gender equality in a context of anti-Muslim racism. Yet, it is not just this European context of anti-Muslim racism, the contestation of Islam's compatibility with European values and the monitoring of Muslims' integration that influence Alevis' boundary drawing to (Sunni) Muslims. The different positions assumed by Alevis and Sunnis in European recognition processes and their meaning-making of such recognition in Europe are, I argue, also influenced by their different placements in the Turkish racial hierarchy.

Hence, another dimension to consider with regard to racial hierarchies is the manner in which they apply, translate and change across national borders. Although racism and nationalism exist in a dialectical unity (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991), the former also exceeds the latter and functions on a transnational scale. This firstly pertains to the existence of a racial system that was globalised through colonialism and Orientalism, and which positioned

European whiteness at the top of any hierarchy (Xypolia 2016). Within such a global hierarchy of power, racial theories and vocabularies originating in European contexts travel and are applied to local specificities by dominant political groups, who meanwhile remain acutely aware of their inferiorisation by the West and “intent on correcting these views by concocting racial theories of their own” (Ergin 2017: 6). Secondly, groups and individuals cross national boundaries through migration and may find their racial position altered thereupon. In this regard, Arviv (2018) describes how Mizrahi Jewish migrants from Israel are taken for Muslims due to a racialisation of both religions in the Western context, Jews as white (to a limited extent) and Muslims as non-white. This is why in North America, Mizrahi Jews may stress their Jewishness to gain access to whiteness and dissociate from non-white Middle Eastern immigrants. Racial hierarchies, meanings and identifications are thus spatially and temporally contingent to a certain degree, while still connected to a global racial system.

In the case of Turkey, Western race thinking was emulated and applied to the local context with the founding of the Turkish Republic by the Kemalist elites, who actively reinvented Turkish language and history to fashion white modern Turkishness as against the Ottoman past as well as Kurdish, Alevi, Greek and Armenian others (Ergin 2016, Gökay 2016, Maksudyan 2005, Ünlü 2016, Zeydanlioglu 2008). As a further and subsequent instance of the transnational connections of national racialised contexts, “Nazi commentators praised the so-called ethnic cleansing of Anatolia calling for adaptation to ‘Turkish methods’ for a solution to the minority questions” (Xypolia 2016: 116).<sup>2</sup> In this way, the Turkish interpretation of Western race-thinking returned once more to inform racist practices in German-speaking Europe which, in turn, shaped the context in which after the Second World War, both Alevi and Sunni migrants from Turkey found themselves. Their religious recognition today allows for the continued

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed account of the “ethnic cleansing” of Anatolia, see chapter 4.

operation of racial hierarchies and reiterates the boundaries to full belonging, which Alevis and Sunnis navigate in light of their different racial positions in Turkey.

## **7. Conclusion: Religious recognition in (trans)national racial hierarchies**

Despite the fact that current processes of official incorporation of Islam and Alevism in Western Europe are framed in terms of religious recognition, I argue that they reiterate national politics of belonging structured by racial hierarchies. This can be accounted for when taking into consideration race-critical and postcolonial readings of recognition. These draw attention to the implicit racial exclusions in the notions of self, equality and freedom that form the basis of established Hegelian conceptualisations of recognition, as well as to the racial hierarchies and power inequalities structuring the positions of recogniser and recognisee. They question the intrinsic good of recognition, especially in racialised contexts and when granted by state authorities to “its” minorities, by showing that it potentially reiterates the very asymmetries it purports to overcome. Muslims’ missing equality in Western liberal nation-states is therefore less a matter of lacking or mis-recognition, but of recognition’s emplacement in and reiteration of national politics of belonging in which racialised groups are hierarchised according to their ability and deservingness to be included.

Moreover, the argument of official religious recognition’s reiteration of national politics of belonging structured by racial hierarchies is substantiated when critically analysing the secular context in which religious communities seek and are granted states’ recognition, which allows for anti-Muslim racism couched in terms of immensurability with secular values, and when tracing the genealogy of the European categorical divide of the secular and the religious based on the Othering of non-Christian groups. Furthermore, Western conceptions of race and religion are codetermined, their mutual development being closely connected to Europe’s

subjugation of other groups, both within and outside its boundaries. Muslim, in this regard, is both a religious and a racial category, and it has conceptually existed in Europe as the quintessential counter-image of Western Christendom. At the same time, in the nation-state context of Turkey, Sunni-Muslim Turkishness has been reinterpreted as the superior racial position, excluding Alevi and other minority groups from the definition of national identity. Western European secularism and its application in Turkey, denotes the definition, circumscription and regulation of the religious, but can also be appealed to in processes of religious claims-making.

While whiteness stands as an invisible benchmark against which non-white others are measured, groups within the race-religious category of Muslim negotiate their more or less acceptable difference from and compatibility with European values. Being deemed a “good” representative of a racialised group does not, however, lead to full inclusion but instead requires the confirmation of the imposed racial hierarchy. At the same time, as migrants move from one national racial hierarchy to another, their recognition within the confines of the latter configures as liberatory in comparison with their ongoing lack of recognition in the former. Applying the concept of racial hierarchies to different groups that in Western Europe form part of the same race-religious category, but whose relation to one another is structured by power inequalities deriving from their respective majority and minority positions in their common country of origin, reveals that the stakes and benefits of European recognition apply differently to various “Muslim” groups. For Sunnis, religious recognition in Europe cannot dispel persistent racism. For Alevi, it confers distinction from Sunni Muslims and acknowledgement for elements of their identity which have been grounds for their discrimination in Turkey. Yet, as Alevi stress their compatibility with European society in opposition to their Sunni counterpart, such boundary drawing also coincides with European discourse on Islam and may circumscribe Alevi’ role to that of the “good” Muslim and compatible migrant, without addressing past

violence and lacking recognition in Turkey as well as continued discrimination by Sunnis in Europe from which official recognition in Europe derives its importance for many Alevis in the first place.

In this way, viewing religious recognition as both means of claims-making and set in and between racially-structured national regimes of belonging, conditions its ability to affect feelings of belonging. Given that the race-religion constellation has served as a foundation on which Western Europe has conceived of itself, race-religious Others within the boundaries of postcolonial and multicultural Europe can be subjects of toleration and state recognition, but largely remain outside of conceptions of a national “we”. The conceptual distinction between homely and governmental belonging sheds light on the kind of belonging that official recognition offered in Western nation-states and in a context of anti-Muslim racism is (not) able to achieve. Although minority groups entertain a sense of homely belonging and contest dominant national imaginings, they are debarred from having an equal say in the terms of belonging, as shown for instance in the continuance of integration demands in recognition processes. Meanwhile, Alevis’ and Sunnis’ recognition in Europe exists in tension with Turkish hierarchies of belonging, against which Alevis measure positively their attainment of recognition in Europe, while Sunnis lament the persistent lack of equality and acceptance despite religious recognition.

## **Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology**

### **1. Introduction**

This qualitative study was conducted as part of a larger research project on religion, migration and belonging in Europe, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (Ayata 2018). It constitutes an empirical microsociological enquiry into the relationship between official religious recognition and community members' feelings of belonging. Considering both Alevi and Sunni communities from Turkey in three Western European countries, namely Switzerland, Germany and Austria, specifically in the cities of Basel, Hamburg and Vienna, I employ two axes of comparison. In this way, I seek to answer the research question if and how official recognition of Alevi and Sunni communities affects community members' feelings of belonging across different locales. In this chapter, the research design and the key methods will be presented. Specifically, I will discuss this study's three fundamental methodological choices, namely the inclusion of both Alevi and Sunni communities and a comparison of these, the consideration of multiple locales based on each case's unique constellations in matters of religious recognition and finally, the conducting of microlevel ethnographic fieldwork, including qualitative semi-structured interviews with ordinary community members and participant observation.

This chapter is structured according to these three main methodological choices. The first section is dedicated to a discussion of the inclusion of both Alevi and Sunni communities in this study as two religious communities from Turkey that assume contrasting positions in their common country of origin, which has proven to be decisive for their differing negotiations of official recognition in Europe. The section also discusses the insight gained from a differential treatment of groups often subsumed under the category of "Muslims", especially in

relation to their racialisation, which is often neglected in writings on the state incorporation of Islam. The second section describes the selection of specific Alevi and Sunni associations in three countries and three cities. Following this, the third section constitutes an elucidation of the methods and process of data collection and analysis, touching on issues of field access, the selection of interview partners, the leading of interviews, as well as transcription, translation and computer-aided analysis. While I include reflections on my positionality as a researcher throughout the chapter, the final section is devoted exclusively to that topic.

## **2. Beyond the category of “Muslims”: Studying Alevi and Sunnis from Turkey**

This study examines the official recognition of both Sunni and Alevi communities in Western Europe, whose presence there can be traced back to migrant movements from Turkey in the second half of the twentieth century, and its effects on community members’ feelings of belonging. The focus on communities from Turkey is derived from the fact that due to post-war migration history, a large number of Sunnis and most Alevi in German-speaking Western Europe have either migrated from Turkey themselves or are the descendants of such migrants. Over the decades, organisations in Europe with institutional ties to Turkey or whose members migrated thence, have grown extensively in size and number. Moreover, a common country of origin of two communities inhabiting opposing positions, with Sunnis forming the national majority and Alevi having been subjected to general and institutional discrimination, provides an insightful basis of comparison of the manners in which Sunni and Alevi community members make sense of their respective state recognition in Western Europe.

Although in Western Europe Alevi and Sunnis are recognised as distinct religious communities, their respective recognition processes in the countries considered are connected in discussions and even in legal matters, or take place simultaneously. Moreover, these

recognition processes unfold while the belonging of Alevi and Sunni members remains a matter of political and public contestation. In fact, their recognition is set in contexts of racism against groups, the othering of which draws on national, phenotypical as well as cultural and religious differences. Such processes and debates affect and are perceived by Alevi and Sunni community members in divergent ways, based on their disparate societal and legal standing in Turkey, their common country of origin, where the Sunnis are represented in state structures, while Alevis lack state recognition. Throughout their history, Alevis have never possessed the official backing of any state. On the contrary, they have suffered state persecution on the basis of their alleged heresy during the Ottoman Empire and were subjected to assimilation into the Turkish republican national project. In selecting both Alevis' and Sunnis' official recognition in German-speaking Western Europe as the case study for this thesis, I assumed that the two communities' opposing status in Turkey inform their meaning-making of official recognition processes in Europe. Indeed, Sunnis' and Alevis' differing status in their common country of origin proved vital to their respective attitudes towards recognition in Europe.

Existing literature on the incorporation of Islam in Europe often neglects to attend to the diversity of "Muslim" groups, leading to a conflation of what Brubaker (2013) refers to as categories of analysis and categories of practice. This precludes accounting for power inequalities among "Muslim" groups and concomitant differences in their self-understanding and outlook. A number of critical authors aim to demonstrate how Muslims are governed and turned into acceptable state subjects in processes of normalisation, control and regulation, premised on the idea that they need to be civilised, reformed, emancipated and integrated (Amir-Moazami 2011, Engler 2014, Haddad & Golson 2007, Hernández Aguilar 2017, Peter 2010, Spielhaus 2006). Yet, even they fall short of deconstructing the category of "Muslims" itself and therefore unwittingly reiterate that which they seek to critique. A partial departure from the monolithic treatment of "Muslims" is presented by Tezcan (2012), who argues that

“Muslim” becomes an ethnic category, subsuming national affiliations such as Arab, Turk or Persian. Since Alevis’ German national representative body at the German Islam Conference promotes Alevism as independent from Islam, while apparently not contradicting the German state’s idea of a “domesticated” Islam, Tezcan even poses the question why Alevis are present at the Conference, offering as an argument their probable function of a balancing element (ibid.: 87-8). Yet, an enquiry into the backgrounds and complexities of Alevis’ positioning in the European state treatment of Islam is missing.

A more careful inspection of the groups counted among “Muslims” who form part of European state incorporation processes of Islam shows that these also include groups that are critical of majority Islam or even vehemently distance themselves from Islam altogether, as for instance Alevis. This ostensible contradiction can be explained by viewing “Muslim” as not only a religious but also a racial designation, referring to someone who has migrated or is the descendant of migrants from a country with an assumed Muslim majority population. As has been elaborated in the previous chapter, the categories of race and religion are coconstituted and have developed alongside one another in Western Christendom’s attempts to differentiate itself within and outside the borders of Europe, from its Jewish and Muslim Others respectively (Anidjar 2008). Including both Sunni and Alevi communities enabled the mapping of such racialisation and has ultimately helped to identify official recognition’s embeddedness in racialised national politics and transnational racial hierarchies of belonging, navigated by different groups within the same European race-religious category of “Muslim”.

### **3. Selecting Alevi and Sunni communities in three countries and three cities**

Germany, Austria and German-speaking Switzerland allow for state-level incorporation of religious communities into institutional structures. Yet, with regard to Alevi and Sunni

communities, recognition has proceeded differently in these three countries and produced different results for local groups. In order to gain insight into the ways in which religious recognition affects feelings of belonging of Alevi and Sunni migrants from Turkey and their descendants, I conducted multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in three cities in Switzerland, Germany and Austria, namely Basel, Hamburg and Vienna. These three cases were chosen due to a combination of similarities and differences regarding both macrolevel citizenship, migration, integration and church-state policies, and microlevel status and practices of religious incorporation.

### *3.1. Cross-national similarities*

All three countries provide for some form of rapprochement between the state and religious organisations, characterised by differing levels of recognition. This departs from a strict laicist approach as practised, for example, in France or the United States, where governments do not officially cooperate with religious communities. In Austria, political participation is state-centred with a strong consociational tradition that favours corporate interest groups including religious communities (Mourao Permoser et al. 2011). Switzerland is characterised by a more civic model with direct democratic institutions, and the German approach lies in between these two (Dolezal et al. 2010). Furthermore, the three countries have experienced a major influx of migrants from Turkey beginning in the early 1960s, which resulted in the gradual formation of religious migrant organisations whose recognition has become of growing concern in recent years. Austria granted national public-legal recognition to two Muslim organisations, Sunni and Islamic-Alevi. While in Germany forms of official recognition of Islam other than public corporation status have been devised, such as contracts or partnerships for Islamic religious instruction, Swiss authorities so far have only enabled certain Muslim practices at the individual level.

At the same time, the three countries have long followed a descent-based model of citizenship, conceptualising national membership on the basis of ethnocultural homogeneity and the existence of a distinctive national identity based on common language, history, ancestry and culture (Dolezal et al. 2010). Accordingly, migrant movements to Germany, Austria and Switzerland after the Second World War were initiated under the condition that migrants would remain guests and foreigners, distinct from the local population. Despite decades of population movement from different countries, be it labour migration, family reunion or asylum, the governments of Germany, Austria and Switzerland have long refused to be called countries of migration, and the status of foreigner has been transmitted across generations, precluding full political membership. For migrants from Turkey, this meant not only restricted possibilities for political participation, but also societal exclusion and a daily reality of racism.

Austrian and Swiss citizenship regimes are still considered the most exclusionary in Europe, stipulating high hurdles and many years of residence in the country until application for formal membership is possible (Hofhansel 2008). In Germany, at the turn of the millennium, restrictive naturalisation policies were liberalised. This was, however, accompanied by heated debates both in parliament and in public about what it means to be German (Özyürek 2014). Political discourses on migration and integration increasingly questioned the belonging of migrants and their descendants, demanding proof of loyalty and willingness to integrate (Engler 2014). In all three polities, right-wing populists have gained considerable electoral strength and all three have witnessed a marked increase in negative attitudes towards Muslims and Islam on which the political right has been drawing excessively. This happened significantly earlier in Austria and Switzerland, while such parties were virtually absent on a national level in Germany until the recent entry of the AfD (Alternative for Germany) into the national parliament (Dolezal et al. 2010). In this context, studying the potential of official religious recognition to affect

Alevi and Sunni community members' feelings of belonging is of high importance and this study is the first to do so.

### *3.2. Local particularities*

Basel, Hamburg and Vienna are the first places in their respective countries where Alevi and Sunni gained official recognition beyond the right to religious instruction in schools. In Basel, a major constitutional revision in the early 2000s enabled the official recognition of religious communities other than the established Christian churches and the Jewish community. This newly devised status of cantonal recognition remains a private law status with largely symbolic significance. In the official understanding, cantonal (or "small") recognition is seen as part of a process of adaptation and integration (Suter Reich 2013). The case of Basel is a rather unique example, as the joint cantonal recognition of two Alevi associations in 2012 preceded that of the Sunni community. The Basler Muslim Kommission (BMK), the organisation representing Muslim associations and mosques in Basel, applied unsuccessfully for public legal recognition in the late 1990s and was consulted during the constitutional revision process, but so far has not applied for cantonal recognition.

In Hamburg, the Alevi and the Sunni community simultaneously signed separate contracts with the local government. Public Alevi mobilisation in Hamburg began with the formation of the Alevi culture group in 1988 and the Alevi Culture Week in 1989, which also marked the beginning of the Alevi movement in Western Europe and the public debate on Alevism (Sökefeld 2008a). Similarly, Schura Hamburg, the local umbrella organisation uniting a variety of Sunni and Shiite mosque associations, is the first of its kind in Germany, and has become a model adopted in other cities (Spielhaus 2011). The 2012 contracts between the Hamburg senate and both the Muslim and Alevi communities regulate, amongst other things, holidays, interreligious school instruction, the construction of spaces of worship and burial. As such, they do not include substantive new provisions as many have already been in place before,

but they constitute a symbol of institutional recognition and establish these communities as official partners of the state (Haddad 2016, Körs 2019). At the same time, the contracts reflect security concerns towards Islam, as they bind its representatives to the Basic Law (Haddad 2016). Furthermore, the contract with the Sunni (and Shiite) organisations has been the object of political contestations, and its cancellation has been repeatedly demanded.

In Vienna, an Islam Law has already been in place since 1912. In 1979, the Islamic Faith Community in Austria (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich, IGGiÖ) was founded, forming the first Islamic religious community in Vienna on the basis of the Islam Law. The IGGiÖ is a corporation under public law and the official legal representation of Muslims residing in Austria. Further to this, the Austrian case is characterised by a major split running through the Alevi community. While the Alevi Community of Austria (ALEVI) has been enjoying public recognition as an Islamic faith within the Islam Law since 2013, the Alevi Federation of Austria's (AABF) claim for recognition as an independent faith outside of Islam has long been rejected. Another significant development was the revision of the Islam Law in 2015 and again in 2021, the latter in the wake of the shooting attack in Vienna's inner city in November 2020. These revisions included, among other things, the proscription of foreign financing, which impacted mosques with institutional ties to Turkey, and the requirement to maintain a list of all religious personnel working in the communities, sparking heavy critique from Muslim organisations since these demands were not levelled at other religious communities.

The three cases thus offer diverse levels and constellations of religious recognition, with different outcomes for Alevi and Sunni communities. While their status in Hamburg is formally equal, Alevis in Basel are granted a higher recognition status than their Sunni counterparts. In Vienna, one Alevi community is legally on par with both the Sunni community and the established Christian churches, while the other Alevi community was until very recently left

without any official status. Only a year and a half after my field stay in Vienna did it receive the subsidiary status of officially registered confessional community. Such varying degrees and distributions of religious recognition allow for an examination of the question if and how they affect community members' feelings of belonging.

### *3.3. Selection of specific Alevi and Sunni associations*

For each city, I selected at least one Sunni and one Alevi association, of which the community centres provided the space where I established contact with community members, participated in community events and chose interview partners. In Basel and Vienna, two Alevi communities were included. In Basel, the Cultural Association of Alevis and Bektashi (Kulturvereinigung der Aleviten und Bektaschi) as well as the Alevi Culture Centre Basel (Alevitisches Kulturzentrum Basel) filed jointly for cantonal recognition. In Vienna, the conflict regarding the unequal recognition status of the two Alevi communities had important bearings on my research question. It was therefore important to include both rival Alevi groups. In Hamburg, conversely, the Alevi Community Hamburg (Alevitische Gemeinde Hamburg) is the oldest and biggest local Alevi community as well as the Hamburg branch of the German Alevi Federation, the chair of which signed the state contract in Hamburg. It was the only Alevi community from this city included in this study.

As the Turkish-Sunni community in Western Europe is represented by a variety of organisations, a focus had to be chosen. Mosques run by organisations affiliated with the Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs (DITIB in Germany, ATIB in Austria and ITDV in Switzerland) make up the largest number of local mosque associations in the three countries considered. The Diyanet-affiliated Fetih Camii, founded in 1979, was the only Sunni association from Basel included in this study, being the biggest, oldest and most organised Turkish-origin Muslim community in Basel. It forms the headquarters of the local Muslim umbrella organisation, the BMK, and its board members traditionally assume leading positions

within the BMK. The latter had tried for recognition in Basel even before such a possibility was legally available, and it was in contact with the constitutional commission during the constitutional amendment process that would result in the creation of a cantonal recognition status. However, until now the BMK has not applied for the latter.

In Germany, DITIB still retains a privileged position among umbrella organisations in their relations with the government. At the same time, the influence of and dependency on the Turkish state as well as nationalist tendencies among member communities are often the subject of much critique, both locally and nationally (Beilschmidt 2015, Gorzewski 2015). In Hamburg, there are ten mosques belonging to DITIB. During a preparatory field visit to the regional DITIB headquarters in Hamburg, three communities were suggested to me as particularly suitable for my purposes, based on their size, good organisation and active community life. I contacted all three communities prior to my arrival in Hamburg via email, but only received a reply from the board chair of the community in the district of Bergedorf, which therefore became my initial Sunni case example in Hamburg. While my preliminary research on the history of Muslim institutionalisation and recognition in Hamburg had revealed the leading role that representatives of the local Millî Görüş<sup>3</sup> community, specifically the Centrum-Moschee, assumed in this regard, I initially focussed on the DITIB-affiliated mosque for reasons of comparability across the cities.

During the course of my stay in Hamburg, however, and especially after having conducted a number of expert interviews with Muslim representatives who had assumed primary roles before, during and after contract negotiations, the inclusion of a second Sunni Muslim community, namely one belonging to Millî Görüş, seemed necessary. The Centrum-Moschee itself was unsuitable for my purposes, its body of visitors being extremely large and

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<sup>3</sup> Other than Diyanet-affiliated organisations, Millî Görüş is an Islamic movement formed in the diaspora with ideological roots in the Turkish National Salvation Party (see chapter 4).

highly fluctuating due to its location in the city-centre of Hamburg. During an interview with the co-chair of Schura Hamburg and the regional branch of Millî Görüş, a community in the district of Wilhelmsburg was recommended to me, again based on its good organisation and active community life. My email request to this community was answered promptly and to the affirmative, so that it became the second Sunni case example in Hamburg.

Within the Austrian IGGiÖ, Turkish umbrella organisations have gained in importance over the last decade, as will be described in detail in the following chapter. The Diyanet-affiliated ATIB and the Millî Görüş-affiliated Islamic Federation are the biggest of these, and the past three presidents of the IGGiÖ have been affiliated with either of these two organisations. Also, given my experiences in Hamburg, it therefore seemed appropriate to again include both an ATIB and a Millî Görüş community. After I conducted a successful meeting at the ATIB headquarters, I was given the contact at an ATIB community in Vienna's sixteenth district which I had already noted to be the only one of ATIB's five mosque communities in Vienna, apart from the headquarters with its own website, suggesting a good level of internal organisation. However, I was only able to conduct two interviews in this community. As will be described further below, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that mosque communities were only open for individual prayer and no community events were taking place. Hence, rather than meeting prospective interview partners during such gatherings, I had to fully rely on community heads and interviewees to recommend and forward the contacts of further interlocutors to me. My contacts at this ATIB community were unable to provide me with further volunteers from their own community and instead referred me to the ATIB community in Vienna's third district, where I continued my interviews. Meanwhile, my attempts to gain access to any of the mosque communities affiliated to the Islamic Federation were riddled with difficulties and my enquiries remained without reply. I was, however, able to get in touch with some female members of its student organisation, who became valuable interview partners.

To summarise, absolute consistency across the three fields regarding the organisations and number of associations included could not be achieved, as I had to allow for local specificities and difficulties. The choice of a particular association depended on an interplay of pre-field research and information gathered during fieldwork, the neglect of which would have compromised the meaningfulness of this study. Moreover, this approach is in keeping with the tenets of grounded theory, which promotes the continuous revision of research premises in relation to emerging insights (Charmaz 2006). The time spent in each field also varied accordingly. At the same time, it was not clearly delineated, especially in Basel, my own place of residence. Here, I already visited the community and was in contact with some of its members before the time specifically allotted to the conducting of interviews that lasted two months. In Hamburg, I undertook two prior short visits before spending a longer, uninterrupted period of three months, due to the inclusion of a second Sunni community, as explained above. In Vienna, I had also planned to stay for three months, with an intention to visit four communities, the most of the three cities. However, my stay was cut short due to a severe tightening of COVID-19 measures in mid-November 2020. I left Vienna after two months and conducted the remaining interviews online, the implication of which I will describe further below. Compared to conventional understandings of fieldwork, the time I spent in each of the three sites was therefore rather short, for both practical and conceptual reasons. As social phenomena and relationships exceed single localities, multi-sited ethnography becomes increasingly common and necessary (Marcus 1995) which, however, also means that less time can be spent in each locality, given one's dependency on and constraint by time-restricted project funding.

#### **4. Data collection and analysis**

##### *4.1. Attaining field access*

In all three cities, my entrance and initial sampling was filtered through each associations' leadership. This approach was necessary as I did not have previous personal contacts, but also because my study thereby gained in trustworthiness for prospective participants. In order to attain access to the Sunni community in Basel, I asked for an appointment with a board member of the BMK, in which my team colleagues and I presented ourselves and our project and were already able to gain insights into recent developments and debates within the BMK. This board member subsequently arranged for me to visit the Fetih Mosque to present myself and the project once more to the representative of the mosque. The latter forwarded details about me and the project to the heads of the association's youth and women's sections. Further to this, my gatekeeper provided me with the contact details of the current and former presidents of the BMK whom I asked for initial interviews. These, together with visits to the community, provided me with more participants.

My entrance to the two legally recognised Alevi communities in Basel followed a rather different trajectory, as my fellow doctoral researcher in the research team, himself of Kurdish-Alevi background, had already made inroads into both communities. Moreover, there were several events that I attended, such as a New Year reception, a public lecture, Aşure fast breaking<sup>4</sup>, as well as an organised bus trip to Cologne on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the German Alevi Federation in September 2019, before our team formally introduced the project to the boards of these two communities. Nevertheless, my establishment in the Basel Alevi community was subjected to difficulties, foremost of which was the issue of language, but also misunderstandings about my person. As I initially appeared in the communities together with my fellow researcher, some members were under the impression that I was my colleague's partner and addressed him when enquiring about me. Hence, I continued attending

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<sup>4</sup> Many Alevis fast during the month of Muharrem to commemorate the suffering and death of Ali's son Hüseyin in Karbala and end the fasting with a communal meal.

community gatherings without him to establish myself as an independent persona and researcher, although this meant that, as was also the case in the Sunni community, I could not lead conversations with many older members beyond short and simple exchanges. Members of the second and third generation, on the other hand, were fluent in Turkish and German. Many young people, however, did not regularly attend community gatherings in the associations.

In Hamburg, I was able to arrange a preliminary personal visit to the Alevi community and the local DITIB headquarters to introduce myself and the research project, occasions on which I was able to form initial personal contacts with board members and representatives. On my first visit to the DITIB community in Hamburg-Bergedorf, I was received by two female board members, who invited me to attend the weekly women's breakfasts conducted in the mosque. Hence, my entrance into the community there was enabled primarily via its female members, facilitated by my own subjectivity as a young female. As already described above, my first visit to the Millî Görüş community in Wilhelmsburg occurred nearly two months into my fieldwork in Hamburg. Here, my email enquiry resulted in a prompt reply by the community's public relations representative who, during a personal meeting, was able to point me to further possible interview partners and provided me with their contact details.

In Vienna, I equally attempted to establish first contact with Alevi and Sunni communities electronically in the run-up to my field-stay. Unlike in Hamburg, where I had already made first inroads during a preparatory visit, I had not been able to travel to Vienna prior to the actual field-stay. Still, I proceeded as I had in the other cases by arranging appointments with the respective headquarters, which in Vienna served also as the national head-offices of the communities. The entrance into the Alevi federation proceeded without much difficulty. My colleague had already met members of the board of the Austrian Alevi federation during a colloquium he had attended in Vienna and could inform them of my coming. As the Austrian federation headquarters and its Vienna member association share the same

space, I was already able to make acquaintances with community members on my first meeting with members of the national board. In the case of the Islam-Alevi community, the recognised religious society and its Vienna member association shared equally the same building. Yet, the step from my first visit and meeting with a member of the national board to community-contact was more difficult, as community life was largely at a standstill due to the pandemic, and my gatekeeper was initially slow to forward further contacts to me. I will elaborate on the difficulties I encountered in Vienna further below.

ATIB headquarters in Vienna had initially been hesitant to agree to a meeting. I was instead asked to address my case to the IGGiÖ headquarters responsible for external requests by journalists or researchers. This deferral of responsibility to a higher representational body was unique to Vienna and an aspect of the legal recognition status existing there. It required me to further explain my research design and my focus on Turkish communities. I was eventually admitted and referred to one of its mosque associations, as already described above. The headquarters of the Islamic Federation in Vienna were, as already mentioned, unresponsive to my enquiries. My first contact to members of its student organisation was established via an interviewee from the second ATIB mosque community I visited.

Caution and suspicion were present among community members across cities and denominations. Sunni Muslims have suffered constant negative public, political and media attention and an exclusionary discourse on their supposed lack of loyalty to and compatibility with their resident societies. In Vienna, the shooting attack in the inner city committed by a sympathiser of the Islamic State halfway into my fieldwork there, in early November 2020, drastically increased public pressure on the IGGiÖ leadership and mosque communities, and presumably heightened their wariness to be under academic scrutiny. On the other hand, many Alevi have continued to fear persecution and surveillance by agents of the Turkish state. This necessitated the formal and very detailed introduction of the project to the boards and

headquarters. Still, a certain reluctance or inhibition about giving interviews persisted, which I ascribe to insecurity and unfamiliarity with this format and with academic categories more generally, language barriers and time restraints as well as power relations within the communities as well as between community members and myself, which I will return to further below. Given these complications in attaining access and selecting interview partners, I used the snowball sampling method to win interviewees, in addition to my visits to the communities and attendance of gatherings, as I will explain below. In Vienna, this became nearly the only way in which I could recruit new interview partners as the attendance of community events and gatherings was forestalled during the pandemic.

#### *4.2. Selection of interview partners*

The interview partners were limited to Sunnis and Alevis from Turkey and their descendants who are members of the communities presented above. Moreover, my own age, gender, racial positioning and the language I speak, as a young female white German citizen, significantly influenced my selection of and interaction with participants, as I will point out throughout the following paragraphs as well as in the final section of this chapter. I employed a processual mode of sampling, guided and informed by observations and conclusions made in the field. Moreover, I greatly relied on interview partners' own suggestions for further participants, i.e. a snowball sampling approach, which enabled me to refer to common acquaintances, thus lowering initial barriers or scepticism. I initially established contact with people who assumed more visible and representative roles in the community. These also formed my first interview partners. With the help and recommendations of this initial group of participants I recruited more interviewees who could diversify my sample in terms of community role, age and gender. This was in keeping with the tenets of grounded theory, which posits that the relevance of specific sampling criteria is decided by the researcher in the course

of experiences and observations made during fieldwork and that the aim of sampling is not population representativeness but theory construction (Charmaz 2006).

Asking for and arranging interviews with the help of mediators may have been more purpose-directed, but bore its own challenges. Relying on others to “ask around” on your behalf was problematic, as I did not know how diligently, persistently or carefully those inquiries had been made and why interviews were declined. Moreover, allowing community members to suggest further participants limits the sample to candidates which they consider suitable for various reasons and bears the risk of neglecting others. Being still dependent on community members’ help in recruiting participants, I remained aware of such dynamics and critical about suggestions for further candidates. Furthermore, on making enquiries and arranging interviews via mobile phone, replies were often given only after many days or weeks, or not at all. This mode of communication allowed for evasiveness while obscuring the underlying causes for this reluctance or delay. Such difficulties were aggravated by inhibitions about written and spoken communication in German, as some community members did not believe to possess sufficient German language skills. These problems were particularly acute in Vienna, where meeting prospective interviewees in person during events was eventually no longer possible due to stricter pandemic measures.

Hesitancy to participate also reflected unequal power relations between members of a racialised religious minority and a white researcher. In this manner, participation in an academic study could have been perceived as intimidating. Some community members indeed expressed their concern that they lacked expertise or the ability to express themselves eloquently. In this way, differing ideas about knowledge worthy of academic study and the type of person in the position to transfer such knowledge to the university researcher came to the fore. While I wanted to speak to ordinary community members about their personal perspectives and feelings, I was often referred to people of higher rank in the community, such as the head of the

association or religious leaders, who were mostly male. Especially Alevis had a certain idea about bearers of “important” knowledge and about the kind of information that I should be given, as well as anxiety over representing Alevism “wrongly”. This became particularly obvious on two occasions in Vienna, when the interviewees unexpectedly brought along a religious leader or designated expert, in both cases an older male with limited German language skills, to whom I was encouraged to address questions about Alevi faith and practice, despite this not being my research focus. Women especially believed themselves not sufficiently expert and felt seemingly uncomfortable to speak of their own views and feelings for an academic study in a non-native language. This divergence of ideas about expertise and worthy academic topics, firstly, made people hesitant to participate as they did not conceive of themselves as knowledgeable, and secondly, made it more difficult to ask for suggestions for further interview partners, as these would include higher-ranking people who did not fall into my focus group. I see these dynamics related to the general argument which I forward in this dissertation. The position of Alevis as doubly racialised in Turkey and Europe leads them to present themselves to members of the European white majority in a way that is to stress Alevism’s compatibility with European values in light of their persecution and oppression in Sunni-majority Turkey.

Issues of power, knowledge, expertise, attributed race and gender were thus ever-present and challenging to navigate. At the same time, both Sunni and Alevi community members’ spare time was severely limited, which I consider to be a symptom of their structural inequality. Muslim and Alevi community life in Europe is based on voluntary work which runs alongside full-time jobs and family commitments. I had the impression that this was particularly true in the case of female community members, who often juggled both work and family duties, and had to look after elderly relatives especially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also remains to be conceded that communication with young community members, who were often born and raised in their respective countries and in some cases university students themselves,

was significantly easier for me. The restriction to community members who were able to converse in German sufficiently to conduct an interview in that language meant that members of the so-called first generation of migrants from Turkey are less strongly represented than those who were born or have grown up in Germany, Austria or Switzerland.

It can be argued that this focus on members of communities that are either already legally recognised or strive for such recognition, left out those adherents of Alevism and Islam who did not place much value on their religious affiliation or did not visit these associations. This was especially the case for Alevis, some of whom would not even define Alevism as a religion at all. While due to the conditions and contexts of incorporation, many Alevi organisations have positioned themselves as religious communities, this remains a matter of contestation within the Alevi movement. However, as belonging is examined here through the lens of religious recognition, considering Alevis and Sunni Muslims who do not affiliate with an organisation that is either already recognised as a religious community or struggles for that recognition would be beyond the scope of this study. That being said, community members themselves have diverse and also critical stances towards the religious incorporation path, and my sample includes many such individuals who view official religious recognition critically.

#### *4.3. Ethnographic interviewing*

In order to arrive at an understanding of the feelings of belonging to their resident societies that Sunni and Alevi individuals entertain in each of the three cities in the wake of official recognition, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 Sunnis and 11 Alevis in Basel, 13 Sunnis and 11 Alevis in Hamburg, and 9 Sunnis and 17 Alevis in Vienna, amounting to a total of 71 interviews. In addition, 9 expert interviews in Basel, 6 in Hamburg and 3 in Vienna with higher-ranking community representatives, politicians, state officials and academics were conducted together with the other members of the research team and provided background information on recognition processes.

#### 4.3.1. Process and content of interviews

Such open qualitative interviews were able to shed light on how recognition was understood, evaluated and narrated by participants in addition to how it was discursively tied to feelings of belonging. Many community members were not well versed in the exact legal provisions and status of official recognition, and interpreted the concept of recognition to mean their societal acceptedness or their ability to practise their religion according to their wishes. Belonging is also a concept that lacks a single definition, the exact meaning of which had to be provided by the participants themselves. Gathering rich data, in this way, involved probing the taken for granted and hidden assumptions of participants (Charmaz 2006).

Regarding the study of feelings of belonging through qualitative interviews, a number of considerations on how best to achieve this were necessary. Kleres (2010) posits that emotions are embedded in narratives. Yet, the extent to which emotions are narratable is limited. Narratives require a process or development to be recounted (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr 2013), whereas feelings of belonging do not always have such a processual nature and may thus not lend themselves as a topic for a coherent narrative. This is why an entirely open narrative interview was not suitable. Instead, my interviews were guided by a number of open stimuli to elicit various smaller but still freely flowing accounts. Each of these was followed by immanent questions for the purpose of clarification or to take up topics introduced previously by the participant. The order of topics and number of follow-up questions varied with each interviewee according to their experiences, personal context and willingness or ability to provide more or less extensive answers to my questions.

Each time, however, I opened the interview with a request to expand on their personal life story and their engagement in their community to help interviewees get used to the situation and to speaking freely. Usually, I would then ask about their familiarity with local recognition arrangements, the latter's prominence as a matter of debate within the community and

participants' memories of the recognition process. We would then talk about the significance of recognition, the changes it may have produced in their individual and community lives, and possible influences on their feelings of belonging to their cities and countries of residence. I also enquired after developments and challenges since their own or other communities' attainment of recognition. I then asked them to elaborate on their understandings of belonging, instances that inform their feelings of belonging and non-belonging and the manner in which such feelings may have changed and developed. Furthermore, I enquired about the place that official religious recognition assumed in their feelings of belonging.

In this manner, I applied a two-way approach in my enquiry into the relationship between recognition and belonging. In the first instance, when discussing the significance of recognition, participants in Basel and Hamburg mostly did not make an explicit connection to their personal feelings of belonging themselves, whereas this was more common in Vienna. I therefore actively introduced the issue, enquiring whether recognition was meaningful to them on an emotional level, particularly regarding their feelings of belonging. In the second instance, after having talked about belonging, I would ask again what place in their feelings belonging is taken up by present forms of religious recognition. Most described this relationship as weak in both instances, but some also gave contradictory replies. In general, participants fluctuated between ascribing a broader, abstract significance to recognition as an ideal concept and stating a low personal or practical impact. By applying two-way questioning, I was able to uncover this duality and ambiguity.

The different natures of recognition in each of the cities necessitated contextual adaptation of the interview guide. The state contracts in Hamburg form a written agreement with detailed stipulations on various topics such as holidays, burial, religious instruction or adherence to the Basic Law. This is not given in Basel, where cantonal recognition is a largely symbolic status without written details on ensuing rights. Hence, interviews in Hamburg were

different from those in Basel due to the fact that in the former case I brought a printed copy of the contract to the interviews. I asked participants how well they were familiar with its content and invited them to have a look at the articles it contained. This spurred elaborations on their part on specific aspects of the contract, relating these to personal views and experiences. In Basel, interview discussions of recognition, its significance and implications for participants were, in contrast to this, of a more general nature and did not touch on specific aspects to the same degree. In Vienna, although there also existed a document listing the rights and stipulations of both recognised Muslim communities in the form of the Islam Law, this was viewed as distinct from the recognition status itself, especially by the recognised Alevi community. Sunni participants often referred to the circumstance of the Law's infamous amendment in 2015 but, apart from its clause on the proscription of foreign financing, were not well versed in its specific content or its positive rights such as holidays. However, the dense and legal nature of its language did not lend itself to perusal during the interview, when many interview partners were not native speakers to begin with.

#### 4.3.2. Interview settings and ethnographic embeddedness

The interview setting was chosen by participants themselves, which could include the community centre, a café or their own homes. The setting was to be conducive to a quiet, comfortable and relaxed atmosphere where participants could speak without restraint. The community centre was, however, my preferred meeting spot, being quieter than a café and providing me with a glimpse of community life at the same time. Interruptions could not be avoided here either, however. Apart from the cases where interviewees had invited religious leaders to join the interview without my knowledge, there were occasions where other community members joined in and made interjections. Meeting participants in their own homes, an option which some participants preferred and which in Vienna also presented itself after the pandemic-induced closure of community centres, bore its own difficulties. Twice I had intended

to speak to female members of the Alevi community, but their husbands joined the interview and in one case dominated it. On two occasions the interviewees had invited other acquaintances or family members to their homes at the same time.

In Vienna, I eventually had to abandon physical meetings altogether due to tightened coronavirus measures and conduct remaining interviews digitally, which had its own implications for the research encounter, in particular its ethnographic embedding and affective dynamics (Seitz 2016, Weller 2017). Some of Weller's (2017) interlocutors perceived the online interview as less intrusive and anxiety-inducing than an interview of physical copresence. A greater sense of ease can, in this way, facilitate greater emotional connection between participant and researcher (*ibid.*). Seitz (2016) similarly observes that participants might feel less nervous and pressured in their own private spaces and through the physical remoteness between them and the researcher. With regard to the young female participants I interviewed online, I indeed had the impression of a good rapport and an easy atmosphere despite physical distance. However, the affective richness of the online interview encounter was impacted by a reduction of pleasantries, smalltalk and acts of hospitality; instead, the first exchanges were to ensure the quality of the connection (Weller 2017). There was no eye-to-eye contact and non-verbal cues were only observable in the face and the upper body.

What I consider the most detrimental aspect of online interviewing, however, is the lack of ethnographic contextual material that comes with travelling to the community centre or a person's home and which embeds the interview in an affective and sensual assemblage (Ayata et al. 2019). The spatial surroundings were part of my memory of the research encounter, helping me to recollect the content of the conversation, and they formed a mental image whenever I relisted to the interview recording, enabling me to relive the impressions of the day. These field trips, even if they were only to travel to an interview appointment, enriched my understanding of community and participants' personal lives. Furthermore, the spatial

context of the interview shaped the conversation itself as speakers referred to specific aspects in the shared surroundings. Therefore, video calls that remain a necessity at times of reduced physical proximity, cannot, however, replace the latter.

Interviews were the primary means of data collection, but their quality depended on their ethnographic situatedness (Sherman Heyl 2001). Interviews were therefore accompanied, where possible, by my attendance of community events and gatherings. Alongside snowball sampling, these congregations granted the opportunity for the building of relationships, familiarity and rapport with participants, as a precondition to leading meaningful interviews. There is a common assumption that in true ethnographic research priorities should be reversed, with interviews supporting the fieldworker's observations and spontaneous conversations. In answer to this, Hockey and Forsey (2012) argue that participant observation is not the only viable method to arrive at an ethnographic account, and may not always be suitable when the objects of study are interior states, experiences or memories, which can only be observed or participated in to a certain degree and have to be explored through conversation. The authors propose to conceive of the interview as participant engagement, characterised by engaged listening. Interviews may assume a primary role in the research process, with participation mostly used to ensure the quality of interviews, although remaining open to additional insights obtained from it.

#### 4.3.3. Conducting research on feelings

Interviews, in this manner, were not only about emotions and feelings, but also had to be regarded as situated and co-performative affective encounters (Ayata et al. 2019, Willink & Shukri 2018). I conducted my interviews on the premise that intellect, action and emotion are not discrete and distinguishable forms of knowing and experience, but reified categories (Davies 2010, Jackson 2010). Using interviews as my main method of data collection, I relied on participants' articulated reflections on a particular politically infused and negotiated

emotion, namely feelings of belonging (Kahl 2019). Further to this, rather than essentialising feelings and viewing them as a static truth about ourselves and others, I approached them as context-bound, contingent, variable, complex and contradictory (Gould 2015). It may be argued that one can therefore only study the rhetoric of emotion, meaning how emotions are spoken about at certain times and in certain places, and how this differs among persons, cultures and circumstances (Czarniawska 2015). In contrast to this, some researchers claim to be able to feel the same emotions as their participants through bodily and experiential imitation (Cook 2010, Luhmann 2010, Rytter 2015). Yet, I was told by different interview partners that one has to have shared their community history or life experiences in order to fully understand the significance of their feelings, thus questioning my ability to fully appreciate their emotional states. Hence, I followed a middle-road by not only attending to the content of speech, but also to the manner of communication, prominent non-verbal expressions and my own emotional states, yet not presuming that I could feel the same feelings as my interlocutors. In this manner, abstaining from predefining the significance and content of certain emotions, such as feelings of belonging, is necessary, as “considering methodology as open-ended and incomplete may enable the researcher to explore local understandings of self and emotion” (Cook 2010: 239).

It is by now ever increasingly acknowledged that emotion can be used to generate knowledge and understanding (Mattes et al. 2019, Stodulka & Mattes 2018). Affects of participants, the researcher and the environment serve us to understand better our topic of study; thoroughly attending to them even enhances methodological rigour (Gammerl 2015). In this manner, the emotions of the researcher can be used as sensitising devices as well as epistemological resources (Berg et al. 2019, Kahl 2019). They can help select what to look for and intensify one’s presence as an observer, especially when one’s own emotions apparently differ from those of participants (Trivelli 2015). Given my own aversion against European anti-Muslim discourse, this was, for instance, the case when Alevis portrayed Sunnis as radical,

violent, oppressive or two-faced. In Vienna, the split through the Alevi community led to suspicion, resentment, mutual accusations and diametrically opposed sides of the story with which I was simultaneously confronted. A number of Sunni participants, on the other hand, made evident their lack of understanding for atheists, assuming me to be a practising Christian. Some, furthermore, expressed strong Turkish patriotism. Rather than attempting to suppress or ignore my discomfort in these moments, or reconcile disparate accounts in an attempt to find the “true story”, I used them as occasions for reflection. In this manner, it is not only our affective consonance with our interlocutors, but also, and especially, our affective dissonances that are instructive and insightful and should spur on reflection on possible presumptions (Mattes et al. 2019, Stodulka & Mattes 2018).

Furthermore, a number of ostensible paradoxes in participants’ responses proved important items of insight. With regard to the question of recognition, while many endowed it with much significance in theory, they ascribed little importance to it in their personal lives, immediate relations and individual feelings. They forwarded ideal definitions of recognition as conferral of valuation and acknowledgement, yet differentiated between the recognition status given to their communities and what many called societal or true recognition. Similarly, many denied a relationship between their feelings of belonging to their city or state and the recognition status which their community possessed or lacked. At the same time, many relayed feelings and instances of exclusion, either explicitly by sharing experiences of discrimination and feelings of alienation as well as their exasperations with regard to recognition processes which again seemed to cast them as perpetual foreigner, or implicitly by describing their resident countries as Christian and themselves as in need of integration. Thus, on the one hand, participants entertained feelings of attachment, familiarity and homeliness seemingly independently from formal status such as recognition but also citizenship, but on the other hand felt excluded and subjected to ongoing integration demands, which recognition processes did

not dispel but instead reiterated. In the case of Alevi participants, their frequent positive interpretation of received recognition in Europe, which they contrasted with their continued discrimination and lack of recognition in Turkey, was accompanied by assertions of their own integratedness and compatibility with predefined Western European values, which implied their lack of equal belonging. These dissonances and contradictions are directly related to the key findings of this study, namely the implication of Alevi and Sunni community members in European and Turkish racial hierarchies of belonging.

#### *4.4. Transcription, translation and analysis*

Data transcription and analysis were conducted with the use of the software MAXQDA. I already transcribed interviews while still in the field, thus breaking with the ideal of a linear sequencing of data gathering, analysis and interpretation based on the assumption of an unbiased approach towards the data. The researcher's view is always already theory-laden, and different elements of prior knowledge are newly combined, modified and integrated with new realisations (Kelle 2011). Consequently, a linear conception of research hardly reflects research reality, in which the collection, analysis and interpretation of data mostly take place simultaneously. Nor is such strict sequencing always desirable. Grounded theory posits that research should proceed processually and that intermittent transcription and data analysis should inform subsequent data collection. This is to assist the researcher in focussing, structuring and organising the research process, and it helps move ethnographic research towards theoretical development (Charmaz 2006). Going back and forth between data collection and analysis helps overcome some ethnographic problems such as uncritically adopting participants' views, lengthy unfocussed forays, superficial random data collection, or reliance on disciplinary categories (ibid.).

The transcription of non-standard and non-native use of German presented me with the question of whether to align grammar and sentence structure according to formal prescriptions

or to transcribe verbatim, in view of the fact that those excerpts to be quoted in my dissertation would have to be translated into English. I decided not to translate a non-standard syntax into what I believed to be its English equivalent, as this would distract from the content of the statement and maybe even constitute an injustice to the speaker. Hence, I opted for an approach in which I stayed true to the content and choice of words, but in some cases rearranged the syntax, added words in brackets should they be missing, and rectified grammatical deviations. In this manner, I could convey the intention and character of the statement, but deflect from what might be perceived as flawed language use. Moreover, “incorrect” use of grammar and syntax was, in this case, not intentionally applied by non-native speakers to convey certain ideas and emotions. In this way, I could still attend to emotional cues and manners in which emotions were verbally expressed, for instance when describing certain emotional states, or when certain phrases were repeated. In such cases when the standard variety of German was spoken fluently (nearly all cases in Hamburg) I transcribed verbatim. For words specific to the Swiss or Austrian local dialect I used the standard equivalents, not only because of their eventual translation into English, but also because, while I was able to follow the dialects, I was not confident enough to transform them authentically into writing. In all cases, I maintained pauses, filling phrases and incomplete sentences to retain the colloquiality of the accounts.

The analysis of data was not contained within a distinct phase of the research process, but began during fieldwork when composing the field diary, which already included conceptual ideas and reflections, and continued in the transcription and coding processes. While transcribing interviews, I took extensive notes on their content and my reflections. I then ordered and structured these notes, thus arriving at a preliminary overview of themes and categories, which I considered necessary due to the high number of interviews I conducted. In this manner, writing was not only the conclusion of data processing, but was itself an important technique of data analysis due to its requirement to verbalise and reason in a comprehensible

manner on presumed connections (Sökefeld 2008c). Accordingly, the coding process was also accompanied by simultaneous writing, the product of which already formed the basis of the empirical chapters of this dissertation.

By producing structured notes during the transcription process, I already created a conceptual overview of the available data. This informed, but did not determine, my subsequent and more in-depth coding. Furthermore, the transcription and coding of material from Hamburg and Basel was undertaken before I was able to conduct fieldwork in Vienna. This was because the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 precluded travel to Austria for many months and necessitated a rearrangement of the overall research sequence. Once my data, including material from Vienna, was fully gathered and transcribed, a further data analysis phase was conducted in which I, in conversation with my supervisor and project colleagues, engaged in a cross-case comparison and, from the codes devised for each case study, arrived at increasingly abstract categories informing the relationship between recognition and belonging (see appendix 2).

This mode of data processing, or coding, was modelled on the principles of grounded theory, specifically as they were later modified by Strauss and Corbin (2008 [1998]). Grounded theory follows a similarly open research conception and inductive approach to ethnography, but also has devised methods not only for data collection but also data analysis compatible with ethnographic fieldwork (Sökefeld 2008c). All the while, the use of grounded theory methodology needs to involve critical reflection on ontological and epistemological issues. More precisely, the concept of emergence suggests an ability to discover pre-existing phenomena. Instead, I subscribe to Charmaz's (2006, 2011) propositions for a constructivist grounded theory methodology based on a relativistic epistemology, conceiving of knowledge as socially constructed and acknowledging the multiplicity of standpoints and realities. Results are thus viewed as conditional, contingent and incomplete constructions rather than objective and generalisable discoveries of what is already out there.

## **5. Researcher positionality**

Given the antagonistic relations between Alevis and Sunnis with a Turkish migration history, which were pointed out by the former and disregarded by the latter, my outsider status in both Sunni and Alevi communities as a white German citizen, although it entailed language and access barriers, worked also to my advantage. Participants felt inclined to explain to me explicitly what they might take for granted with members from their perceived in-group, such as the meaning and definitions of certain events, practices, groups or developments. Conversely, I could “get away” with asking about experiences that many do not explicitly and regularly converse about with their peers, either because these are obvious and everyday or because these concern matters which, quite to the contrary, may exceed the scope of conversations led with persons sharing a similar social position. I was told on several occasions that participants had found the interview assuaging, because they had been able to express issues and relay experiences which they usually did not talk about. My subjectivity as a young female was possibly also perceived as less intimidating despite my role as a researcher.

At the same time, my positionality as a member of the dominant majority structured my encounters. Even in Switzerland and Austria, as was at times pointed out by participants there, I, in contrast to them, would find no difficulties in being accepted as part of the national community. Although an agnostic, I form part of and was addressed as a representative of the white-Christian majority, albeit one who, in the course of her upbringing and education, has developed a stance against anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric and policy in Europe. In this way, I already embarked on the research allied with the cause of Muslims in Western Europe affectively, while as yet knowing little about Alevis or the political history of Turkey. Many Alevis, however, assumed that I shared in the Western European anti-Muslim sentiment. Throughout my fieldwork, I remained alienated by some Alevi participants’ anti-Muslim

discourse and declarations of their own compatibility and integratedness. At the same time, I felt highly sympathetic to accounts of discrimination, especially by Sunni women. As described above with regard to the use of one's own emotions as sensitising devices, especially discomfort and disagreement, I had to learn to reflect critically on my own internal reactions and biases, especially on my implicit expectations and ideas about how racialised subjects should react to their racialisation, in order to view Alevi and Sunni responses not only in light of their racialisation and exclusion in Europe, but also their respective minority and majority positions in Turkey. While Sunnis' discrimination in Europe may be more obvious to perceive, not least because of the fact that they themselves openly call out racism against themselves, Alevi are equally racialised in Europe, although this racialisation has different implications for them and is responded to differently by them due to their past and ongoing racialised exclusion in Turkey.

## **6. Conclusion**

Existing studies on the institutional incorporation of Islam fall short on the three main methodological choices adopted in this research project. First, in writings on state encounters with Muslim communities, the latter are often treated in an undifferentiated manner. Rather than uncritically adopting the designation of "Muslim", this thesis views it as a racially configured category which itself must be submitted to scientific scrutiny. Comparing Alevi and Sunni communities, specifically their member's meaning-making of recognition processes, counters the homogenising treatment of differently positioned "Muslim" groups and reveals the workings of this racialised category as well as its role in the production and reproduction of racial hierarchies of belonging. Secondly, the analysis and comparison of three different contexts, bearing a combination of similarities and differences, is able to bring to light major continuities in participants' concerns, but also shows how these are differently inflected in each of the three locales. In this way, this thesis can submit a broader critique of official recognition

processes in German-speaking Western Europe as they apply to racialised religious minorities. Thirdly, this is founded on qualitative empirical research among those who are directly affected and addressed by such recognition acts and processes.

Such a microlevel study on the way in which state recognition is received in Sunni and Alevi communities has not yet been conducted. Yet, its value lies in its ability to bring to the fore the different ways in which community members themselves negotiate and navigate state recognition and relate it to the question of their belonging. As such, the accounts of community members provide the complexities, paradoxes and dilemmas that come with being given or denied state recognition as a racialised religious group. Furthermore, this positions recognition as something that is not simply done to and imposed upon its receivers, but as a status that is debated by them, albeit in highly unequal power settings. Lastly, in this way it can be revealed that, when it comes to community members' feelings of belonging, it is not the recognition stipulations per se but rather their emplacement in and between different national politics of belonging marked by racial hierarchies that is decisive.

The next chapter will introduce more detail to the contexts and histories of religious recognition in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna, outlining the history of Turkish migration to Europe, as well as the development of Alevi and Sunni organisations, their institutionalisation and official recognition in Europe. The specific contexts and processes of Alevis' and Sunnis' recognition in Basel, Hamburg, and Vienna will be recounted in depth. Furthermore, I will argue that, in order to understand their relationship to feelings of belonging, recognition processes need to be situated within national and transnational contexts marked by racialised politics of belonging. The upcoming chapter therefore also describes the racial hierarchies of belonging in Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Turkey.

## **Chapter 4: Contexts and Histories of Religious Recognition in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the local, national and transnational contexts and histories of the religious recognition processes examined. First, it will provide a general overview of the institutionalisation and incorporation of Alevi and Sunni organisations in Western Europe, and specifically Sunni organisations affiliated with the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Millî Görüş movement, tracing the development of state community relations from comparative neglect to integration and recognition. Turkey's diaspora policy and the presence of the Turkish state in Europe will also be introduced, since they influence European recognition processes of organisations from Turkey. Secondly, I will delve into a detailed account of the developments regarding Sunnis' and Alevis' state recognition in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna. Thirdly, I will argue that in order to fully understand the relationship between official religious recognition and the feelings of belonging of members of Alevi and Sunni communities in Western Europe, it needs to be situated and presented within a broader context. Recognition processes, I hold, take place in and are fundamentally structured by transnational contexts of institutional racism and racial hierarchisation. In the third thematic section of this chapter, I will therefore depict these broader national, transnational and historical contexts.

Here, I will show that German-speaking countries of Western Europe instantiate the concepts introduced in chapter 2, specifically the role of race in the making, development and perpetuation of nation-states as well as their terms of belonging. As in other nation-states, politics of belonging have continued to be a key site of cementing racialised hierarchies in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Yet, these countries also display particularities in the way

in which race has a tectonic role in their institutional and state histories and structures, both as a group of German-speaking countries and as individual nation-states. Meanwhile, although Turkey and its inhabitants historically have been objects of Western inferiorisation of the East, the Turkish nation itself came to be imagined and founded on the racialised conceptualisation and structuring of its population, excluding ethnic and religious Others, such as Alevis. Sunnis and Alevis both migrated to Western Europe from the 1960s onwards, from one racially hierarchised national context to another. Current processes of official recognition of their representative organisations unfold in and are structured by politics of belonging marked by the exclusion of Muslims and migrants from Turkey. However, Alevis' and Sunnis' contrasting positions in Turkey inform their differing negotiations of recognition in Europe. Together, this chapter's three sections aim to enable an understanding of the sociopolitical, institutional and historical context in which negotiations over belonging in the course of official religious recognition unfold, and set the scene for the upcoming empirical chapters.

## **2. Institutionalisation of Islam and Alevism in Western Europe**

### *2.1. From laissez-faire to incorporation*

Alevis and Sunnis from Turkey began to migrate to Europe in the 1960s when Western European governments officially recruited labour forces from abroad. This was based on a two-year rotary system to ensure that these workers would not settle down permanently in Europe. Yet, after the recruitment ban in 1973, the year of the first oil crisis, not only did many labour migrants fail to return, but new migrants came to join their families in Europe, adding women and children to what had previously been a mostly male labour migrant population. These first and second phases of migration from Turkey were succeeded by a third, following the military coup in Turkey in 1980 and resulting repressions. This caused many political dissenters as well

as ethnic and religious minorities to flee Turkey and seek asylum in Western European countries (Massicard 2013, Sökefeld 2008a, Suter Reich 2013). Meanwhile, asylum constituted practically the only legal means of access to Europe after the official ban on labour recruitment came into being.

In the beginning, labour migrants from Turkey practised their religion inconspicuously and pragmatically in private gatherings. In the early 1970s, when many decided to remain in Europe and were joined by spouses and children, self-help organisations emerged, later replaced by religious and cultural associations (Stowasser 2002). A debate about their institutional incorporation only began when a certain consensus was reached that migrants should have the right to a long-term stay (Spielhaus 2006). Accordingly, Laurence (2012) distinguishes two policy periods with respect to the treatment of these new communities by European governments. The first period stretches from the 1960s to the 1980s when European states subscribed to a *laissez-faire* or outsourcing approach, allowing sending states such as Turkey to manage the cultural and religious needs of their citizens in Europe. This outsourcing policy was meant to maintain strong ties to the country of origin and thereby encourage eventual return, a strategy endorsed by both the sending and host countries. Sending states sustained the idea that their intervention was necessary to rein in radicalism in the receiving states, while European governments appreciated the convenience of “a prefabricated, export-ready version of the Islamic religion: a Muslim religious practice within the secular Turkish framework, complete with clergy from the homeland” (ibid.: 60-61).

However, “guest” workers not only failed to return “home” but were also joined by their families. Furthermore, the public visibility of Muslim migrants, especially their political activism in the late 1980s on issues affecting Muslim countries, their socioeconomic marginalisation, foreign government control and fear of home-grown terrorism led European governments to replace the outsourcing policy with an interventionist incorporation regime.

While religion had previously been “but one characteristic of this population of immigrant origin,” it became “the door through which social integration of this minority population would come to pass” (ibid.: 148). Hence, the second period is marked by efforts of European states to establish national Islam councils that were to function as political mediators between governments and Muslim communities, cut transnational ties, institutionalise moderate voices, encourage the formation of centralised representative bodies, build national loyalty and diminish the threat of radicalism. Thus, migrants from Turkey became the focus of conflicting attention, both as part of Western governments’ integration and domestication of Muslims, and in the Turkish government’s efforts to reach out to its diaspora, as will be shown further below.

## *2.2. Turkish Sunni organisations: Diyanet and Millî Görüş*

Over the decades, a variety of Muslim organisations have developed in Western Europe. Although the Turkish state, specifically the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) has long been active in attending to the religious needs of its citizens in Western Europe, this initially did not proceed in a concerted manner. It was only in the early 1980s that the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB) was founded in Germany to provide prayer spaces and religious personnel, but also to respond to regime-critical organisations (Aydin 2014, Gorzewski 2015). The Austrian equivalent (ATIB) was established in 1990, while the Turkish Islamic Foundation of Switzerland (ITDV) has been in existence since 1987. With its foundation, DITIB found itself in competition with other Turkey-affiliated organisations that had already come into being in the 1970s. DITIB’s advantage, however, was that member associations would receive an imam trained and financed by the Turkish state. While the initiative for its founding came mainly from Ankara, the size to which DITIB was soon to grow and its speed of development were due to local associations, affording DITIB its double character as a migrant organisation and partner of the Turkish state (Gorzewski 2015).

Among different contenders for recognition, European states could choose whom they regarded as capable of representing a moderate Islam (Laurence 2012). Diyanet-affiliated organisations initially retained a prominent position in Islam councils, presenting themselves as necessary allies to European states in the fight against terrorism and because, as yet, there was no alternative source of financing for mosques and imams (ibid.). Yet, in recent years they have lost their previously good standing due to deteriorating relations between Turkish and European governments, in the course of which they have been accused of enabling interference by an increasingly autocratic Turkish leadership.

Meanwhile, Millî Görüş, a diasporic association of members of the Islamic National Salvation Party (Yurdakul & Yökleyen 2011), has long been subject to European state surveillance and allegations of radicalism. Yet, the organisation has attempted to “detach itself from its Turkish political roots, emphasising instead its organisational self-understanding as a religious community”, based on the interests of a younger generation of members but also on external political expectations (Rosenow-Williams 2014: 768, Schiffauer 2010). Millî Görüş has been more outspoken in its “demands concerning the integration of religious rights for Muslims within the German institutional system”, calling out the ongoing lack of legal parity with Christian churches or the Jewish community (Rosenow-Williams 2014: 771). Indeed, Millî Görüş’s interest in public recognition has a longer history than DITIB’s efforts in that direction, long having aimed to “integrate specificities of Muslim life into the German public sphere” (Yurdakul & Yökleyen 2009: 224). At the same time, since the taking of power by Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, there has been a rapprochement between the Turkish government and Millî Görüş, after the latter had long been considered an “unacceptable movement to the establishment in Turkey” (Avcı 2005: 207).

### *2.3. The formation of institutional Alevism in Europe*

It was in Europe that Alevi groups, in the late 1980s, were first able to found associations specifically under the name of Alevism, having previously organised themselves under leftist causes (Sökefeld 2008a). The German Alevi umbrella organisation was founded in 1989, its Austrian and Swiss equivalents in 1998 (Massicard 2013). Accordingly, the past three decades have seen an unprecedented increase in the sociopolitical visibility of Alevism (Zirh 2008). The fact that the Alevi movement in Western Europe no longer frames itself in political or cultural terms, but seeks to gain recognition as a religious community, is not a self-evident development. This transformation reflects the increasing availability of opportunities for state recognition as well as a change in public discourse on migration more generally since the 1990s, from terms of cultural difference to religious identity (Massicard 2013).

Furthermore, Alevis in Europe tend to emphasise their independence from Islam, although the question of whether Alevism is a distinct faith, a denomination of Islam, or a religious belief at all, remains contested within the community (ibid.). The question of Alevism's belonging inside or outside Islam is not only theological, but one that also touches on Alevis' positioning within integration, immigration and recognition debates in Turkey and Western Europe (Sökefeld 2008b). While positioning Alevism apart from Islam is problematic in Turkey, it is advantageous in the European institutional and discursive context of anti-Muslim racism and owes to the fact that the official recognition of Alevism requires it to be distinct from other religions. Yet, this polarisation within Alevi communities is also informed by their history as a minority in a Sunni-majority context of the Ottoman Empire to the present day, as will be shown further below.

#### *2.4. Turkey's diaspora policy and the Turkish state in Europe*

Since its conception in 1924, shortly after the founding of the Turkish Republic, the role and scope of the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs have expanded to include the active promotion of mainstream Hanafi Sunni Islam at home and abroad (Öztürk 2018). According to

Öktem (2014: 7), “a relative reticence in policies towards Turkey-related communities abroad [...] has given way to a significantly more proactive engagement with Turkey’s multiple neighbourhoods under the Justice and Development Party (AKP).” This coincides with a conception of Turkish citizenship and belonging as based on Muslim values as well as, more recently, a shared Ottoman legacy, the now more overt expression of which is to retain affective bonds to the home country across geographical distance (ibid.). The Turkish state is invested in the institutionalisation of a Turkish Islam in Europe, both in order to combat so-called radical political organisations and to retain influence on its diaspora. However, European integration politics and attempts to form national versions of Islam lie, according to Citak (2017), in tension with Diyanet’s ethnic-national conception of Islam. Diyanet-affiliated organisations in Europe still put themselves forward as legitimate representatives to emerge as the preferred candidate against other more transcultural and transethnic models (Bruce 2013).

While European governments fear foreign intervention into their citizenship and integration policies, Islam conferences in Western Europe have cemented Muslims’ exclusion by reinforcing a Muslim category independent of citizenship (Öktem 2014). Sending states such as Turkey can cater to the contested belonging of Muslims in Europe by offering further or alternative referents of identification, as well as by criticising anti-Muslim racism in Europe and defending Muslim and national values against assimilation (ibid.: 16). Meanwhile, such discourse excludes those regarded as enemies of the Turkish state, such as Kurds and Alevis at home and abroad, who are concerned about Turkey’s new diaspora policy and turn to their resident states instead (Aydin 2014). Seeking and gaining official recognition from their countries of residence, Alevis remain aware of their exclusion from the Turkish national community through their encounter with Turkish-Sunni organisations who pursue recognition alongside them, as well as through the Turkish governments’ reinvigorated attempts to reach out to “its” diaspora, retaining the transnational connections of racial hierarchies.

### **3. Backgrounds and developments of religious recognition in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna**

In Germany and Switzerland official religious recognition falls within the jurisdiction of individual *Länder* or cantons. The Austrian religious recognition regime, on the other hand, is nationally centralised. In all cases, there exists a hierarchy of status that religious communities may achieve, and can broadly be distinguished into private law status and corporation under public law. The latter is a middle-way between state-church separation and cooperation, reflecting the historical entanglement of the state and the Christian Church in Europe (Triadafilopoulos & Rahmann 2016). It entails privileges regarding tax collection, media representation, employment of personnel and the establishment of foundations. In Austria, both the Islamic faith community and one Alevi community are recognised as corporations under public law, the same formal status as Christian churches. In Germany, however, it was only after my field stay in Hamburg that the application of the Alevi umbrella organisation AABF for public corporation status in the German county of North Rhine Westphalia was granted, whereas as yet, no Sunni community has gained the status of public corporation. Instead, various subsidiary private law status have been devised, such as contracts with local governments (Spielhaus & Herzog 2015). In Switzerland, Islam is not officially recognised in any private or public form in any of its cantons (D'Amato 2015) and Alevis are only recognised privately in Basel City.

#### *3.1. Cantonal recognition in the Swiss canton of Basel City*

Of the three countries considered in this study, Switzerland presents the most decentralised polity, with politically and legally heterogeneous conditions of incorporation resulting in a “fragmented accommodation” of Muslims (Mahnig 2002). Muslim demands are mostly negotiated on a local-cantonal rather than on a national level (Allenbach & Sökefeld

2010, D'Amato 2015). Yet, a national Islam discourse similar to that in other European countries is still present. Moreover, Switzerland's direct democracy allows emotionally laden atmospheres to have immediate effect on the country's laws and policies, as was proven in 2009, when the Swiss electorate voted in favour of a ban on minarets (Schneuwly Purdie & Tunger-Zanetti 2018). Similarly, religious recognition is not a mere administrative proceeding, but decided on by the local citizenry or parliament, marking societal inclusion or exclusion (Pahud de Mortanges 2015). Official recognition can therefore only come to pass if and when a basic level of societal acceptance already exists (Tunger-Zanetti 2015). In this manner, legal and societal recognition are more intertwined in Switzerland than in the other two countries.

Mosque associations and Muslim organisations in Switzerland are caught between requirements for public representation and inconspicuousness (Monnot 2016). Local mosque associations remain invisible to protect themselves from assaults, but this has also made lack of recognition self-evident and uncontested (ibid.). The task of public representation is given to supralocal umbrella organisations such as the Coordination of Islamic Organisations in Switzerland, founded in 2000 and including associations from Basel, Bern and Zürich, as well as the Federation of Islamic Umbrella Organisations in Switzerland, founded in 2006. Beginning in 2011, the presidents of these two organisations endeavoured to attain public-legal recognition of the Muslim community in Switzerland and, to that end, proposed a national cross-ethnic and democratically structured organisation subsuming local mosque associations (Baumann & Hess-Hurt 2014). Media and right-wing parties were quick to condemn the project and so far, it has not been executed. Meanwhile, in some cantons local Muslim umbrella organisations are striving to cooperate, where possible, with local authorities and to gain public recognition.

Around forty associations are affiliated with the Turkish Diyanet through the Foundation for Turkish Religious Affairs in Switzerland (ITDV) (Schneuwly Purdie & Tunger-

Zanetti 2018). In contrast to other organisations' religious personnel sourced abroad, imams employed and sent by the Diyanet do not stay on tourist visas but are granted residence as migrant employees and can thus remain in Switzerland for several years (Müller 2017). Both media and politics in Switzerland have paid increasing attention to imams in the country in recent years, voicing fears about their connections to their country of origin and their supposed spreading of radical ideas (ibid.). The financing of mosques and the nature of their religious teachings have been matters of general debate, especially focussed on Turkish and Arab funding. Suspicions against Diyanet-affiliated mosques grew further after the alleged coup d'état in Turkey in 2016 (Schneuwly Purdie & Tunger-Zanetti 2018).

Basel presents a mixed picture of both liberal and restrictive tendencies when it comes to immigrant integration and religious accommodation. Pupils and their parents in Basel are, for instance, denied the right to appeal to courts for individual exemptions from participation in communal sports lessons, thus departing from a 1993 supreme court ruling and reflecting an increasingly restrictive stance towards diversity and compromise (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2009). In 2007, a religious roundtable was brought into being, the first of its kind in Switzerland, serving as a dialogue forum for the city's religious communities (Roost Vischer 2010). Furthermore, the majority of citizens in Basel voted against the minaret and burka ban initiatives in 2009 and 2021 respectively. The official recognition of Alevism preceded that of Sunni Islam, which as yet remains without an official status. Moreover, while Alevis are strongly represented in local politics, Muslims are largely absent.

In 1992, the Alevi-Bektashi Cultural Union for Basel and Surroundings was founded, soon followed by internal divisions along the Kurdish question, religious positioning in relation to Islam and loyalty to the Turkish state, as well as power struggles among community leaders (Suter Reich 2013). Already in 1994, an enquiry about the attainment of public-legal recognition was made on behalf of the Alevi community in Basel which, however, was not yet

possible at the time as the cantonal constitution did not yet provide for it (Interview Yıldız 2020). In 1995, social-democratic parliamentarian Daniel Goepfert submitted a proposal to the local parliament on the public-legal recognition of the Muslim community, including both Sunni and Alevi groups, but it was unanimously rebuffed. Local Muslim associations founded the Basel Muslim Commission (BMK) in 1997, initially with the aim to attain Muslim burial spaces (Roost Vischer 2010). In 2000, an Alevi commission representing the four existing communities in Basel was formed to undo internal fissures and to enable public relations and representation vis-à-vis the authorities (Suter Reich 2013).

In 1999, the citizens of Basel voted in favour of a complete revision of the cantonal constitution, which would also allow religious communities other than the established Christian and Jewish ones to attain an official status. In 2002, the constitutional commission proposed a model that would allow for the recognition of new religions, mentioning the BMK as well as the Alevi community as conversation partners. Its report notes that a public-legal recognition of either group was at that point not yet possible because of lacking organisational structures, representativeness and financial transparency. Further to this, it was argued that Islam is characterised by a lack of separation of state and religion, an issue which the commission did not deem applicable to Alevism (Verfassungsrat Basel-Stadt 2002).

The revised cantonal constitution, finalised in 2005, featured new provisions on the relationship between state and religion which enabled legal recognition of new religions (VIII.2. para. 133). First, the public-legal status was opened to the possible inclusion of further religious communities apart from those of Christian and Jewish faith. Secondly, cantonal recognition was introduced as an official but private law status for religious communities that were either unwilling or as yet without the necessary organisational and financial structures to attain public-legal corporation status. In contrast to public-legal recognition, cantonal recognition does not require a public referendum but merely an absolute majority in local parliament. In this manner,

the creators of the revised constitutional provisions on religion aimed to avoid a public referendum on Islam, which would undoubtedly be a highly contentious one. In the official understanding, cantonal or “small” recognition is part of a process of adaptation and integration (Suter Reich 2013). Applicants are expected to comply with the legal order and to maintain peace, as well as to prove their societal relevance.

The attempts of Alevis in Basel to gain recognition were the first of their kind in Switzerland (ibid.). In 2010, two Alevi communities in Basel jointly filed for cantonal recognition. Their application was approved in 2012. In consequence, Alevism has since been listed among other official religions of the canton in the residence permit form, which increases its statistical and institutional visibility. To this, such privileges as religious instruction at school and burial spaces are added. Cantonal recognition remains, however, a largely symbolic and immaterial acknowledgement of the public value and social contribution of certain religious communities, while endeavours are being made, despite the lack of recognition, to amend the practical ramifications through pragmatic arrangements and local dialogue (Pahud de Mortanges 2015). For example, Muslims are granted burial spaces without being officially recognised. This may also explain why Muslims in Basel, having once attempted unsuccessfully to gain public-legal recognition in the late 1990s, have not yet applied for cantonal recognition. Further to this, cantonal recognition still depends on the approval of local parliament and Muslim representatives expect little success due to the absence of public acceptance and political representation. In Basel and Switzerland more generally, they continuously pursue recognition, but prioritise immediate issues such as recruitment of imams, maintenance of buildings, burial arrangements and interreligious dialogue. Meanwhile, in 2014 the cantonal educational law was changed in such a way that only those religious communities with at least cantonal recognition may give religious classes in public schools. To this, Islam’s exclusion from the population registration form as well as from official listings of local religious

communities (Roost Vischer 2018) are added. These developments point to a growing practical significance of cantonal recognition.

### *3.2. "State" contracts in the German city-state of Hamburg*

Hamburg looks back on a long history of Muslim presence and connections to the Muslim world, through migration, trade and colonialism (Foroutan et al. 2014). Merchants of Iranian origin formed the first considerable Muslim community in Hamburg and the eye-catching Shiite Imam-Ali Mosque, located centrally on the shores of the Alster river, is often drawn upon as a symbol of the city's metropolitanism and tolerance. Hamburg claims and is attributed to have a pioneering role in dealing with religious diversity, is labelled a capital of interreligious dialogue as well as a gateway to the world (Körs & Nagel 2018). It is the first German state in which both Alevi and Muslim organisations signed contracts with the local government in 2012, stipulating their rights and confirming an approving relationship between these religious groups and the senate. Recently, however, the Islamic Centre that inhabits the Imam-Ali Mosque has caused much public concern due to its participation in events such as anti-Israel demonstrations or services mourning the Iranian general Soleimani. Turkish organisations and representatives have equally been criticised extensively, and the Muslim contract has been attacked repeatedly.

For Alevis, Hamburg constitutes a particularly meaningful place in their history of institutionalisation. The national Alevi federation emerged as a result of developments taking place in Hamburg; in 1988, the Alevi Culture group was formed, marking the move from non-Alevi political engagements to a commitment to the Alevi movement (Sökefeld 2008a). In May 1989, the group published a statement, subsequently known as the Alevi Declaration, demanding the official recognition of Alevism in Turkey and Germany (ibid.). This was followed by the staging of an Alevi Culture Week later in 1989 at the University of Hamburg, featuring talks and performances and attracting an audience from beyond the confines of

Hamburg. This week was concluded with the first public *cem*<sup>5</sup> celebrated in Europe. The Alevi Culture Group was formalised as the Alevi Culture Centre Hamburg (HAKM) in the same year, although within a year it split into diverging factions (ibid.). In 1995, Alevi representatives joined the roundtable on interconfessional religious instruction at school, initiated and led by the Evangelical Church and also including Muslim representatives.

One of the Muslim contract partners to local government, alongside the local branches of DITIB and the Union of Islamic Culture Centres (VIKZ), is Schura Hamburg, founded in 1999. It is an umbrella organisation of local mosque associations of different Muslim denominations and national origins, although its most significant member is the Millî Görüş-affiliated Centrum-Moschee. Already in the 1990s, the board of the Centrum-Moschee sought dialogue with the public, politicians and other religious communities in light of growing anti-Muslim racism (Spielhaus 2011). This became even more pressing after 2001, when it was revealed that some of the 9/11 terrorists had regularly met in a nearby mosque. This led to increased surveillance of local mosque associations, which were under particular pressure to position themselves and open up to the public (ibid.). In this manner, the founding of Schura and the preceding dialogue endeavours already stand in relation to a prospective agreement between Hamburg Muslims and local government (Haddad 2017).

Concerning the initiation of contract negotiations, a frequently recounted incident<sup>6</sup> took place in 2006 during a fast-breaking reception in the Centrum-Moschee, when its imam gave a speech to the guests, including the then mayor Ole von Beust from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The imam addressed the fact that the city of Hamburg had recently signed contracts with the Christian churches and asked for the same treatment of the Muslim community, giving a list of issues which should be thusly regulated: the training of Muslim

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<sup>5</sup> The most important Alevi ritual in which the community gathers to allay conflict, pray, dance and make music.

<sup>6</sup> in expert interviews with current and former Schura representatives, confirmed by video footage of the event

theologians, teachers and imams, Islam in public schools, mosque construction as part of local urban development, chaplaincy in prisons and hospitals, participation in the broadcasting board, burials and halal slaughter. Ole von Beust spontaneously responded to this request and promised to take up talks. However, in an interview he himself explained that he had already been considering an official recognition of Islam since the incidents of 9/11 (ibid.). Further to this, developments in Hamburg coincided with the commencement of the German Islam Conference in 2006, also with DITIB, VIKZ and Millî Görüş as participants.

Ole von Beust kept his promise and invitations for talks were sent to Schura, the local branches of DITIB and VIKZ as well as the Alevi community. It was initially assumed that Alevi and Muslim communities could be treated collectively. Yet Alevis, from the outset, expressed their wish for separate talks. Here, they could draw on an expert appraisal by religious studies scholar Ursula Spuler-Stegemann in 2003 for the ministry of education in North Rhine Westphalia after the German Alevi federation had applied for the right to teach Alevism at schools there, in which she defined Alevism as an autonomous syncretic religion, albeit with special references to Islam.

In 2010, in the face of upcoming local elections, in which the CDU was to lose its majority to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the senate suggested concluding negotiations with a simple, written cooperation agreement. Muslim representatives, however, demanded a contract, because only this and the concomitant recognition as a religious community would allow for equal participation in decisions over cross-confessional religious instruction at school. Consequently, expert assessments analysing the legal-organisational constitutedness of the communities as well as their community life were commissioned by the senate and published in 2011. Concerns emerged regarding the organisational structure of DITIB, specifically its ties to the Turkish Diyanet that could, however, be rectified through a statute change (Körs 2019). Furthermore, the issue of Millî Görüş's surveillance by the Office for the Protection of the

Constitution in Hamburg was similarly resolved in its favour (ibid.). A contentious issue that emerged towards the end of negotiations with the Alevi community after the change of government, was the creation of a university chair for Alevi theology. Both the local government and the university were hesitant to comply with the community's wishes. Eventually, a junior professorship was established and 2015 saw the launch of an Alevi studies programme at the University of Hamburg, one of two of its kind in Germany.

Unlike the previous contracts with the Christian and Jewish communities, the Muslim and Alevi contracts contain a pledge of commitment to constitutional values and gender equality, possibly since the contract partners are not public corporations, as well as a clause regarding renewed negotiations after ten years. Furthermore, the Muslim and Alevi contracts were approved by the Hamburg parliament but remain without legal transformation into state law, "thus not unfolding as a legal tool but rather primarily as an instrument with political meaning and symbolic power" (ibid.: 464). Nevertheless, due to an inclusion of a declaration of intent to that effect and because in order to act as contract partners the organisations had to be recognised first as religious communities in the sense of the Basic Law, "the contracts are seen as progress on the way to achieving corporate status" (ibid.: 458). Moreover, they had a "pioneering role and set a precedent for other Länder, and also influence discourses at the national level" (ibid.: 459). Although negotiations were concluded in 2011, it was only in late 2012 that the contracts were signed and in early 2013 that they were passed by parliament. This was because the SPD-led government, which had taken over the contract proceedings from its predecessor, struggled to close its own ranks and ensure a parliamentary majority.

Since then, there have been repeated calls from right and conservative parties in local parliament to terminate or suspend the contract with the Muslim organisations, spurred on by the DITIB espionage scandal, the participation of the Islamic Centre in anti-Israel demonstrations, as well as nationalist Facebook posts by Muslim representatives. Such conflicts

reflect an increasingly tense social climate since 2016 with regard to issues of integration and belonging, also exacerbated by deteriorating relations between Germany and Turkey's AKP government. The entrance of the AfD party into the Hamburg parliament in 2015, furthermore, recast parliamentary debates, as the CDU and the AfD vied for the right margin of the political spectrum. In the run-up to the February 2020 local elections, which coincided with my field stay in Hamburg, the contract with the Muslim community remained a contentious issue. While Muslim organisations have been the target of criticism, the Alevi community was pronounced an exemplary contract partner by the Hamburg government (Bürgerschaft der FHH 2018).

On a national level, attempts by Sunni Muslim organisations in Germany to attain public recognition status have so far been rejected on the grounds of organisational fragmentation. The founding of the Coordination Council of Muslims in 2007 as a union of major umbrella organisations was their direct response to such reservations, but it has been accused of only representing a minority of Muslims in Germany (Azzaoui 2011). In this manner, the prerequisites for being regarded as a legitimate religious community changed from forming a single unified representation to representing the majority of adherents, neither of which has a basis in religious constitutional law (ibid.). At the same time, with the instigation of the German Islam Conference in 2006 under the purview of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the prerequisites for public corporation status have shifted from legal-administrative criteria to worthiness and compatibility with the cultural and value basis of society and the constitution, raising the stakes for parity with the established religious communities even higher (Joppke & Torpey 2013).

### *3.3. National-legal recognition in Austria and its capital city-state of Vienna*

#### *3.3.1. Law and politics on Islam in Austria*

Austria stands out from the three cases considered in this study through its long history of recognition of the Islamic community as a corporation of public law. A law recognising Islam as a religious community was passed in 1912, in the aftermath of the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in consequence of which a significant part of the Empire's population was Muslim. After the fall of the Empire, the law continued to exist but lost its significance until the beginning of labour migration in the 1960s (Arslan 2016). Yet, it was not migrants from Turkey, but students and intellectuals from Bosnia and Arab countries who endeavoured to revitalise the law and, to that end, founded the Muslim Social Service in 1964, which formed the precursor to the Islamic Faith Community in Austria (IGGiÖ) (Hafez 2013). The latter was founded in 1979, thereby forming the first Islamic religious community in Austria on the basis of the 1912 Islam Law. Muslim organisations, such as the Diyanet-affiliated ATIB or the Millî Görüş-affiliated Islamic Federation, are members of the IGGiÖ, but remain independent legal units.

Umbrella organisations had no formal role in the early years of the IGGiÖ, as they were only founded after the latter's establishment. The IGGiÖ was initially led by a non-Turkish intelligentsia and Turkish members aligned themselves with competing candidates (Hafez 2013). It was only in the late 1980s that Turkish-origin Muslim organisations began to be formalised in Austria. Moreover, Turkish organisations, especially ATIB, were distancing themselves from the IGGiÖ, challenging its ability to represent Muslims in Austria as its statute limited the representation of any ethnic group at the high council to thirty percent (Heine et al. 2012, Şimşek 2017). ATIB also disapproved of the training of religion teachers at IGGiÖ's Islamic Pedagogical Academy and of other imams coming from Turkey to serve in Millî Görüş or Süleymanî mosques (Citak 2013). Contestations of representativity, not only by Turkish organisations but also self-designated liberal Muslims and Shiites, led to a revision of the internal structure of the IGGiÖ beginning in 2008 to allow for greater participation, also

marking the end of its eschewal by ATIB. The overcoming of ATIB's reserve also coincided with the growing foreign activity of the Turkish government (Aslan 2018). Amendments to the structure of the IGGiÖ and elections in 2011 strengthened the position of Turkish organisations (Hafez 2013). The restructuring of the IGGiÖ was, however, not merely motivated by internal criticisms, but occurred also during a political debate in 2009 on the results of a study on the attitudes of Islam teachers towards democracy and the rule of law (Khorchide 2009), which amplified cries for greater control over the training of Islam pedagogues.

The boundaries between Austria's exclusive citizenship and inclusive religion policies are becoming increasingly obfuscated (Mourao Permoser & Rosenberger 2009), in favour of a growing conflation of the public-legal recognition of Islam with integration and securitisation concerns, coexisting with persistent anti-Muslim racism (Baghajati 2016, Mattes & Rosenberger 2015, Sezgin 2018). The founding of the integration state secretary within the Ministry of the Interior in 2011 marked the beginning of an official integration politics on a national level (Hafez 2018). The new government programme of 2013 included, under the heading of integration, the amendment of the Islam Law and the long-term training of imams in Austria (*ibid.*). Hence, Muslims' legal status in Austria is not stable or uncontested but rather has been put under renewed scrutiny by the state, coinciding with a more general change in the discourse and politics on Islam (Baghajati 2016, Hafez & Dautovic 2019, Hafez & Heinisch 2018).

The draft of the amended Islam Law, presented in 2014 and praised by the then foreign minister Sebastian Kurz for its potential to enable an Islam of European character, was met with heavy criticism from the political left, academics, as well as Muslim organisations (Baghajati 2016, Hafez 2017). The IGGiÖ leadership voiced its opprobrium but ultimately accepted the draft, which had not been substantially changed despite the general discontent (Bauer 2016). The revised law included the duty to conform to state norms and prioritise these over religious

rules, and demanded a positive attitude towards the state, something that cannot be found in other religious special laws (Baghajati 2016, Hafez 2018). Furthermore, the law placed an emphasis on the German language and the need to make Islam teachings and practices transparent, including a state-approved translation of the Quran into German (Hafez 2018). Further to this, it stipulated a ban of foreign funding of regular activities aimed at meeting religious needs, which equally has no counterpart in any other religious acts (Hafez & Dautovic 2019). Additionally, the law included a provision on the dissolving of associations the purpose of which is the propagation of religious teachings of already existing religious societies (ibid.), which proved especially detrimental to the unrecognised Alevi community, as will be shown below. Finally, the position of umbrella organisations, now termed *Kultusgemeinden*, was further strengthened by the cancellation of the ethnic restriction clause (Baghajati 2016).

The new Islam Law has had tangible ramifications for Muslim associations and organisations in Austria. In 2016, nine ATIB imams had to leave Austria because they were paid through foreign means, in violation of the new proscription of foreign financing. The complaints of more than sixty Muslim associations against these proceedings were deemed inadmissible by the constitutional court (Öktem & Alkan 2018). In February 2019, another forty imams employed in ATIB mosques were expelled. The ATIB filed a complaint against this decision at the constitutional court in Vienna, which was dismissed (ORF 2019). The year 2020 brought further incisive developments for the Muslim community in Austria. The Documentation Centre Political Islam was founded, which sparked an intense debate on the definition of political Islam. The IGGiÖ refused to cooperate, sensing another state-led attempt to control and securitise Muslims in Austria. Meanwhile, the finance authority continued its crackdown on Muslim associations, especially those of Turkish origin, to take action against foreign financing.

In the aftermath of the shooting attack in Vienna's inner city committed in early November 2020 during my field stay, by a young Austrian ISIS-sympathiser, the Austrian government declared to fight terrorism with all available means. So-called radical mosques were closed, among them the one in Vienna frequented by the attacker, which shortly prior had already been stripped of its legal status and its membership in the IGGiÖ. Mosques across the country were subject to raids; the Muslim brotherhood and its Austrian network became a special focus of investigations. The then chancellor Sebastian Kurz announced his intention to make "political Islam" a criminal offence, allow for an easier closure of religious communities, institute an imam-registry and implement a toughening of the association law as well as further measures to impede the financing of terrorist activities. In this manner, the Islam Law was tightened even further, stipulating regular inspections of communities' financial documents and a widened obligation to notify the authorities of organisational conflicts or changes.

### 3.3.2. Austria's divided Alevi community

Another major change in the amended Islam Law of 2015 was the fact that the IGGiÖ no longer featured the only Muslim public corporation. An Alevi faith community had been recognised as a public corporation in 2013 and included in the Islam Law (Arslan 2016). The formation of Alevi groupings in Austria coincided with activities in Hamburg at the end of the 1980s (Şimşek 2017). These associations gathered under an umbrella organisation, the Federation of Alevi Associations in Austria (AABF), which was founded and officially registered in 1998 (ibid.). In unison with other European Alevi federations, it decided to attain public recognition in 2007 and has worked towards this goal since 2008. The internal restructuring of the IGGiÖ and controversies over its status as the sole representation of Muslims in Austria provided a further backdrop. The Austrian Alevi federation handed in its application for public recognition in April 2009. However, without prior consultation, the Viennese association had already submitted an application to the responsible government

department (*Kultusamt*) some weeks before. The statutes which it had submitted largely resembled those agreed upon and later used by the federation, with the important difference that while the federation described Alevism as an independent and syncretic belief, albeit with special connections to Islam, the association described Alevism as a denomination of Islam (Arslan 2016). Both groups, however, wanted to shed their subsumption in the IGGiÖ, especially to attain power in decisions over the content of Alevi instruction at school (*ibid.*).

The *Kultusamt* initially rejected the application of the Vienna association for recognition as an Islamic Alevi religious community, arguing that there already was a legal representation of Islam, namely the IGGiÖ. The association thereafter filed a complaint to the constitutional court in October 2009 which, in December 2010, ruled that the rights of the association had been violated (*ibid.*). The decision also drew on a statement of the IGGiÖ, which denied that Alevism is an Islamic faith (*ibid.*). The court decided that the applicants were adherents of Islam in the sense of the Islam Law of 1912, but not members of the IGGiÖ, and that there may be more than one representation of Islam in Austria (*ibid.*). The application for recognition as an Islamic Alevi Faith Community in Austria was thereafter granted, although initially as a state-registered religious confessional community (*ibid.*). It was fully recognised as a corporation of public law under the name of Alevi Religious Community in Austria in May 2013 and formed the second public Islamic corporation under the Islam Law of 2015. Other than the IGGiÖ and its member organisations, the Islamic Alevi community supported the law's provisions. Its public-legal recognition and inclusion into the Islam Law led to the establishment of Alevi studies at the universities of Vienna and Innsbruck. Further privileges include the recognition of Alevi holidays, the provision of burial spaces in the Central Cemetery in Vienna and Alevi instruction in public schools. In addition, the religious affiliation appears on personal documents such as school reports, birth and marriage certificates and residence registrations (Şimşek 2017).

Meanwhile, the application of the Alevi federation was rejected based on the argument that their teachings did not sufficiently differ from the Islamic Alevi community (Arslan 2016). Thus, a protracted legal proceeding was initiated, lasting many years. Furthermore, as the Islam Law stipulates that associations which propagate religious teachings of a recognised religious society are to be dissolved, the Islamic Alevi community could demand the closure of Alevi federation associations and lay exclusive claim on the use of the Alevi designation and religious practices. The Alevi federation has struggled for the rectification of what it perceives as gross injustice, illegitimate state-led intrusion and assimilation under Islam. Having exhausted all national legal paths, it submitted its case to the European Court of Human rights and simultaneously filed a new application for recognition as a confessional community with the Austrian *Kultusamt* in 2020. Only very recently, in April 2022, a year and a half after my field stay in Vienna, the Alevi federation was granted subsidiary legal status as an officially registered religious confessional community.

As has already become apparent in the preceding account on the recognition processes of Alevi and Sunni communities in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna, national discourses and policies on the place of Islam and the integration of Muslims not only form a context to such proceedings but are a major influence on them. I argue that such discourses and policies are part of national politics of belonging based on racialised terms of inclusion, exclusion and hierarchisation. Furthermore, the terms of belonging extant in Turkey and Alevis' and Sunnis' opposing histories of state treatment there, impact their respective meaning-making of official recognition in Europe, particularly with regard to their feelings of belonging. The following section, accordingly, treats the topics of race and migration in Turkey and German-speaking Western Europe, portraying the racial hierarchies structuring these contexts.

#### **4. Histories and structures of racism in Turkey and German-speaking Western Europe**

## 4.1. Racial hierarchies and silences in Germany, Switzerland and Austria

### 4.1.1. Common ideas and histories

Despite decades of population movement from different countries, be it labour migrants, family members or asylum seekers, the governments of Germany, Austria and Switzerland denied being countries of migration with diverse societies until the very end of the twentieth century. Until then, the status of foreigner was hereditary and attached even to those who were born and raised in these countries. For residents of Turkish origin, this meant barred access to formal membership and full political participation, as well as social exclusion and a daily reality of racism. In Germany, naturalisation policies have been liberalised to a certain degree at the turn of the millennium. Yet, this has caused heated public and political debates about what it means to be German, triggering fears about immigration's threat to German *Leitkultur* and liberal ideals (Özyürek 2014). At the same time, citizenship regulations in Austria have grown more restrictive, while in Switzerland, citizenship attainment is highly discriminatory as it lies in the discretion of local citizen committees (Hofhansel 2008). Austrian and Swiss citizenship regimes are considered the most exclusionary in Europe, maintaining high hurdles for formal membership such as years of residence, financial means, job security and knowledge about local culture and the political system.

Nevertheless, former legal divisions between citizens and foreigners are vanishing as the descendants of labour migrants increasingly become citizens of their country of birth and residence. As a consequence, formal citizenship no longer serves as the sole basis of division between those who belong and those who do not (Ayata 2019b). Instead, since the early 2000s, integration has become a predominant paradigm, reflected in the introduction of integration courses, naturalisation tests or national integration plans (Triadafilopoulos & Rahmann 2016). Meanwhile, especially after 9/11, religious difference is taken both as the explanation for incompatibility and failed integration and as the means by which integration is to come to pass,

reconfiguring the racialised boundaries of the nation (Lewicki 2018). Political discourse on migration and Islam in all three countries questions the belonging of Muslim migrants and their descendants, constantly demanding proof of loyalty and willingness to integrate.

Germany, Switzerland and Austria have long been defined as communities of descent in which substantive membership is predicated upon racial categories. Yet, all three countries are characterised by a post-WWII public and official denial of race as a structuring principle of state and society. Race and racism are understood as an aberration of the past, a problem of other countries, confined to extremist groups, to rural areas and, in the case of Germany, formerly socialist provinces, or as a matter of individual psychology, rather than continuously determining the very definitions and structures of state and society (Goldberg 2006).

#### 4.1.2. Continuance and erasure of race in Germany

In Germany, the end of the Second World War was regarded as *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour). Anything that followed was deemed a break from the past. However, 1945 did not constitute a rupture in terms of racialised debates, even as explicit racial discourse subsided (Jung 2021). Rather, racism and antisemitism came to be treated as two distinct phenomena. West-Germany assumed responsibility for the Holocaust and its post-war development and status of de-Nazification were gleaned from its treatment of and attitude towards Jews (Chin et al. 2009). Yet, while public expressions of anti-Jewish sentiment lessened after the violent decimation of the Jewish minority on German soil, the underlying racial assumptions were still alive (ibid.). Furthermore, re-education and Holocaust commemoration took on a highly restricted form. Rather than encouraging an engagement with the treatment of difference more generally, including the presence of black residents as well as labour migrants from southern Europe and Turkey, it was limited to past Nazi atrocities. Not only did Holocaust commemoration not reflect on the past and present continuities of racism, it cemented the exclusion of the current non-white population, because inclusion into the German nation came to be premised on one's

membership of the *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, the community of fate in which perpetrators and their descendants came to terms with their guilt (ibid.).

In this way, the German as well as the Austrian governments<sup>7</sup> had no qualms in establishing a labour migration system that was deeply racialised, based as it was on hierarchical and gendered divisions of labour, the temporary exploitation of the labour force and their dismissal once their time or use had expired, as well as their physical, social and legal separation and exclusion. Once the presence of migrants from Turkey and their families became permanent in the 1970s and the idea of their eventual return had been largely abandoned, racialised notions of cultural difference and calls for the integration of “foreigners” emerged, due to a concern to preserve national identity (ibid.). Rather than using tropes of biology, notions of incompatibility were expressed in the language of fixed cultures which were allegedly at odds with Western democracy, enlightenment and female emancipation.

German reunification further cemented exclusionary racial terms of belonging. Debates were cast in terms of ethnic union and homogeneity, at the exclusion of multiple generations of resident migrants, and public efforts were exerted to induce a common national identity, again through the means of Holocaust commemoration or the museal exhibition of a common and guilt-free distant history (ibid.). The manner in which the political leadership reacted to the intensified xenophobic violence of the early 1990s did not address its racist terms, but instead reiterated and cemented racial boundaries and hierarchies by eroding the constitutionally granted right to asylum (Lewicki 2018). The hate crimes of the early 1990s were cast as new phenomena, or a problem deriving from extremist margins of society, rather than understood as “an intensification of already existing patterns” (Chin et al. 2009: 128). Only recently has Germany recognised the genocide of the Herero and Nama in what is today Namibia, committed

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<sup>7</sup> Switzerland’s reception of labour migrants was organised through employers and not part of a concerted government initiative.

in its more distant colonial past, but activist groups call for a more encompassing accounting for colonial history and its continuities until today.

The societal standing of migrants from Turkey and their descendants suffered significantly as the relationship between Germany and Turkey's AKP government deteriorated since 2016, the year that saw the EU-Turkey refugee deal, the Böhmermann-poem<sup>8</sup>, German parliament's positive vote on the recognition of the Armenian genocide and the failed coup attempt in Turkey. Both "narratives of an ancestral neo-Ottoman revival in Turkey and of ethno-national rebirth in German politics" have exacerbated the notion that Turkish Germans are in a "conflict of loyalties' between fixed notions of an 'enlightened German culture' and a 'non-enlightened Turkish culture'" (Özvatan 2020: 294; 296).

#### 4.1.3. Swiss and Austrian Particularities

Austria and Switzerland were also implicated in the Nazi racial state. Austria became part of the National Socialist German Reich through its *Anschluss* in 1938, while Switzerland cooperated with the German government, for instance through its dismissal of Jewish refugees at its borders. As in Germany, racialised distinctions have constituted a structuring principle of state and society, albeit in particular ways. While Switzerland did not possess colonies, it has nevertheless been part of transnational exploitative structures through trade, missionary activities or development aid. However, its indirect implication both in colonialism and Nazism meant that it could deny state racism more effectively than the other two countries. Silence on race and the public delegitimising of anti-racist claims are, in this manner, more acute in Switzerland, which has staged itself as exceptional in Europe and has claimed neutrality throughout its history (Boulila 2019). Yet, the regular electoral success of right-wing parties

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<sup>8</sup> in which German comedian Böhmermann uses sexually and racially connoted insults against Turkish president Erdogan (describing him as a paedophile, zoophile, dirty and smelly). Erdogan sued Böhmermann for defamation of a foreign state representative, which caused a political debate in Germany on the abolishment of this charge.

and their racist campaigns against migrants and Muslims, coupled with ineffective anti-racist federal state bodies, belie such claims.

Austria was part of a multinational and multireligious empire, which explains its singular legal accommodation of Islam. At the same time, it has a deeply ingrained anti-Turkish public memory, harking back to the fourteenth century and two Ottoman sieges (Matzka 2009, Strasser 2008). Austria exhibits a unique kind of frontier orientalism, informed by its historical location at a contested dividing line between the Orient and the Occident (Gingerich 2015). This frontier orientalism, which features regular surges in recent public and political discourse, departs from its classical variant famously described by Said (2003 [1978]). It does not refer to distant subjugated colonies, invoking tropes of voyeurism, exoticism and eroticism, but to adjacent intruders' aggression and threatening invasion. This is accompanied, at least from the annexation of Bosnia onwards, by a division between internal, loyal and "good" Muslims, for whom the Islam Law was put in place in 1912, and external, threatening, "bad" Muslims, which have to be driven out (Gingerich 2015, Strasser 2008). Immigration from Turkey in the second half of the twentieth century brought these "invaders" in and Austria's traditionally strong right-wing parties regularly caution the electorate against a third siege by the Turks.

#### *4.2. Racial hierarchies in the late Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, and the Turkish definition of national belonging*

Similar to the narrative of the *Stunde Null* that conceptualises the end of the Second World War in Europe as the termination of social, political and ideological formations and the point of new beginnings, the Turkish conversion narrative establishes the founding of the Republic in 1923 as a radical break in the history of the region and especially as a total departure from the preceding Ottoman period. Yet, there were important continuities between late Ottoman "efforts to establish a meaningful presence within the new cosmology of Western modernity" and Republican ideas on the essential unity of the Turkish people (Ergin 2017: 48).

By the nineteenth century, powerful and resilient conceptions on the “terrible” and subhuman Turk had already been firmly established in and by Western science and popular culture. Western anthropological texts, for instance, spoke of “Turkish blood”, “Turanian stock” or the “typical Turkish skull” (ibid.: 71). Orientalism more generally positioned the East as an antithesis to Western civilisation, progress and enlightenment (Said 2003 [1978]). Only towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, did the subjects of the Ottoman Empire start to conceptualise themselves as Turks, namely when Turkish-speaking émigré intellectuals sought to disprove Western ideas of Turkish inferiority by attempting to establish the ancientness of the Turkish language and people, and their links to other great civilisations (Ergin 2017). This project, initiated in late Ottoman times, was continued with renewed vigour in the early years of the Turkish Republic, as will be shown further below.

Moreover, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the leading faction within the Young Turk movement that later turned into the Union and Progress Party, maintained continuity from the late Ottoman years to the early Republic in terms of politics and personnel. From 1913 to 1918, the CUP ruled as a one-party state and during that time pursued violent ethnic cleansing and demographic engineering campaigns in Anatolia, in order to achieve racial and religious homogeneity and the instantiation of Sunni-Muslim Turkishness as a dominant identity (Üngör 2011). Most devastating among these was the deportation and extermination of the Armenians in 1915 and 1916, the definition of which as genocide remains unrecognised by the Turkish government. Another campaign of similar nature was the systematic killing, deportation and expulsion of the Christian Greek population of Anatolia between 1914 and 1922, the survivors of which fled or were forced to move under the stipulations of the population exchange between Turkey and Greece as part of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. This treaty sealed the sovereignty of the new Turkish nation-state, granted its immunity with regard to previous atrocities and gave protected minority status to non-Muslim groups, while excluding Kurds and

Alevis from such status. It thereby tacitly endorsed the expulsion and extermination of those deemed racial and religious outsiders, establishing this as a legitimate nation-building practice which, for instance, appealed to German revisionists (Kieser 2010).

The founders of the Turkish Republic pronounced a concept of citizenship inclusive of the entire population, yet simultaneously constructed and imposed a unified Turkish national identity based on Sunni Islam as well as Turkish language and race. “Turkish nation-building worked within a particular racial hierarchy and [...] all groups were not equally and universally incorporated into the concept of the nation” (Maksudyan 2005: 291). The 1934 Settlement Law, for instance, divided residents and potential immigrants into those who were part of Turkish culture in terms of language and race, and those who were required to assimilate. By mixing Turkish and Kurdish populations in Western and Eastern Turkey, it aimed to avoid concentrations of those who fell into the second category (Ergin 2017). Through means of population movement, educational and language reforms, Kemalists took on “a civilising mission on a supposedly backward and traditional Anatolian society” (Zeydanlioglu 2008: 4).

Ideas of the racial and civilisational superiority of Turks and the inferiority of other “races” were, furthermore, constructed and substantiated in officially endorsed scholarship. Following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, the West was continuously imagined as the audience and arbiter of Turkish modernisation (Ergin 2017, Gökay 2016). Western Orientalist constructs and race science were emulated in a state-guided process of knowledge production and dissemination, seeking out the racial essences of Turks in the ancient past and proclaiming Turkish civilisation as the cradle of all other civilisations (Ergin 2017, Gökay 2016, Maksudyan 2005, Xypolia 2016, Zeydanlioglu 2008). Such “modern” and Western scientific race-based comparisons were applied to the already defined ethnic and religious others of Turkish national identity, namely Greek, Jewish, Armenian and Kurdish people, reproducing and legitimising older hierarchies (Maksudyan 2005).

Conceptions of race remain an evaluative criterion for citizenship in Turkey. While the overt vocabulary of race has declined, Turkish national identity is still portrayed as immutable and incompatible with certain social locations. The status of Sunni Islam as a defining element of Turkish citizenship has become ever more overt and the notion of Kurds as a “problem” and troublemakers more entrenched (Zeydanlioglu 2008). These days, Alevis and Kurds are major challengers of Turkey’s definition of citizenship (Aktürk 2012). The position of Alevis has mostly been one of exclusionary inclusion, their assimilation being based on the suppression of their claims to difference.

### *4.3. Alevis’ relationship with the Turkish state*

#### 4.3.1. Persecution, assimilation and revival

In the centuries preceding the founding of the Turkish Republic, Alevis’ relationship with the state ranged from distrust to outright violence. In Ottoman times, Alevis were persecuted as they had sided with the Safavid Empire (Bardakci et al. 2017). While they were administratively treated as part of the Muslim community, scholars of Islam regarded them as heretics and infidels (Arkilic & Gurcan 2020: 5). Neither the millet system of the Ottoman era nor the subsequent Lausanne framework legally recognised Alevis as a minority group. Initially, they attached great hopes to Atatürk and his new secular republic, believing that it would end the Sunni-Muslim dominance of the preceding empire. “In fact, throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, Alevis have perceived themselves as a counter-force to Sunni fundamentalism, ensuring the continued secularism of Turkey” (Koçan & Öncü 2004: 476). Yet, the creation of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in 1924, which solely represented and served Turkey’s Sunni Hanafi majority, the closure and prohibition of lodges, shrines and other religious sites in 1925, as well as the massacring military campaign in the eastern Anatolian region of Dersim in 1937-38 shattered initial hopes and strained relations with the Kemalist state (Aktürk 2012, Arkilic & Gurcan 2020). Alevis’ search for collective rights has consistently

been “perceived as a ‘threat’ to the unity and authority of the state” (Arkilic & Gurcan 2020: 5). In this way, Alevis have occupied a position between inclusion into and exclusion from the Turkish nation-state.

Repression of difference and a definition of citizenship based on Sunni Turkishness continued to form guiding principles of Turkish republican state action. As Islam remained a national element even under Kemalist politics, “Alevi difference posed a problem that needed to be explained and controlled” (Dressler 2013: 272). Alevis were subjected to assimilation into the nationalist project and “into a mainstream identity discourse drawing on notions of Turkishness as well as a secular interpretation of Islam” (ibid.). Meanwhile, Aleviness was at best considered subordinate or complementary to Turkish and Sunni Islamic identities. In this manner, speaking of “our Alevi brothers and sisters,” while ostensibly including Alevis into the nation, simultaneously excluded them “from its normative center” which was “explicitly defined as Turkish and implicitly as Muslim” (ibid.: xvii).

With the end of one-party rule in 1950 and in the course of the following decades, Alevis have been present in Turkish parliament, but unable to change the definition of national belonging (Aktürk 2012). During the political polarisation of the 1970s, many Alevis participated in leftist movements and were therefore considered an internal threat. Between 1978 and 1980, they were the target of violent attacks in Malatya, Sivas and Çorum. The military coup of 1980 intensified the persecution of leftist groups and the 1982 constitution sealed the so-called Turkish-Islamic synthesis by stipulating compulsory religion lessons at school, expanding the role of the Diyanet and increasing the construction of mosques (Bardakci et al. 2017).

This increased suppression of the political left in Turkey led to a dispersal of Alevism as “folk socialism”; instead, a new generation of Alevi activists emerged “who saw Alevism as a cultural and a political ‘identity’” (Koçan & Öncü 2004: 478). In this way, the late 1980s

marked the beginning of an Alevi revival both in Turkey and in Europe, as associations were formed, publications appeared and Alevis engaged in public claims-making as Alevis. The Sivas massacre in 1993, in which a mob set fire to a hotel housing a conference of Alevi artists and intellectuals, killing 37 people, accelerated Alevi mobilisation and is commemorated in Alevi associations to this day. After a long legal battle in the 1990s, Alevis in Turkey won the right to use the term ‘Alevi’ in the names of their associations. Yet, as the law continues to withhold recognition from Alevi houses of worship (*cem evi*s), these associations have been running under the guise of cultural centres. “Furthermore, a greater number of people began to publicly disclose their Alevi identities, which they had kept private due to fear of stigmatization and retaliation” (Karakaya-Stump 2018: 55). As Turkey became an EU accession candidate in 1999, further gestures to include cultural, ethnic and religious diversity could be observed. It provided a political leverage for Turkish and European Alevi organisations, and Alevis’ continued lack of equality was regularly included in EU progress reports on Turkey, exerting pressure on Turkey to recognise Alevi identity (Soner & Toktaş 2011).

#### 4.3.2. The AKP’s “Alevi Opening”

The accession to power of the Islamic conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 led to an acceleration of reforms and a rapprochement with the Alevi community, although Alevi demands such as the recognition of *cem evi*s, the banishment of obligatory Islam classes and the restructuring or abolishment of the Diyanet were a major challenge to the definition of the Turkish state as well as AKP’s self-understanding. The height of the Alevi Opening was constituted by a series of workshops between 2009 and 2010, including state officials, Islamic theologians, experts and representatives of selected Alevi organisations. These forums have resulted in a number of mostly symbolic gestures such as an official apology for the Dersim massacre, the allocation of state funds to state-friendly Alevi associations, or the broadcasting of Alevi documentaries (ibid.). However, compulsory religion

classes at school remain and while Alevism was included into the school curriculum, it is taught from a Sunni perspective and defined as a subvariant of Islam. No steps were taken regarding the recognition of *cem evi*s as official places of worship or the status of the Diyanet. Rather, an official Alevism is developed and practised by government-friendly Alevi associations such as Cem Vakfi (Orhan 2019) and the sending of state-sanctioned Alevi religious leaders to Alevi organisations in Europe has caused much suspicion among the latter (Arkilic & Gurcan 2020). Hence, rather than making substantial concessions to Turkey's Alevis, the AKP seems to have aimed at legitimising Sunni re-Islamisation by extending certain gestures towards the Alevi community (Gümüş 2013).

Accordingly, the AKP dropped the issue of accommodating Alevis after the elections in 2011, in the run-up of which it had already made sarcastic remarks about the Alevi background of opposition leaders (Karakaya-Stump 2018). In 2014, the new prime minister Davutoğlu once again tried to bridge the gap to the alienated Alevi community, for instance by visiting a *cem evi* and promising to turn the site of the Sivas massacre into a museum. Yet, Alevis' major grievances pertaining to their *cem evi*s, the structure and very existence of the Diyanet as well as compulsory religious classes remain unresolved (Bardakci et al. 2017). On the contrary, the accelerating Islamisation of the secondary and higher educational system threatens to stifle social mobility for Alevi families who are not able to afford private schools. Alevis' employment possibilities are shrinking, while a rising "Aleviphobia" deepens their sense of disenfranchisement (Karakaya-Stump 2018: 64). Moreover, the ruling party continues to label Alevi organisations in Europe that have provided financial resources to Alevis in Turkey, shaped their agenda and lobbied Alevi parliamentarians, as external enemies threatening national unity (Boyras 2019).

In its restricted inclusion of selected Alevi groups and its attempt to shape a moderate and state-friendly Alevism, the Turkish Alevi Opening is not dissimilar to European state

treatment of Islam such as the German Islam Conference. The latter also included representatives of the German Alevi umbrella organisation. However, despite the racialisation implicit in Alevi's role as enlightened "Muslims" (Hernandez Aguilar 2017) and despite the historical and current similarities in the German and Turkish nation-states' handling of minorities, Alevi's empowered position vis-à-vis Sunni Islam makes them view their status in Germany favourably (Arkilic & Gurcan 2020).

#### *4.4. Migration to and recognition in Europe*

Many Alevi's had already moved from rural Anatolia to Turkish cities further West in search for a better outcome before the start of official labour recruitment to Western Europe in the 1960s. Although Alevi's are likely to be overrepresented in Western Europe compared to their numbers in Turkey, as their disadvantaged position in Turkey, both sociopolitically and economically, encouraged them to leave, Alevi's at first remained invisible in Europe (Sökefeld 2008a). They were subsumed into the group of Sunni-Turkish migrants, generically labelled labour migrants, Turks, foreigners or Muslims. Alevi's themselves, both in Turkish cities as well as in Western host countries, initially occluded their adherence to Alevism out of fear of discrimination, especially from their Sunni fellow migrants, and at times even abstained from passing on their beliefs to the next generation (ibid.).

Moreover, both Alevi's and Sunnis found themselves in a post-war context of silenced but enduring racism and racial hierarchisation within which they eventually came to negotiate their official religious recognition. Based on their diverging position within the Turkish racial hierarchy, Alevi's think of their recognition in Europe as a mark of their difference from Sunnis and their compatibility with European secular and democratic values, while Sunnis call out their persistent inequality with and denigration by white Europeans.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I elaborated on the sociopolitical contexts and histories of the recognition processes considered in this dissertation, outlining the history of migration from Turkey to Western Europe from the early 1960s and giving a broad overview of the institutionalisation and state incorporation of Sunni and Alevi organisations, the associations of which were the research sites of this study. I delivered an account of the particular contexts and developments pertaining to Alevi and Sunni official religious recognition in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna. Arguing that its situation within wider national and transnational contexts and histories is necessary fully to understand and account for religious recognition's relationship to community members' feelings of belonging, I detailed the continued presence and shape of racial structures in Turkey, Switzerland, Germany and Austria.

In this way, I prepared the reader for the upcoming three chapters, each of which is dedicated to one case study. In these chapters I will show how, in their reflections and accounts on official religious recognition, Alevi and Sunni participants in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna negotiate differently the Turkish and Western European hierarchies of belonging structured by racialisation. The first of these chapters is devoted to Basel where official recognition, unequally distributed among Sunni and Alevi communities, is often framed as a reward for and a reflection of successful integration, also by community members themselves. In this way, recognition forms part of a general racialised conception of the terms of inclusion into Swiss society, within which Alevi and Sunni discuss their deservingness of recognition with a view to their different positions in Turkey and Switzerland.

## **Chapter 5: Passing the Bar – Recognition as an Integration Reward in Basel**

### **1. Introduction**

It was five o'clock in the afternoon on the 17th of October 2012, when the president of Basel City's parliament introduced what was to be a political debate on the appropriateness of officially recognising the local Alevi community, some of whose members had gathered that day on the visitors' stand to watch the proceedings (Großer Rat Basel-Stadt 2012: 729 ff). It was an unprecedented occurrence in Switzerland, where so far no non-Christian or non-Jewish religious community had been officially recognised in any of its cantons (Reber & Aharchaou 2020: 4). In the end, a clear majority of 68 parliamentarians voted for Alevi recognition. Only one voted against and thirteen abstained. The parliament congratulated itself for representing a liberal canton, of setting a precedent in Switzerland and pointing the way towards more inclusion and equality. The Alevi visitors gave a long-lasting applause, some cried from joy and relief, as I was later told in my interviews with Alevi community members. It is hard to overestimate the significance of an official state-granted status and its promise of visibility and acknowledgement, for a community that has faced oppression and discrimination in Sunni-majority Turkey, especially for those individuals who had spent the first part of their life in Turkey before migrating to Europe. Added to this is the peculiarity of the distribution of cantonal recognition among the minority religious communities in Basel; with their official recognition, the Alevi community has come to possess an official status of which the local Muslim community, represented by the Basler Muslim Kommission (BMK) that includes some twenty local mosque associations, is devoid. This inverts the situation in Turkey and departs from the other two cases considered in this study, Vienna and Hamburg, where Islam was recognised respectively prior to or simultaneously with Alevism.

Basel's cantonal recognition is a private law status which was implemented in the course of a cantonal constitution reform in 2005 and enabled the granting of an official status to Basel's small or "new" religious communities. The constitution stipulates that in order to be granted cantonal recognition, the applicant community must show its "societal significance", its respect for religious peace and the rule of law, demonstrate financial transparency and grant the possibility to cease membership at any time. However, there is no entitlement to cantonal recognition, even if all requirements are fulfilled. Based on the report previously submitted by the responsible state department, which provides its recommendation on the community's suitability for cantonal recognition with regard to their fulfilment of the prescriptions of the cantonal constitution, the cantonal parliament is given the task to determine whether to give or withhold said recognition. In the discussion in October 2012, parliamentarians argued that in deciding on Alevi's cantonal recognition, they should not, and did not, value-judge or rate this group, but instead reach a conclusion on the basis of formal criteria. However, such neutral formality is arguably already precluded when a political body is asked to judge a group's social significance.

As was explicated in the governmental report which formed the basis of the parliamentary debate (Regierungsrat Basel-Stadt 2012), cantonal recognition is meant as a preliminary step for communities which do not yet meet the requirements for public-legal recognition. It expresses the state's valuation of these communities' contribution to society which is, for instance, reflected in their endeavours to further their members' integration. Not only are existing integration achievements acknowledged in this way, but cantonal recognition itself serves as a means to integrate those new religious communities into society who are willing to become integrated (ibid.: 4). Between the Alevi community's application for cantonal recognition in 2010 and its approval by the local government in 2012, the community had indeed been closely examined. This involved official visits to the community and attendance of

a *cem*<sup>9</sup> by government employees, interviews with community representatives as well as expert interviews with academics. Many parliamentarians, accordingly, positively emphasised Alevis' endeavours for integration. Their liberal, democratic and humanistic stance was noted, as well as the fact that they do not pray in mosques, do not interpret the Qur'an literally and that women are actively involved in community life. A social-democratic representative remarked that "The Alevis want to integrate themselves in Basel, and they are already very well integrated here [*bestens integriert*]" (Großer Rat Basel-Stadt 2012: 732).

In consequence, there were few misgivings about giving recognition to Basel's Alevis. However, some anxiety persisted and one parliamentarian wondered what should be done if a Salafi group, whose statutes were ostensibly in order, was to request recognition (ibid.: 732-33). While that day's decision might not have been a difficult one, it was mused that there could be such in the future. To this day, Basel's Muslim umbrella organisation (BMK) has not applied for cantonal recognition. Sunni community members believed, as I learned in the course of my fieldwork, that their application would be refused or at least cause public uproar. Attaining an official status was often deemed to be of little consequence in dispelling deep-seated prejudice against Muslims. The above-cited praises and fears by Basel parliamentarians not only show that Alevis' recognition was related to the issues of migrants' integration and the place of Islam in Swiss society, but that despite avowals to the contrary, a hierarchy of worthiness was established between different minority groups.

Meanwhile, Alevis' recognition status continues to be framed as a reward for or reflection of their integration achievements, not only in official and political discourse but also by Alevi community members themselves. Conversely, some Alevis argue that the Sunni community lacks recognition precisely because their integration is deficient. This, in fact, is

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<sup>9</sup> This is the major Alevi ceremony for which the community comes together to settle conflicts. It also involves dance (*semah*) and lute (*saz*) music.

key insight about the relationship between official religious recognition and belonging which I would like to convey in this chapter: Alevi felt joyful, proud and indeed safe and relieved about their attained recognition and the concomitant acknowledgement of their previously denied identity. At the same time, the integration frame reveals recognition to be implicated in racial hierarchies of belonging and, as a consequence, a confirmation rather than expansion of dominant terms of belonging.

This chapter is based on interviews I conducted in October and November 2019 with members of the two Alevi associations that filed jointly for cantonal recognition, as well as members of the largest member association of the BMK, which is also affiliated to the Swiss branch of the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs. I will first present the main points of significance and frames of reference which recognition in Basel assumed for my Sunni and Alevi interviewees. For Alevi, this includes the importance of their official registration and correct naming, reflecting the acknowledgement of their identity. Sunnis, by contrast, could only speculate on official recognition's potential effects and their responses oscillated between perceiving official recognition as panacea or good-for-nothing. Participants' ideas and reflections on what recognition is, does or could do, also in terms of their feelings of belonging, why it is important and for whom, serve to understand the role it assumes in their lives and contextualise the observations to be made and arguments to be pursued throughout the rest of the chapter. In the next section, I will proceed to present in more detail the manner in which participants perceived their belonging to Basel and Switzerland, in particular with regard to their external and self-definition as subjects of integration. Following this, it will be shown that recognition is itself predominantly framed as a matter of integration, not only officially but by participants themselves. Sunnis believed official recognition to be out of reach due to their persistent societal exclusion, and in any case powerless to solve the latter, while Alevi viewed official recognition as a reward for a passed examination of their compatibility with European

values such as gender equality. The conclusion pinpoints the argument I pursue in this chapter with regard to the relationship between religious recognition and belonging in Basel; framed in integration discourse, the former confirms rather than expands dominant terms of belonging and reproduces the racial hierarchies of belonging which structure society more broadly.

## **2. Recognition's significances and frames of reference**

### *2.1. The importance of the official acknowledgement of Alevi's identity*

For Alevi interviewees, their achieved recognition status in Basel gained its special significance in light of the fact that it was the first time a non-Christian and non-Jewish community was officially recognised in Switzerland. Hence, while Alevi had long been suffering oppression and discrimination in Sunni-majority Turkey, their community had gained an official status that Muslims in Switzerland are still lacking. This contrast between circumstances in Turkey and Switzerland, most of all the perceived paradox inherent in the fact that a “foreign” country has taken a step which your “own country” still shuns, formed the backdrop to Alevi participants’ meaning-making of recognition in Basel. For instance, it explains their expression of feeling free, secure and without fear in openly declaring themselves Alevi. In this manner, Metin, a middle-aged man who had moved from Turkey to Basel as a teenager, disclosed: “I feel safe [...] In the hospital or elsewhere, forms I have to fill in, I have my peace, I can write that I am Alevi [...] I am free now.” In this way, Metin described the circumstance of being able to officially register as an Alevi, which the cantonal recognition had enabled, making him feel safe and peaceful. Murat, an active member of the community who had been closely involved in the recognition process, also described his feeling upon recognition very vividly, as a sense of profound relief: “It is as if you have been carrying a hundred kilos every day and someone took it away from you. And you can take a deep breath.”

The symbolic and historical meaning of cantonal recognition outweighed for many the fact that, apart from the possibility to officially register as Alevi, it had few practical benefits. Lütfiye, a cheery and exuberant middle-aged Alevi woman, who was born in Germany and moved to Basel upon her marriage, expressed her emotions very strongly during our interview. She touched her heart upon declaring that official recognition had an indescribable meaning for her. She explained:

“You know, there doesn’t need to be much change in practical life. It is simply a super-great feeling to be accepted, to be finally recognised after so many years, so many struggles, massacres, suffering. And when you are then recognised, not in your own country [Turkey] but abroad, the joy is so much the greater.”

Here, Lütfiye clearly establishes that Alevi’s adverse situation in Turkey influenced the meaning that they attached to recognition in Switzerland, even though the latter was mostly symbolic. For her, the circumstance that recognition was achieved “abroad” rather than in Turkey made that recognition an even greater reason to rejoice.

As was already mentioned above, the ability to formally register as Alevi was among the few practical privileges that came with cantonal recognition. Officially verified existence and proper titling was of high importance for Alevi in Basel, signifying the acknowledgement of their identity which historically has been obscured and denied. Even upon migration to Europe, Alevi continued to be affected by Turkish state structures and the empowered position of majority Islam. The issue of correct naming featured very prominently in Murat’s following response: “In hospital, I was given a form, where you could tick Islam. And I crossed out Islam and put Alevi. And then they said, well, what is that? And you always had to explain, I am not that, I am that. My name is Murat, not Hans. But today the authorities know who Alevi are.” Here, Murat contrasted Alevism’s previous inexistence as an official category and people’s lack of knowledge about Alevism that necessitated him to explain who he was, with its current official existence. Interestingly, in his description he did not merely add his religious affiliation

to the available list, or crossed out the list entirely, but specifically erased Islam. In this way, he felt compelled to define himself against Muslims (“I am not that, I am that.”). Halil, a young member of the Alevi community, similarly imparted:

“In the past, I had to explain why, on my ID, there stood something different from what I claimed to be. It’s as if my name is Halil, but on my ID stood Marcus. I’m not called Marcus. So, there would always be discussions. But now I am liberated from that. What I say and what stands there are the same, no questions.”

This congruence of his self-identification and his official designation on identification documents was a source of inner contentment for Halil. Meanwhile, he admitted that this circumstance is geographically restricted, as in Turkey he is still officially identified as Muslim, and even in other Swiss cantons an official designation of his religious affiliation is not existent:

“In Solothurn, I am a Muslim again.”

Several of the young Alevi participants relayed encounters with Sunni peers in which the latter had challenged and questioned them. Such moments of self-justification in front of Sunni Muslim peers formed decisive instances in their self-understanding as Alevis, but also set into relief their frequently lacking ability to articulate a cohesive and persuasive narrative about the group of which they were a part. Halil, who was in his mid-twenties, told me in our interview that he himself had such difficulties, but was now able to express himself eloquently and self-confidently about his faith, after years of self-study and attendance of a college programme on Alevism in southern Germany.<sup>10</sup> I met him at an event at the Alevi association during which he gave a presentation on the concept of truth in Alevism to a group of youngsters, not all of whom seemed overly excited to be there. He challenged individuals in the room on their behaviour and attitude, accusing the assembled Alevi teenagers of ignorance, laziness and lack of interest. During our interview some weeks later, Halil recounted: “Before [recognition],

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<sup>10</sup> PH Weingarten is one of only a few educational institutions and universities in Germany, also including the University of Hamburg, which offer courses on Alevism. This is part of Alevis’ official recognition process there.

it was often the case that my Muslim friends pointed out the fact that I was registered as Muslim, saying, you are just a Muslim confession. And now I can show and say, look what it says here? I didn't make this. The state, the canton, sees it that way." Recognition, in this manner, provided a point of reference, as the conferral of state recognition signified the official acknowledgement of Alevism's independent existence vis-à-vis Islam. Halil had thereby been provided with a riposte to the challenges of his Muslim peers.

Not only did Alevis' received recognition allow for and facilitate their distinction from Muslims, but many Alevi interlocutors were of the opinion that their innate difference from (Sunni) Muslims, reflected in their ability to adapt better to Swiss society, had enabled their recognition in the first place. As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, Alevi participants believed that their compatibility with European values and lifestyle set them apart from Sunni Muslims, whose lack of ability and efforts to integrate made them undeserving of recognition. Özlem, a woman in her mid-twenties and one of the few young Alevis regularly attending her association, even serving in its board, recounted:

"When I started my new job, I was asked, what do you eat, how do you fast? Because with them [Muslims] it is mostly like, I can't eat this and that. But we don't say 'turn the music down' or 'stop laughing' or 'feel with me'. We are here and we adapt to society [...] I find it important that people know who we are, that we are not as strict, not against the Swiss or other religious groups."

In this statement, Özlem wanted to convey Alevis' unassumingness and inconspicuousness, which she contrasted to Muslim's taxing need for attention and empathy. Her definition of "who we are" revolved around Alevis' adaptedness and their difference from Muslims. Another interesting detail is provided in her first sentence; her new colleagues, presumably judging from her name and appearance, apparently believed her to be Muslim. This racialisation by members of the Swiss majority society, however, remains uncommented in Özlem's account.

Adile, a young Alevi university student, conversely stated that while there have been moments in which she had to justify herself towards Sunni peers, by far these have not made her feel as excluded as political and popular discourse targeting her “foreign identity” as a child of migrants from Turkey. She also refused to define herself in opposition to Sunni Muslims. Adile thereby explicitly challenged Özlem’s account cited above, namely assertions of compatibility by minorities seeking recognition in the context of racism and, in doing so, their internalisation of and conforming to imposed hierarchies of belonging through the language of adaptation and integration. As will be shown in the course of this chapter, recognition is viewed by many Alevi participants as a reflection of and even reward for successful integration, resulting from the government’s realisation that Alevis are different from Sunnis on account of their adherence to national values and modes of life. The preceding paragraphs showed that recognition’s testimony to their integration in Europe is not the only meaning recognition had for Alevis. It was of great significance to them as a means of their official and correct designation and concomitant identity acknowledgement. In light of their past and present situation in Turkey, as well as decades of obscurity in Europe, recognition induced feelings of joy, relief and safety. At the same time, official recognition’s conceptualisation as a matter of integration was the racialised frame within which both Alevis and Sunnis negotiated their societal position in Basel and, more broadly, in Switzerland.

## *2.2. Sunnis’ perception of official recognition as panacea or good-for-nothing*

Some Sunni participants remarked on the seeming paradox inherent in the fact that Islam, one of the so-called world religions and the largest minority religion in Europe, has not been officially recognised anywhere in Switzerland and was therefore, so to say, institutionally inexistent. At the same time, as was observed by some Sunni participants, a perceived splinter

group of Islam<sup>11</sup> had been given a superior official status. Yet, while Alevis depended on an official recognition status as a distinct faith community in order to assert their independent existence and boundaries to Islam, some Sunni participants in Basel expressed a certain defiance in the face of missing official recognition. Sezer, a man in his mid-twenties who chaired the mosque association's youth section, explained: "We are not recognised, but does this harm us? We know, we are Muslims; everyone knows, we are Muslims [...] Recognition means that you accept that the community exists. Everyone knows there are Muslims." Similarly, Filiz, a young woman who was also active in the mosque's youth commission, challenged: "So what if you don't recognise my religion? What does it do? Am I not allowed to practise my religion anymore? [...] Am I better when I say I am Alevi? Ah, recognised! Does it have a different effect when I say I am Sunni? Right, not recognised. What does it matter?" In this way, Sunnis were speaking both from an empowered and disempowered position, denigrated and structurally excluded in Switzerland, yet part of a religion with a large followership and state-backing elsewhere, unlike Alevis, a circumstance endowing them with the confidence to dismiss their lack of official recognition in their country of residence. At the same time, by asking whether official recognition makes someone "better", Filiz pointed to a hierarchy of value implied in the granting of recognition based on a community's societal significance and integration achievements.

Their consciousness of Islam as a large and socially significant religion, albeit lacking official status in Switzerland, meant that many participants often had their minds fixed on public-legal recognition, also possessed by Christian churches, rather than the lesser private-law status of cantonal recognition. This became apparent when participants thought that cantonal recognition allowed for the collection of taxes, involved financial state support, was

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<sup>11</sup> Whether Alevism forms a part of Islam or not remains a contentious question, not least among Alevis themselves. In their application for cantonal recognition in Basel, the Alevi community describes itself as an independent faith, which developed within a Muslim context.

valid for the whole of Switzerland, or meant legal-institutional parity with Christianity and Judaism. Cantonal recognition, as a subsidiary and preliminary status to public-legal recognition, does none of this. Those who were aware of the difference between cantonal and public-legal recognition nevertheless deliberated on the latter option, also with view to the fact that there had already been past, although unsuccessful, attempts in that vein both by the BMK and by national umbrella organisations. At the same time, gaining public-legal status in the foreseeable future was not deemed likely, given that it required a constitutional change and the vote of an electorate who was believed to view recognition of Islam unfavourably.

Moreover, some participants voiced fear of legal restrictions and control concomitant with either cantonal or public-legal recognition. While an official status was generally viewed positively, there remained some hesitation and scepticism over too close a command of the state over the internal affairs of religious communities. Such apprehensions were, for instance, voiced by Cenk. He had been involved in the founding of the BMK in the late 1990s and had long assumed a leading position. Now in his seventies, he had transferred many of his duties to the successive generation but was still actively engaged in the community and concerned over its future: “We are afraid ... or rather concerned that it is recognised and then politicians come and say, you are not allowed to do this or that.” Austria and its recent tightening of the Islam Law which, for instance, included the proscription of foreign financing or the employment of foreign imams, was given as a negative example. In fact, Cenk noted double standards and hypocrisy in Swiss state behaviour towards Muslim communities and representative bodies. On the one hand, Muslim life and practice was the continuous object of political contestation, scrutiny and control, while on the other hand, declarations about the supposed separation between state and church allowed for the neglect of Muslim grievances. In this way, he attested state agencies with a combination of control and neglect.

While some Sunni participants argued that members of the majority society already knew of Muslims despite their lack of recognition, which pre-empted the need for its attainment, others observed that the “knowledge” circulating about Muslims did not represent their true nature. It constituted notoriety based on misconceptions and prejudice propagated by right-wing politicians and media outlets rather than a proper understanding. As was pointed out by Cenk, whom I introduced above: “Actually Islam in Europe is not at all known, after all. It is a foreign religion. You only hear about terrorism [...] And what you don’t know scares you. But if the public knew more, certain problems would already be solved.” As Cenk pointed out in his last sentence, inducing general knowledge about Islam would serve to create societal understanding and acceptance of Muslims. In this, however, he attributed Islam’s official recognition with only a minor role.

Others, in turn, believed that Islam’s official recognition itself could contribute to alleviating anti-Muslim prejudice. In fact, between and within interviews, participants oscillated between an overestimation of official recognition as a panacea for many societal problems and a pessimistic evaluation of it as of being no use at all, practically or in terms of societal acceptance. Concerning the former, it was believed by some that recognition could quell discrimination and general prejudice. This often went hand in hand with a conflation of different recognition status, public-legal and cantonal, as already described above. Some imagined that recognition would solve Muslims’ struggles on the labour market, in particular discrimination based on Muslim dress, or that as a result of the concomitant introduction of Islam classes at school, it could affect a more differentiated knowledge of Islam and thereby dispel negative media portrayal. Sabiha, a young female community member and part of the BMK’s board, even believed that it could reduce daily racism, because it would provide an official ground on which victims of racism could lodge complaints and legal measures could be taken.

Hülya's view on recognition was especially optimistic. She was a middle-aged woman who had moved to Basel from Germany to join her husband upon their marriage and since then has been attending women's gatherings at the mosque. She imagined recognition as a basis for Muslims to feel better, be understood, accepted and known for who they really are, rather than what media or politicians say of them. Being recognised, for her, was synonymous with being accepted as a person, while misrecognition was a personal injury: "We are here, with our religion, and if you do not recognise our religion, it means no recognition for our personalities, either. They don't recognise our personality, our Self, as a human." Hülya believed that recognition was the foundation for a life of peaceful and happy co-existence, because it was the reflection of profound mutual knowledge and understanding: "It just leads to happiness, a happy life together. Why have war, when there could also be peace, happiness and contentment." In this manner, she conceived of recognition as more than an official status granted by state authorities and instead viewed it on both inner-societal and inter-human levels. An event which left a lasting impression on her and which she endowed with the potential to motivate non-Muslims to enquire more deeply into Islam and arrive at a fuller understanding of it, was a public iftar<sup>12</sup> celebration organised by the BMK on one of Basel's central squares. It is questionable whether cantonal recognition could affect the kind of recognition envisioned by Hülya.

Those Sunni participants with a pessimistic view on recognition deemed not only the practical but also the societal effects of an official recognition status to be minimal at most. Regarding the former, a grievance which was repeatedly voiced by participants was the lack of resources, in terms of finance and personnel, which, however, could not be alleviated by cantonal recognition. This added to the defiant dismissal of official recognition expressed by

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<sup>12</sup> Iftar is the meal in which Muslims jointly partake after sunset during the month of Ramadan to communally break their fast for the day.

some Sunni participants vis-à-vis the missing status, as was already described at the beginning of this subsection. Filiz, the young woman active in the mosque's youth commission, declared: "They won't finance it, and I don't need confirmation, because nothing wrong is done anyway, which the state could call a stop to. So no, it wouldn't change anything." Apart from her denial of recognition's practical use, Filiz also declared not to require external validation, implying that she viewed recognition as the approval of a community's law- and value-abidingness ("nothing wrong is done"). Sinan, a young community representative, wondered what benefit official recognition would ultimately bring and whether it would be worth investing time and effort: "I personally find recognition really important. In a way, it is the act that really says, you have arrived. But for me it is not a topic that is very urgent, that we have to achieve at once. I work and have family and children and, for me, to invest so much energy in this, I see too little gain." Other than Filiz, Sinan saw official recognition as important confirmation of Muslim's place in society. However, in seeming contradiction to this, he did not find it worth the endeavour. As will be discussed in more detail below, many Sunni participants perceived recognition as out of their reach, forestalled by their lack of societal acceptance.

Regarding the societal effects of an official recognition status, anti-Muslim prejudice was believed to be too long-lived, deep-seated and condoned for a legal-administrative status to change it. As Cenk, the elderly Sunni participant, submitted:

"These are our difficulties, where society doesn't accept it yet. They always say, we are not integrated. This has nothing to do with integration. They should actually ease off on a political level, most of all. Otherwise, the legislator always comes and says, you mustn't do this, you mustn't do that, you should do it like that."

Rather than accepting the preconditioning of recognition upon integration, which they supposedly have not yet attained, Cenk identified the root of the problem not in Muslims' unwillingness to integrate but in state and society's unwillingness to equally acknowledge Muslims. This adds to the impression entertained by many Sunnis that the granting of

recognition remains in the hands of a majority who condone those perceived as compatible and well-integrated and whose dismissal of one's demands one is powerless to influence. Basel Sunnis deemed themselves "integrated", but their fragile belonging is dependent on their ability to keep individual and collective identities apart and the latter invisible in public, as will be discussed further below.

### *2.3. Recognition, belonging and the question: Who is recognition for?*

Murat, who had been actively involved in the recognition process and whom I cited above describing his sense of relief upon recognition, imparted how he had personally felt part of this society already before the Alevi community was officially recognised in Basel. At the same time, recognition, which he had helped bring about, made him feel "taken seriously" in his religious or collective identity also, "As a religious community, not only as Murat." Yet, he argued that recognition is of even more importance for the young Alevi generation. He attributed the young community members with the necessary skills and knowledge to expand recognition, as well as pursue a systematic study of Alevism and establish a conception of it as independent of Islam, which previous generations in Turkey had not been able to. Their ameliorated ability to "explain themselves" to the Swiss majority population could also dissipate any remaining mistrust on the latter's part. Young ones, after all, "belong to this society. This country belongs to them", Murat argued.

In contrast to this, Mert, a young man in his late twenties whose family was very engaged in the Alevi community but who himself only attended important community occasions, pronounced the need to distinguish between his personal concerns and the interest of the community. Having grown up in Basel, he had always felt at home there: "I feel at home in Basel, and for me Basel has always been home." Official recognition of the Alevi community did not affect this, nor did he think that a hypothetical lack of such a status would have decreased his feelings of belonging to Basel. He argued: "For people who moved to Basel

and had a hard life in Turkey it [recognition] has, I believe, a greater meaning. I was born here and grew up here. I identify strongly with the [Swiss] culture here and am laicistically thinking.” In this way, while Murat argued that young Alevi’s belonging to Switzerland was the reason why recognition mattered most to them, Mert cited his feelings of belonging as well as his identification with the principle of laicism as grounds for the lack of significance that official religious recognition had for him.

Some Sunni interviewees attributed the Muslim Commission’s past inactivity with regard to recognition partly to the more rudimentary German language skills, lower formal education levels and the difference of perspective on their new country of residence of the so-called first generation of migrants from Turkey. In contrast to this, young Muslims, it was argued, have the ability to express themselves and participate politically. However, this might be exactly why recognition could be of little interest to them, as other routes of civic and political engagement may be believed to bear more fruit in claiming their belonging. Moreover, a commonly voiced concern among Sunni participants in Basel was that even if such an official recognition status was achieved, exclusion and prejudice would persist. In this manner Mehtap, a middle-aged Sunni woman and one of my two interviewees who regularly wore a headscarf in public, wondered, “If this [recognition] happens, will people stop berating me on the streets, when we are recognised? No, that won’t stop [...] Sometimes I think if this doesn’t change, things might as well stay as they are.” Esin, a female university student, similarly declared, “As long as I still get weird looks when I say that I am a Muslim, it is somehow the same to me [whether we have recognition or not]. There has to be a change from below and not from above. It has to be within society.” Esin, in this way, believed that it would take a lot more to dispel the bad image of Islam and Muslims, and such a profound societal change could not be achieved by official recognition, alone or at all.

Kayra's account was particularly memorable in this regard. She was born and raised in the Netherlands and had lived there until the age of nineteen, when she moved to Basel to join her husband. Although she had initially felt isolated in Basel, she has built up a social network of colleagues, friends and family, which bound her to this place despite experiences of racism. These, she explained, she had to get used to. She relayed an incident in which she and her sister-in-law had a hostile encounter with an elderly white Swiss woman on the street:

“A discussion arose, and then she said, ‘You Arabs, go back to your country.’ And my sister-in-law is a Swiss [citizen], and she said, ‘I am Swiss, too!’ And the woman said, ‘You are just a bought Swiss [*abgekaufter Schweizer*].’<sup>13</sup> So, it does not matter whether recognised or not, you see?”

As the incident above shows, not even the possession of citizenship, let alone cantonal recognition, can raise a person to the status of arbiter and guardian of the nation in the eyes of those who claim for themselves exactly this role. What reveals itself very strikingly in Kayra's account is that the sense of power and entitlement to determine who should belong and who should return to what is assumed to be their actual home is unequally distributed and, I would add, hinges on unattainable, naturalised factors based on race. In the next section, I will elaborate on Sunni and Alevi participants' understandings of their belonging to Basel and more generally to Switzerland, with a particular emphasis on this chapter's overall focus, namely integration as the predominant frame within which official recognition worked and was conceived.

### **3. Feelings of belonging of integration-subjects**

#### *3.1. Preclusion of dual belonging for both Alevis and Sunnis*

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<sup>13</sup> She is accused of only having purchased her Swiss citizenship, rather than possessing it from birth.

Metin and I sat at the conference table in the office of the Alevi community centre. He was an open, warm and spirited middle-aged man who chaired the association board. In the course of our interview, he related to me that he had migrated to Switzerland in his youth. Only two months after his arrival in Basel, he started working to be able to afford rent and the education of his younger siblings. This meant that he himself had never been able to attend a German class. Towards the end of his account, he expressed his inability to combine his Swiss and Turkish belonging: “I cannot say the sentence, I am a Swiss, and I cannot say, I am a Turk, either. [...] For me, this is a difficulty. I want to become a Swiss, but the thoughts do not let me. I want to wipe these thoughts away, but they won’t go away.” In this way, Metin imposed on himself the difficult requirement to cancel any thoughts or emotions about his place of birth and childhood as well as the language he learned there, which he believed necessary to be fully Swiss. He seemed to have internalised both unspoken and explicit expectations levelled at migrants from Turkey and their descendants. In fact, in many of my interviews in Basel, being Swiss and being from Turkey were posed as contradictory; one precluded or superseded the other.

Adile, a young Alevi woman born and raised on the outskirts of Basel, criticised the fact that, while she identified as Swiss, her avowal was not taken seriously, as she would instantly be asked where her true or actual origins lay. Her account of her citizenship attainment interview, which she underwent only a few years ago, clearly corroborated this assessment:

“Beforehand, I had to answer several questions, one of them being, ‘Do you want to keep your previous citizenship and if yes, why?’ And I put down, yes, because I want to stay true to my roots. I don’t know if today I would still write it that way after what I experienced. And in the interview, we had gone through all the questions and, in the end, I was asked, ‘There was something I still stumbled over. You say you feel Swiss, but you want to stay true to your roots. What does that mean?’ He sort of pressed me on this, and I had to, like, justify myself, and I felt, like, denounced or exposed.”

These negative feelings were still vividly in her mind, when Adile recounted this incident to me. Despite the assessor's questioning of her ability to feel dual belonging during the citizenship interview, she still tried to integrate her allegedly disparate identities, because she could not reconcile it with her conscience to identify as exclusively Swiss. Yet, she had difficulties doing so.

Filiz, a young Sunni woman, was perceivably torn between her feelings of belonging to Switzerland and Turkey, sentiments which she perceived as conflicting. She struggled to determine where she belonged, evidently believing that a decision between the two was ultimately necessary. The pressure she apparently felt made her react with resignation as well as defiance: "I am a foreigner there, I am a foreigner here, I am a foreigner everywhere. I have come to think, say what you like, I don't care." Her peer, Mesut, similarly communicated his status as "foreigner" both in Switzerland and in Turkey, but other than Filiz he expressed a desire to belong to Switzerland and, indeed, to prove his belonging: "Of course, if I go to Turkey, I am a foreigner, and here I am a foreigner, too. But here at least, I want to prove that I belong here, because I work here, I did the military here, and that shows that I belong to Switzerland. And most Swiss also agree with this." Mesut's statement shows that participants' belonging both required proof as well as the confirmation and goodwill of the white majority who needed to "agree" with claims for belonging. While there are certain aspects a migrant or a descendant of migrants can fulfil to advance such claims, such as labour and military service, this will not amount to equal unquestioned belonging, because the latter is based on unattainable characteristics related to race. In this manner, Sezer, a young man who was a member of the same mosque community and also born locally, described the putative incompatibility of Turkish and Swiss identities in the following way: "When are you a Swiss and when are you a Turk? [...] I try to be one hundred percent Swiss here, but it doesn't work, because I have a Turkish name and apparently an accent that is somehow Turkey-related [...] And appearance

plays a big role. I don't look like a Swiss." While he attempted to become fully Swiss, however that may be defined, he was deterred from this due to what he clearly perceived as racial barriers to full belonging.

In relation to this, a prominent topic in my interviews with female Sunni participants was the wearing of headscarves and the concomitant experiences in public spaces. While prejudice based on Muslim dress was a major concern among participants in the other two cities, in Basel there was a more striking contrast between the less predominant practice of wearing headscarves<sup>14</sup> and frequent accounts of aggressive harassment based on wearing a headscarf. The two participants wearing headscarves shared multiple personal experiences, while all Sunni female participants talked about friends, relatives and fellow community members who were attacked or discriminated against for wearing a headscarf. Such experiences heightened their conviction that they harbour identities which cannot be brought into agreement. Esin, a young Sunni woman and member of the Muslim student association at university, felt barred from dual belonging, saying that the concept did not exist in Switzerland for descendants of migrants from Turkey:

"When I walk around with my mother, who is wearing a headscarf, you can feel the gazes. But this is the same to me now. In Turkey, I am not accepted as a Turk anyway either. And here, I cannot become Swiss. I would say, I am a Muslim Swiss-Turk, but this expression somehow doesn't exist here. It does in Germany, but here it is missing. So, it's the same to me, I would still call myself a Basler."

In this way, local belonging to Basel remained possible for Esin despite experiences of discrimination and exclusion.

Similarly Sabiha, a young Sunni woman, described herself as "more Basler than Turk."

In her account, her educational and professional career ran "parallel" to her religion and her

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<sup>14</sup> Only two of my six female Sunni participants in Basel wore a headscarf regularly. All seven female Sunni participants in Hamburg and all six in Vienna wore headscarves.

parents' Turkish culture. She described a linear progress from feelings of exclusion in primary school to feeling at the height of Swiss belonging, as she currently was the only local in her international team at work and thus able to play city guide for her colleagues. She concluded her account by saying that, for her, the issue of integration was no longer relevant: "The issue of integration is actually long settled [*schon lange abgeschrieben*]." This assessment of hers implied that, although she was born and raised in Basel, integration had once been an issue, but she had self-reportedly progressed to overcome her past lack of it. At the same time, she reported a continuing necessity to explain or justify herself in the face of prejudices and misconceptions about Islam. Yet, like Esin, she contended: "I am strong enough to differentiate that and to say, hey, I will explain this to you, but I am nevertheless a Basler. We are still good enough and belong nonetheless."

Although Esin and Sabiha positively confirmed their belonging to the city, in both cases this is tied to reservations and restrictions to their belonging in broader nationwide terms. For Esin, it was the alternative to inaccessible national and dual identifications and came with a certain level of resignation. For Sabiha, it was an assertion against those who persistently questioned her belonging. Furthermore, her idea of being just "good enough" to belong to Basel implies normative judgement and hierarchisation which precludes full belonging. For most participants, their identification with Basel was less problematic than their identification with Switzerland as a whole. Yet, as was observed by Halil, the assertive young man from the Alevi community, merely being a Basler was not enough:

"Everyone in Basel is a Basler. But people will ask, and what else? Who are you apart from this? It is not enough for people, when you say, I am a Basler, because this says nothing about you. Actually, it means, you are not part of society [...] You need an identity which society accepts as sufficient."

Here again, full belonging is described as dependent on the acceptance and approval by majority society. Similar to the idea of being "good enough", the concept of a "sufficient" identity

implies that migrants from Turkey and their descendants are perceived and perceive themselves as lacking. Assumptions of deficiency also underlie demands for integration, which many participants seem to have internalised. A further response to feelings of incompatibility and exclusion is the adoption of a discursive divide between private and public spheres, as will now be shown.

### *3.2. Sunnis' attempts to keep their difference private and their implications for official recognition*

Sunni participants especially made a distinction between their individual private self and their inclusion in a religious community, or between their individual daily life and a broader socio-political perspective. By considering only the former and shutting out the latter, they were to a certain extent able to feel part of their surroundings. Sabiha, the young Sunni woman, explained that the fact she did not wear a headscarf regularly allowed her to first introduce herself as a “good or as a pleasant person”, to be perceived as an individual, a citizen of Basel, a colleague and so on. Only as a second step did she mention the fact that she is also a Muslim by which time, as she argued, she had already established a good image of herself. She was happy to recount that at her work placement in central Switzerland, she had been able to dispel prejudice and “leave a good image about foreigners”. Mesut, a young man active in the mosque’s youth group, distinguished a personal from a collective sphere, the former reserved for so-called Swiss contacts and influences, the latter compartmentalising cultural, religious and racial otherness. Keeping these spheres distinct supposedly speaks of one’s good integration. In this way, Mesut stated: “I feel more Swiss than Turk, did the military here as well. At work, I only deal with Swiss. And I don’t mind that. It is better that way [...] Sure, we are there for our religion, but everyone has their own life and decides for himself, right?” In this way, Mesut was also proud and pleased about the fact that customers he would talk to in

the local dialect on the phone at work had confirmed to him that they could not even tell that he was a “foreigner.”

Faith, politics and any connections to Turkey thus had to remain a private issue in encounters with friends, colleagues or strangers. At least, one could not become emotional when the conversation broached such topics, as was alleged by a number of Sunni participants. They repeatedly asserted a constant need to deflate, detach and remain inconspicuous. According to Mesut, giving a belligerent reply or seeming aggressive should at all costs be avoided. One should either steer away from discussions about religion and Turkish politics altogether, also among friends, or one should reply in as calm and innocuous a manner as possible. Remaining silent or evasive on religious or political topics when in conversation with non-Muslims for Mesut, was a way to protect his private persona: “It is important after all, not to end up in a bad light, lose my job over such things.” Accordingly, Mesut did not attribute much significance to the official recognition of his community. He endured the lack of societal acceptance of Islam in Switzerland, arguing that this was a predominantly Christian country in which Muslims only posed a minority. He supported the minaret ban<sup>15</sup>, saying that building minarets for a small part of the population was disproportionate and unjustified. The industrial appearance and location of their mosque at the edge of the city was of no concern to him. Yet, his concluding question of “Why should you change something in a different country?”, also revealed that attempts to keep one’s difference private and inconspicuous came with a sense of exclusion and impression of lack of entitlement to shape the country in which one lived.

Not only did Sunni participants feel compelled to keep a low profile and avoid conflict, but their attempts to do so are confounded by regular demands to position themselves with regard to their supposed home country. My interview with Sinan, a man in his thirties who

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<sup>15</sup> In a public referendum in 2009, the majority of the Swiss electorate voted in favour of the proscription of minarets on mosques.

assumed a leading position at the mosque community as well as the board of the BMK, left a lasting impression on me in that respect. We were sitting at the conference table in the office of the mosque, two glasses of strong black tea in front of us, and Sinan talked at length about his experiences appreciating, as he later said, the opportunity to reflect and speak out openly. He imparted:

“I don’t at all enjoy acting the Muslim [*wenn ich da groß der Muslim bin*]. Also in my job. I don’t discuss it. It is not a topic for me. I just do my work like everybody else. But the public debates, they always draw me in. [...] You are under extreme pressure, and this partly determines your life. I don’t do this because I want being Muslim to play such a big role in my life, but because I am sort of drawn into this. I know what it means to enjoy life, but I do this because I see it as my duty.”

Sinan also recounted a visit by politicians to the mosque, one of whom advised the community to distance itself publicly whenever terrorist attacks happen. Yet, Sinan declared that by now, after forty-five years of existence, it should go without saying that this community has no connections to Islamism and that such debates should finally be laid to rest: “At some point, you have to stop debating whether you belong [...] At the end of the day, we simply want to be seen as citizens, without having a label attached. We are simply a part of this country, citizens of this country, with the same rights and duties, like everybody else, right?” As stated by Sinan, one is often forced to stand in for the collective and defend oneself when, in fact, one wants to lead a “normal” peaceful life. Being born and raised in Switzerland, he was tired of always having to position himself vis-à-vis political developments abroad. This also made him hesitant to apply for official recognition in Basel, as it would put further pressure and public scrutiny on him.

Yet, keeping inconspicuous is only possible to a certain degree, and the ostensible societal inclusion as an unassuming individual can reveal itself to be superficial and conditional. Events such as terrorist attacks or military operations led by Turkey bring to the fore what may otherwise be felt only subliminally, namely that participants’ true belonging is believed to lie

elsewhere. As was affirmed by Mehtap, a middle-aged Sunni woman and one of the participants who regularly wore a hijab: “Every time something happens, a terrorist attack or something, you somehow feel under surveillance.” Times like this, she said, made her think that she might be better off in her “own” country, meaning Turkey, although she had misgivings about this also: “At least you can say, [Turkey] is my country, and even when something bad happens, people won’t give me strange looks or ask strange questions [...] But we grew up here and we have our work here, so could I feel at home there?” While Sinan did not want to inflict more pressure and negative publicity on himself and his community by trying for official recognition, Mehtap doubted whether an official status could redress the experiences she had had on the streets as a Muslim woman, for whom it was impossible to keep her difference inconspicuous.

Given the prescript of remaining inconspicuous as an individual in the Swiss public sphere, in conjunction with the racialised definition and perception of Muslims, being correctly identified as Alevi by members of the general society is hard to achieve. As explained by Murat, “When you were on your own, this society did not really notice where we are from. We are in a laicist society, and no-one noticed as long as they didn’t ask.” At the same time, Alevis’ lack of such conspicuous markers as a headscarf or particular habits of consumption, is precisely why Alevis thought that their non-belonging to Sunni Islam should be evident although, as was seen, many Sunni women did not wear a headscarf either. Despite their official recognition status as well as strong political representation in the city, some Alevi participants in Basel remained frustrated over their persistent grouping with Muslims, especially because this formed a continuity to Alevis’ subsumption under Islam in Turkey. As Halil explained, “When you come here, to the free world so to speak, and you are marked with the same stamp, that’s of course extremely stupid.” Consequently, he observed: “The people still do not know us. [...] We may have the juristic bit behind us, but the societal part is still in front of us.”

Perceptions about the extent of general knowledge about Alevi varied. Some, like Halil, saw societal awareness to be largely lacking, while others attested a marked difference through recognition. Others differentiated between those who had a personal interest in the matter or knew Alevi personally, being therefore more sensitive to the differences between Alevi and Sunni, and the “normal Basel citizen” without any such personal connections and therefore unlikely to be aware of Alevi recognition, let alone their relationship to Islam. Murat did believe, however, that recognition affected a change in this regard. While people might still initially take him for a Muslim, their second guess would already identify him as Alevi which, according to Murat, would not have been the case in the past. The fact that two of the national delegates elected in Basel were explicitly identified as Alevi by the local media, rather than as Muslim or Turkish, was a further case in point for him. However, Alevi’s appreciation of those occasions when they were correctly designated by white Swiss, even on second guess, cannot undo the underlying circumstance that both Sunni and Alevi are categorised as Muslims based on outer appearance and attributed country of origin.

As I have shown in the preceding paragraphs, participants often perceived both equal and multiple belonging in Switzerland as barred to them, based on their racialised and religious difference. In this way, feelings of belonging to Basel were accompanied by feelings of exclusion expressed in a discourse of cultural incompatibility and expectations to shed elements of identity. Thus, participants negotiated and contended with the terms of belonging imposed on them, unable to have an equal say in their definition. In order to meet integration requirements, Sunni participants often tried to keep their identities as Muslim and as descendant of migrants from Turkey private and inconspicuous. Official recognition was either believed as unwarranted in a Christian country, or feared to rouse a public backlash against Muslims from Turkey. Women wearing conspicuous Muslim dress believed that their difference would not be accepted even upon official recognition. Meanwhile, requirements to be inconspicuous in a

general context of anti-Muslim racism meant that Alevis' differentiation from Sunni Muslims remained fragile, even with their official recognition in place. In the next section, the way in which participants reflected on the relationship between official recognition and societal acceptance will be further elaborated. While Sunnis deemed official recognition both out of reach, due to their persistent lack of acceptedness, and unable to solve their societal exclusion in any case, many Alevis saw their official recognition as a reflection of and even reward for their integration achievements. Integration demands, in fact, spurred on hierarchisations of the more or less integrated.

#### **4. Recognition as a matter of integration**

##### *4.1. Sunnis' belief of official recognition as out of reach*

Many Sunni participants agreed that “societal recognition” was the prerequisite for official state recognition, but were convinced that their missing societal acceptance and political representation precluded their official recognition. As was argued by Esin in relation to the Muslim student association she was part of: “We want to show that Muslims are not only theologically but also worldly active. And I think if we and also other organisations manage that, one will eventually somehow arrive at societal recognition. Legal recognition [on the other hand] will still take a long time.” While there may be few technical barriers to cantonal recognition, although it was also stated that lacking human resources and diverging levels of organisation between different mosque associations within the BMK did pose a practical challenge, Muslim representatives were nevertheless hesitant to undergo the procedure when dismissal remained a likely outcome due to persistent prejudice and negative political and public discourse about Islam. The decision to grant cantonal or public-legal recognition

depended respectively on parliamentary approval or the positive vote of the citizenry, neither of which was believed by Basel Sunnis to be in favour of any kind of Muslim demands.

Accordingly, some Sunni participants argued that their time was better spent on societal and interreligious exchange and dialogue as preliminary work for recognition, rather than making an effort to craft an application which will not stand up to parliamentary and popular debate anyway. They stressed the importance of interhuman understanding, respect and empathy in order to realise commonalities and dissolve prejudice before or even in lieu of pursuing an official status. In this manner, an event often referred to by Sunni participants in Basel was a publicly celebrated fast-breaking on the conclusion of Ramadan, which took place on a prominent square in the city centre. Local public figures and members of the general society also took part, showing the possibility of peaceful societal and interreligious coexistence and reflecting the fact that Muslims were a part of society.

Political participation was viewed as another way to dispel prejudice and make Muslim concerns count, as well as to increase chances of attaining official recognition. However, access to it, although technically available to those with formal citizenship, was still hard to attain. Members of the Muslim community had attempted to enter the political sphere but were discredited through accusations of being in league with the Turkish government. As was noted by Cenk, the elderly community member, “It is difficult to represent our religion in public. We hesitate because we always have to be prepared to defend ourselves.” Sunni participants had a sense of constantly being made an issue of political debate, rather than able to affect political discourse themselves. Moreover, access to political participation was, by some, conceived as a competition with Kurdish and Alevi political representatives, who had a relatively strong presence in local parliament. In this way, Sezer, a young Sunni community member, stated:

“People in Switzerland don’t convey to minorities that they belong to Switzerland, too. That doesn’t just concern us Turks, but also other minorities such as Indians, for example. They are not listened to, either. Alevis, on the other hand, are very integrated. And integration begins

when you build up communication with the political powers or media. When the media doesn't know any Turks, politicians say, Turks aren't integrated. [...] When they [Alevi] become politically active, they of course don't want the competitors [Sunni] to play a part."

Sezer similarly related an incident in which a member of the community had run for local parliament but had been forced to step down after accusations of working for the Turkish government. Yet, Sezer framed this as resulting from the strong political power of Alevi in Basel, who allegedly attempted to deter Sunni from participating in parliament. Furthermore, Sezer observed that Alevi had achieved to be integrated, or perceived that way, by virtue of their political activity, while "Turks" were deemed to be non-integrated. Political participation and representation, and concomitantly Sunni's chances for official recognition, were therefore not just believed to be barred through overrepresentation of white Swiss politicians, but also hindered by more "integrated" politically active minority groups. Hence, recognition appeared out of reach, because it was conceived as an issue determined by political and societal powers, which Sunni participants were unable to affect. Rather than applied for in an objective administrative process, recognition was believed to be granted by the state at its discretion, contingent upon approval or dismissal in parliament.

This led several Sunni participants in Basel to a state of affective disengagement or resignation. This could be observed in such statements that questioned investing time and energy, either to pursue recognition specifically or change public perception more generally, when the odds and public opinion were stacked against oneself. Those with a leadership role, such as Sinan, spoke of it as their duty, seeing it at times as a burdensome responsibility and personal sacrifice, marked by moments of resignation: "Sometimes, I don't feel like being here anymore, although I actually love the country and the people and everything here, and I am happy that I can live here, that my children can grow up here. But sometimes it's just extremely tedious, and I can't be bothered." Some wanted to disengage from public debate completely,

asserting that external opinion, be it approval or disapproval, did not matter anymore and wishing instead to be simply left alone. In this manner, Filiz disclosed:

“I have come to think, I don’t need your confirmation. If you accept me or not, I am who I am. I don’t need to justify, I don’t need to defend myself, I don’t need to talk about it [...] I don’t have patience for this anymore, that people attack each other over their origin or religion. That needs to stop before we can even talk about recognition and stuff. We have lost any respect, human to human. I will die someday anyway, so it is simply the same to me.”

Such resignation speaks of a sense of powerlessness and oppression. The statement also, once more, reflects Sunnis’ general conviction that basic societal relations need to be amended before it makes sense to address formal recognition. At the same time, the ability to dismiss official recognition is not available to all. While it speaks of powerlessness vis-à-vis the white Swiss majority, it reflects a certain degree of power in relation to Alevis, who depend on official recognition in Europe in light of their precarious status in Turkey. While their religious recognition in Basel, and Western Europe more generally, reiterates their racialisation and framing as integration subjects, turning their backs to it is not a viable option.

#### *4.2. Alevis’ viewing of official recognition as a reward for a passed examination*

Whereas many Sunni participants were convinced that their missing societal acceptance forestalled their chances for recognition, Alevis believed that their successful integration and concomitant societal acceptance was the underlying reason for the uncontested acceptance of their application for recognition. As was asserted by Mert, recognition was a “testimony” to the strong integration of the local Alevi community:

“That was something completely new for Basel, that a very unknown religion suddenly received recognition. But of course, it also was testimony [*Zeugnis*] to the fact that the Alevi community is very strongly integrated in Basel, really socialised itself [*sich sozialisiert*] and is part of this community and has not segregated itself [*nicht abgespaltet*] and is open for all.”

In this way, Mert and other Alevi participants conceived of recognition as the reflection of, or the return and reward for their ability to integrate, adapt to and abide by Swiss values. Other

than in Hamburg and Vienna, the recognition process in Basel indeed involved interviews with community representatives and experts, as well as visits to the community centre and participation in a *cem* ceremony by the responsible government employees. Hence, Alevis were scrutinised, tested and ultimately accepted in the course of their application for recognition. Metin, the middle-aged community representative, even used the image of an exam posed by the state which Alevis were able to pass successfully: “Europe examined us, how we are adapted and integrated, how we dress, how we sit in the association, man and woman, young and old. It didn’t just give us recognition on a golden plate.” What is particularly insightful in this statement are the indicators which, according to Metin, speak of Alevis’ successful integration and adaptedness, namely their (European) dress and the lack of segregation of different ages and sexes in their community gatherings, which are at the same time elements of their practice and identity for which they have been denigrated in Turkey. As will be shown below, in self-defining as gender-equal, Alevis at the same time mark their difference from Sunni Muslims.

The participants who recounted this examination process did not, however, interpret this scrutiny negatively. To the contrary, they believed thorough examination to be a necessary and comprehensible requirement for their official acceptance as a good fit for local and European society and were eager to show the extent of their compatibility with Swiss values such as gender equality. It was, accordingly, deemed important that the Swiss know how Alevis think and feel, as was argued by Lütfiye, a middle-aged Alevi woman:

I have always said, I am Alevi, and I am this and that, and it was always said, ah great. But now, no matter where I go, I notice that people are aware of Alevism. Many are more aware now. Maybe not about recognition itself, but what [Alevism] actually is. And that already is important. And now they know what makes the [Alevi] people tick [*wie die Menschen ticken*], what they practise, how they think and feel. That, I think, is very important to the Swiss people.”

Being able to say that the state had seen everything they do, think and feel and had considered it worthy of appraisal, was cited as a matter of pride. Furthermore, such an examination was

deemed acceptable and even necessary to confirm the genuineness of Alevis' claimed compatibility in values. As Murat argued, "They [state officials] wanted to see, 'What do they actually do within these four walls?' And they wrote down a lot, also about gender equality and so on. Many religious communities say that, although it's not true. But in Alevism, it is like that." While Sunnis also profess to uphold gender equality, their assertions would, according to Metin, not pass state muster.

"Alevis showed everything publicly, we are Alevis and we live like this. They saw everything. [...] But if the commission goes to the mosque to clarify something about Islam or Muslims, they see: all men. And then they go to the other side and they see: all women. For Europe, that is a point against recognition."

Similarly, Öymen, a middle-aged man whom I met during a breakfast gathering in the Alevi association, stated his lack of surprise over the recognition of Alevism in Basel and suggested that there are reasons why Sunnis did not get it yet: "Things like gender equality, the headscarf, how they pray. When you look at world politics ... I don't even want to go into this, you know what I mean." Halil, the young Alevi man whose educational presentation I had attended, explained Muslims' lack of official recognition in a similar manner: "Islam does not go together with the constitution. Stoning people, cutting off hands, polygamy or whatever. Or marrying off small children. That is all allowed [in Islam]." In this way, Alevis' recognition was a matter of people knowing who and what they are not. Özlem, a young Alevi woman born and raised in Basel, stated: "With recognition, it is like, ok, they know us, they know that we are not evil, that we are not their enemies."

Others viewed state control and scrutiny critically, but added that Alevis had nothing to hide. As Halil argued with regard to the Round Table of Religions, a state-initiated dialogue platform formed in 2007 and comprising representatives of all of Basel's religious communities, also those without an official status such as the BMK:

“It’s not just about information, exchange, it’s also about control by the canton. People are not that stupid. Everyone here knows that. It’s about control. But we have nothing to hide. It’s not a nice gesture by the canton, but we have nothing to hide anyway. Others need to be worried more, who I will not mention by name. They have a lot more to hide.”

Halil therefore found fault with the use of state-led religious platforms as a means of control, but also stated that such scrutiny was not detrimental to Alevi who, he implied, were more adapted and compatible with Swiss values than other communities. His description of the round table’s dynamics which led up to the above statement also reveals whom he referred to as those who had “a lot more to hide”: “At this round table of religions, it often seems to me like, alright, Christians, Jews, let’s talk about you later. But Alevi, Muslims, what are you up to?” Halil thereby voiced his impression that Alevi and Muslims are grouped together and viewed with more suspicion than established religious communities.

Few Alevi participants, however, drew joy from the fact that the Muslim community was still without an official recognition status in Basel. Only Lütfiye stated that she was outrightly happy about the lack of recognition for local Muslims and expressed her hopes that this would stay this way. She recounted an incident where the establishment of a gender-segregated boarding school for Sunni children could be averted thanks to the general outrage of the Basel population, which further confirmed her good opinion of Basel. Some pointed to the immensity of the circumstance that “a mere ant among the religious communities”, in the words of Murat, gained local recognition before a religion with world renown and followership. Often, as was shown above, Alevi mused that the reason for this situation was their own higher degree of compatibility with Swiss society, especially through their adherence to gender equality and, in so saying, coincided with common preconceptions about Muslims as particularly resilient to integration and irreconcilable with so-called European values. In this way, most believed that any group respecting religious peace should have the right to file for recognition, with the caveat that Muslims would have a hard time getting it, given their

incompatibility with precepts such as gender equality. Thus, by stating that Sunni Muslims do not fulfil the requirements to the same degree that they themselves do, Alevi participants confirmed a relationship between integration achievements, societal acceptance and granted recognition, also discernible in official discourse.

At the same time, and somewhat in contradiction to this, it was observed that neither the authorities nor the wider population had known about Alevis prior to their recognition and had instead subsumed them under the category of Muslims or migrants from Turkey. In this vein, several Alevi participants noticed an increasing awareness about Alevis, specifically their distinctness from Sunni Muslims, as a result of their attained official status. The fact that politicians gladly visited their associations was given as an example of this. Following Murat, “The canton only perceives you when you are recognised. When there are official events, they always invite the Alevi community. And when the president of parliament gives a speech, he always welcomes the Alevis, too. You are noticed.” Some participants gave examples of individual non-Alevis in their workplaces who knew about Alevism, and believed that recognition had helped establish a general awareness of Alevis in Basel. In such accounts, members of the white Swiss or Basel population were deemed particularly accepting of Alevis because they knew them to be open, tolerant, modern and adaptable.

Yet, according to other participants, such awareness is not yet firmly established and still needs to expand further. Halil observed that there remained a lack of knowledge about Alevis: “We are not recognised as long as we still have to explain who we are. A Jew, a Christian, a Muslim does not have to do that. Not even Scientology does. Recognition is when you don’t have to say it, and people already know.” Lisa affirmed that she wanted the “Swiss” to understand them better and to know that they are no “threat”. She announced: “I want people to see, we are not like them, we don’t do that, we are not like that”, implicitly contrasting Alevi openness and harmlessness to Sunni dogmatism and violence which has shaped Alevi history.

#### 4.3. Recognition and belonging of integration models

Many Alevis in Basel, however, were happy with the recognition that they had received and remained without further demands. Lütfiye, for instance, expressed: “We do not expect anything, we accept everything as it is. I already think it is great that they recognised us. That already is sensational.” Not only did many Alevi participants not wish to ask for more, such as human or financial resources to maintain school classes,<sup>16</sup> but they did not feel in the position to do so, either. Many participants were convinced that different demands are to be made towards Turkey than Switzerland. In this manner, it was frequently criticised that in Turkey, *cem evi*s, Alevi prayer houses, are not given financial support while the salaries for imams as well as the rent and upkeep of mosques are undertaken by the Turkish state. Yet, the fact that similar inequality was also present in Switzerland with respect to publicly recognised churches and privately recognised associations was not submitted to the same critique. This was based on a difference being made between one’s “own” country, meaning Turkey, and a “foreign” country, meaning Switzerland, and needs to be seen in light of a history of oppression and annihilation and the withholding of such an official status by the Turkish state. This is why Mercan, a middle-aged Alevi woman, asked: “If we don’t even get it from our own country, how can we demand it from Switzerland?” Symbolic recognition in Switzerland was therefore received with gratitude and without further demands.

This was not just prevalent among members of the so-called first generation, who grew up in Turkey, but also among younger respondents born and raised in Switzerland. In fact, the image of inhabiting a mere guest status, and therefore not in the position to make incisive changes or demands, emerged particularly strongly in Özlem’s responses. Her following reply

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<sup>16</sup> While the canton provides space and a time slot, the Alevi community has to organise the teacher, pay her salary and gather enough pupils to attend.

also reveals that she believed further concessions beyond cantonal recognition to be dependent on Alevis' satisfactory development, seeing their current state as one of probation:

“We are in a country, and different people govern there, and they want you to adopt. They just have their own rules. [...] If I have a house, and people come and do as they please, I wouldn't like that either. We came here, and of course, we don't have to change everything. I mean, Basel doesn't forbid us to practise Alevism. We are allowed to, but we have to adapt [...] We show respect, and we get respect in return. One cannot make changes or expect too much all at once. [...] They first have to see what we are like, what we are doing and how we will act now [that we have cantonal recognition].”

According to Özlem, time had to prove Alevis' worthiness and readiness, and the authorities and general population of Basel had to be convinced that they could take the next step.

Alevis' continued position as integration objects, rather than subjects in a level debate on the terms of belonging, as well as their subsumption in a racial hierarchy of belonging, is also reflected in their external and self-designation as a model migrant. Halil offered a sharp analysis of the position Alevis assume within Switzerland's migrant population. He described Alevis as not fully welcome but the preferred migrant group. In this regard, he admitted that the general defamation of Muslims in Swiss society has expedited Alevis' acceptance in contrast to Muslims. In this manner, authorities can “point to Alevis and say [to Muslims], why are you not like them?” Recognition is, therefore, extended to Alevis not solely on their own account, according to Halil, but in their role as specimens of a desirable religious and migrant subject. Alevis, as was shown, internalised and reiterated this frame to a certain degree. However, while it may have helped their attainment of an official recognition status, it also, argued Halil, resulted in occasional invisibility, exactly due to being inconspicuous and “well-integrated.” Moreover, being noticed by the state as a “good” migrant or overlooked for the same reason, as well as being grouped with Muslims as subjects of greater scrutiny, together with conceiving of recognition as a reward for displaying approved behaviour, all speak of the

imposition of a racial hierarchy of belonging in which “Muslim” groups vie for acceptance by the white majority.

In this way, formal religious recognition’s embeddedness in a context of racialised exclusion of migrants from Turkey and their descendants precludes its ability to contribute to a sense of equal belonging. This was made especially evident in my interview with Adile, the young female university student:

“It might have come across as if Alevism was the centre of my life, but it isn’t like I primarily identify as Alevi. Most of all, I feel like I belong when I am recognised as a person with all my characteristics, like I am, in my social surroundings. And there, debates about quote unquote “foreigners” affect me more. That affects more strongly how I feel to belong to Basel or whatever [...] When people see me, I have black hair, and you can see that I am not Swiss, whatever that is supposed to mean. And then I am first perceived as foreigner in daily encounters and not as Muslim or Alevi or whatever. That is secondary; that only comes later.”

Hence, racial exclusion of both Muslims and Alevis, despite their different religious affiliations and Alevi’s possession of official recognition, persisted based on their perceived foreign appearance and made full belonging in Switzerland unattainable. While Adile responded by criticising the exclusionary character of public and political debates, others felt under continued pressure to clarify their identity, as was shown above. In this way, Alevis’ belonging, despite their avowals to be well accepted and integrated, was conditional on their ability to mark their boundary to Muslims and stress their similarities to the Swiss majority population.

Recognition for Alevi interviewees was, in this manner, a proof of their worthiness and their ability to assimilate, dispelling any prejudice or scepticism that white Swiss harbour against the ostensibly foreign Other. The idea that state representatives had carefully scrutinised them and declared them acceptable, deeming this desire to know the Other fully, even what they think and feel, understandable and even necessary, implies an unequal relationship between the owner or arbiter and the perpetual guest of the national space. Alevis’ assertions of their own compatibility and recognition-worthiness are set in a context of power inequalities,

both between Alevis and Sunnis and between racialised migrants and the national majority, which structure societal relations more generally and recognition settings in particular. In Europe, while prevalent anti-Muslim racism grants Alevis attention to their arguments for their own compatibility to European values and their difference from Sunni Muslims, for which they have been persecuted in Turkey, they are at the same time cast as integration subjects. In this way, Alevis' deliberations and statements on their official recognition in Basel reflect their attempts to navigate European racial hierarchies of belonging, in light of their continued exclusion and discrimination in Turkey.

## **5. Conclusion: Religious recognition and belonging in Basel**

In Basel, the Alevi community had an official status that the local Sunni community did not possess. Alevis' sense of being noticed, appreciated and taken seriously, set apart and even above the local Muslim community, spurred on warm feelings towards Basel such as joy, gratitude, relief or inner peace. A so-called foreign country had granted what their "own" country was withholding from them. Hence, cantonal recognition could confirm or underline positive feelings towards the canton and strengthen one's image of the city as open and inclusive. Yet, feelings of homely belonging, a sense of familiarity and attachment, often existed independently from an official recognition status. Participants who were born and raised in Basel or had spent long life spans there felt homely belonging to have been continuously existent. In this manner, it was stated that recognition was not overly significant for the individual personally, but more so for the community at large. In their so-called private lives and with regard to their daily experience, recognition could change but little.

Meanwhile, religious recognition remained unable to contribute to a substantive kind of belonging that conferred an equal say in defining the terms of belonging, rather than just being

the object of pre-established discourse and conditions. Even participants who were born and grew up in Switzerland conceived of themselves as foreigners and objects of integration, and of Switzerland as a foreign country. Belonging to Switzerland was deemed possible only on a private level, in terms of civic duties, individual responsibilities and contributions as a worker and tax-payer. Both Sunni and Alevi participants in Basel professed an impossibility to engage in feelings of multiple belonging and felt under obligation to uphold exclusivity in their belonging, while they were at the same time barred from being “fully” Swiss. In this regard, wearing a headscarf created particularly severe feelings of exclusion and incompatible duality, as participants felt obliged to distinguish between a public and a private self. Hence, homely belonging, with its warm and positive connotations, also implied experiences of exclusion, feelings of ambivalence and self-conception as a subject of integration. A sense of having an equal say in the terms of belonging, on the other hand, remained largely out of reach, although it was shown that such a level of belonging is envisioned and demanded by several participants as well as partly achieved through political participation.

Official religious recognition was set in and reiterated wider discussions on the politics of belonging on Islam and migration in Europe. Specifically, as was shown in this chapter, it was conceived through the frame of integration of racialised and religious Others. Recognition was believed to constitute a testimony of and reward for the fact that Alevis were compatible with Swiss values such as gender equality and have passed state muster. The fact that Sunni Muslims lacked cantonal recognition served as a confirmation of this reading, as the latter were, conversely, deemed unable to hold up to state scrutiny in terms of their adaptedness and conformity. Sunnis, on the other hand, were perplexed, resigned and sometimes defiant about their lack of recognition. It was not their supposed lack of integration, but rather societal prejudice against Islam that barred them from its attainment, they argued.

Rather than arguing that, given Alevis' official and self-assessment as well-integrated and therefore worthy of recognition and Sunnis' sense of exclusion and belief that recognition is unattainable, the former have achieved belonging while the latter have not, I maintain that differentiation must not be made between the well-integrated and the supposedly insufficiently or non-integrated, but between those who are made into subjects of integration and those who are exempt from the requirement to integrate altogether (Schinkel 2018). This latter differentiation is racially defined, as even the children of migrants who were born and raised in Switzerland are perceived and perceive themselves as in need to prove their belonging and show their level of integration. Both Alevis and Sunnis were believed and believed themselves to be subjects of integration. Alevis' openness and liberal outlook, some participants even describing themselves as non-threatening and peaceful, was cited as the reason for their acceptance and ultimately their recognition in Basel. Yet, perceiving one's presence as an enriching and useful contribution, or at least as compatible and not harmful, either to the cultural-religious diversity of local society or to its socio-economic system, reflects an unequal distribution of the managerial power over the country. It implies that one's presence can only serve or add to but should not define the national majority who decides over the nature of national society and how much divergence from it can be allowed. As recognition was regarded as a seal of good opinion bestowed by the state in its sole discretion, it confirmed the power constellations between majority and minority in which the former applies its terms of belonging.

Furthermore, the framing of recognition as a reward for integration achievements, both by community members and state officials, led to an oppositional conceptualisation of compatibility and deservingness against those not yet given this reward. In this way, religious recognition processes are set in and reproduce a socio-political context structured by racial hierarchies of belonging, both between whites and non-whites and within the racial-religious category of "Muslims", as members of this imposed category compete for acceptance. This has

been arguably most devastating for Alevis, who have attached high hopes to recognition in Europe as a means to bring about their liberation from former oppression and subsumption under Islam in Turkey. Alevis' arguments for their own compatibility and recognition-worthiness need to be assessed with this history in mind. In Europe, however, while they are viewed benevolently, their recognition is granted on account of their perception and self-presentation as model migrants and integration subjects. In this way, both Alevis and Sunnis are compelled to navigate racial hierarchies of belonging, both European and Turkish: Alevis draw their boundaries from Sunni Muslims, seeking to cast off their association with a group which, while denigrated in Europe, assumes a majority-position in Turkey. Sunnis lament their racist exclusion in Europe and need to keep their difference inconspicuous, but are also able to defy the lack of official recognition of their religion.

Integration discourse is one of the three ways, presented in this dissertation, in which official religious recognition reiterated wider politics of belonging and reproduced racial hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion, thereby remaining unable to induce a sense of equal belonging. In the following chapter devoted to the Hamburg case study, I will show the second of these instances, namely the politicisation of recognition agreements based on country-of-origin relations. As will be shown in the next chapter, the contract between the Hamburg senate and three Muslim organisations was made the subject of larger political debates about Muslim communities' and representatives' affective and institutional connections to Turkey. Repeated calls for the contract's cancellation were a potent tool in the politics of belonging, policing country-of-origin relations. Meanwhile, Alevis in Hamburg possessed the same official recognition as local Muslim communities, but remained anxious to assert their difference from Sunni Muslims and the latter's position as persistently more powerful. Above all, they were unable to address their situation in Turkey in religious dialogue settings, as country-of-origin conflicts were deemed to exceed the scope of such settings.

## **Chapter 6: Put on Probation - Politicisation of Recognition in Hamburg**

### **1. Introduction**

Ample time has elapsed for community members to feel and observe the repercussions of the two contracts between Hamburg's senate and its Muslim and Alevi communities. These contracts, ratified in 2013, established the German Alevi Community (AABF) and three Muslim organisations as official partners to the local government, the latter being the locally founded Schura comprising both Sunni and Shiite associations and local branches of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB) and the Union of Islamic Culture Centres (VIKZ). They also stipulated a number of rights regarding schooling, burial, mosque construction and holidays. Muslim community representatives had entertained high hopes, stating that the contract would not only change local and national debates on Islam in Germany but also significantly increase the feelings of belonging especially of young Muslims born and raised in Hamburg (Bürgerschaft der FHH 2013). However, the ordinary Sunni community members with whom I conducted interviews between December 2019 and early March 2020, could not confirm the materialisation of their hopes. Palpable positive effects, in terms of practical implementation or societal impact, have been slow to emerge. Instead, what has been very tangible is the presence of political debates on both affective and institutional relations to the so-called home-country of individual Muslim representatives and mosque associations. Concomitant calls for undivided loyalty and repeated demands for a cessation of the contract with the Muslim community as a tool of discipline have revealed the contracts to be prone to the ups and downs of nation-state politics, or more generally politics of belonging, rather than a reflection and establishing of an inclusive understanding of belonging.

Meanwhile, Alevi saw their contract as a proof of their independence from Islam, and relations between local government and the Alevi community were praised on both sides.<sup>17</sup> Some welcomed the harsher tone struck against Sunni organisations, but were anxious to assert continually their distinctness from Sunni Islam and to make themselves heard in common forums, feeling that the Sunni position remained more powerful due to foreign state backing which they themselves have always lacked. However, an overly open show of divisiveness with Sunnis from Turkey over country-of-origin politics was not desired by state representatives in religious recognition settings either, as these were aimed to induce religious dialogue, and conflicts deriving from unequal power relations in Turkey were deemed to exceed its scope. Hence, Alevi were unable to address the grievances that for them constituted the main frame of significance of recognition in Europe.

In the previous chapter, it was shown that recognition's implication in integration demands and Alevi's own conceptualisation of it as a reward for successful integration in opposition to the non-recognised Sunni group, reflected a cementation of dominant terms of belonging and the imposition of racial hierarchies of belonging. In Hamburg, both the Alevi and the Sunni communities received the same recognition status, but their subsequent treatment has greatly diverged. This chapter, in turn, presents a second instance of the manner in which recognition could not broaden the definition of belonging but has actually reiterated it, this time by recourse to country-of-origin politics. The fact that recognition resurfaced as an issue of politics related to "home" country connections, a disciplining tool in the politics of belonging, together with the necessity it imposed to assert and prove one's belonging by setting oneself apart from the denigrated group while discouraging the expression of country-of-origin conflicts, show that Alevi and Sunnis could be more or less tolerated minorities in the country,

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<sup>17</sup> While there were several parliamentary debates about the contract with DITIB/Schura/ VIKZ following demands for their cessation, the Alevi contract was only debated once, on occasion of its five-year existence, to emphasise its success amidst an otherwise negative atmosphere (Bürgerschaft der FHH 2018).

but were not regarded as part of the national community. In this way, participants' feelings of localised attachment, familiarity and safety did not amount to an equal say in setting the terms of belonging. The community members who appear in this chapter formed part of the local association of the German Alevi umbrella organisation AABF, a local member community of DITIB, as well as a member community of the local Schura belonging to the Milli Görüş (IGMG) movement.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the levels of significance of religious recognition, such as the tension between its personal and wider significances, as well as questions of equality and boundary drawing, with Alevis seeking both equality to and distinction from Sunni Muslims. The first section will also show that many participants denied the influence of official recognition on their personal feelings of belonging. The following section is devoted to the question of security. Sunnis argued that contractual stipulations should have provided support but turned out to be contingent in a context of fluctuating politics. Alevis negotiated political but also ontological and identitary security, in terms of their self-definition, differentiation and articulation. Next, participants' verbalisation of their feelings of belonging is presented. A strong attachment to the city and even residential quarter was displayed across interviews, but wider societal exclusion formed an integral part of this. The following section treats the politicisation of local recognition and the policing of country-of-origin relations. While the Muslim contract has been under threat of cancellation upon perceived misbehaviour, Alevis felt that their grievances deriving from country-of-origin conflicts were not taken seriously. In this way, religious recognition provided a setting in which community members confirmed and contested the unequal distribution of power defining the terms of belonging.

## **2. Recognition's significances and frames of reference**

### *2.1. Daily, personal and wider significances of recognition for Sunnis in Hamburg*

An early observation I made when broaching the topic of religious contracts during exchanges with Alevi and especially Sunni community members in Hamburg, was that it was not of immediate concern. Some had not even heard about the existence of such an agreement. Others only possessed a very general and vague, sometimes misconceived, idea about its content and impact. Only very few had read it. Instead, it was often termed a concern of higher-ranking members, those responsible for administration and outward representation, functionaries and politicians. The view that the state contract was a matter of politics and the elites seemed particularly prevalent among participants from the DITIB-affiliated community. To the question whether the contract was still a topic of debate in the community, Selma, a woman in her mid-fifties whom I had met at one of the women group's breakfast gatherings in the mosque, replied, "That doesn't interest us at all. We have done our work anyway and we still do it now. What it says doesn't interest anyone here. That's only for the politicians, a little bit, right? Not for us." Ferhat, the middle-aged man who chaired the mosque's board, had a similar impression that the contract was "an issue of politics" and that a person's familiarity with the contract was therefore dependent on the individual's interest and willingness to engage in such politics. Hence, "people who just want to come here to pray, who do not want anything to do with politics, can be told about this over and over, the interest isn't there." Interviewees from the Milli Görüs-affiliated community were also of the opinion that little was generally known about the contract among common members not charged with administrative or leadership tasks. Among Alevi participants, on the other hand, the existence of the contract was known to all but one. Yet, they were similarly unfamiliar with its specific stipulations.

It was often stated by participants that the influence of the contracts cannot be felt in their daily lives and that it was therefore of little immediate relevance for them. One explanation given for this was the lack of material gain as well as delayed or missing implementation. Sunni

participants lamented, for instance, the lack of representation in public broadcasting or of halal food in hospitals, as well as unattractive local cemeteries. Arrangements with a local hospital, concerning the provision of halal food or pastoral care, were still dependent on the association's initiative. On the subject of Muslim dress, practice and holidays in the work environment, Selahattin, a young man who was active in the DITIB community's youth group, confirmed that the implementation of specific contractual content depended on individual discretion. He explained: "If the boss doesn't want to implement it, you can try as much as you like." Similarly, with regard to religion classes at public schools, to which some community members attached high hopes, believing that it could lower societal prejudice and increase a general knowledge and acceptance of their groups, young participants reported that the inclusion of Alevi and Muslim content remained at the discretion of individual teachers or was dependent on the presence of Muslim or Alevi students in class who were asked to present their faiths. In general, the disparity between levels of institutionalisation and professionalisation resulting from different recognition status of Christian churches and the Muslim and Alevi communities was keenly felt. The latter continue to rely on unpaid voluntary work alongside full-time jobs and family commitments.

Despite the oft-reported irrelevance to daily life, the general conviction as to the contracts' general importance and wider significance still persists. Yasin, who, although still in his twenties, was already responsible for coordinating children's religious instruction in his mosque community stated: "Even when I do not think about it every day that we have a state contract, I know that it brings advantages. And it fulfils you, because you know that the city of Hamburg and the Muslim citizens of Hamburg get along or at least have a contract, in which they agree on the duties which both sides have." Hence, even though the contract did not occupy Yasin on a daily basis, he attributed it with certain advantages deriving from an agreement on

mutual duties, the existence of which he perceived as fulfilling. Yet, this wider significance was also filled with tension, as will now be shown.

Sunni participants often placed the contracts in a broader socio-political process, stretching over many years and even decades, within which the contract formed but one step. Songül, a middle-aged woman who was very active in Hamburg's DITIB community explained:

“The fact that we have many possibilities by now already shows that the state contract has done a lot, but you don't perhaps see it with your eyes. Because, as I said before, ten, fifteen years ago, it was totally different. And if you think about where we are today and what we achieved, what good things are happening now, then this has a lot to do that this has come to pass.”

At the same time, however, Songül commented on the way in which the contract failed to help Muslims' acceptance in an Islam-sceptical majority society: “If you have a totally different attitude, I can talk to you about the contract as much as I like, you won't accept it anyway.” Accordingly, Selahattin, head of his DITIB association's youth group, predicted that issues treated in the contract will remain a topic of debate both within and outside the Muslim community for the coming decades. Muslims' status was still societally contested and would not be solved any time soon. For him, the contract served as a minimal foundation on which to build gradually, according to the new and changing needs of the Muslim community in the future. Ferhat, an older male member of the same community, shared this view and pointed out that “We cannot have everything at once. Little by little. It has to settle in society.” This idea that the Sunni community has to pace its demands and wait for majority society to accept and grant them gradually reflected existing inequalities of belonging within which recognition took place.

For many Alevi participants, while their contract similarly may not have had many immediate, practical effects, its wider importance, conversely, lay not only in its potential to

reflect or contribute to their equal place in German majority society, but also in its demarcation of Alevis' difference to (Sunni) Muslims from Turkey, as will be shown below.

## *2.2. Alevis' search for equality with Sunni Muslims*

Claims for equality and equal treatment could be found across the two denominational groups, yet the group with whom, and even where, equality was to be achieved, varied. Sunni participants envisioned, or lamented the lack of, an equal standing within German majority society, including their equal treatment and acknowledgement at the workplace, the overcoming of prejudices against them, or legal parity with the Christian churches. Sunni participants often reported that their immediate encounters and interactions with white members of society have not significantly changed with the contract. Alevis, on the other hand, considered the manner in which they were perceived in the eyes of both Sunnis and non-Muslim Germans. The former especially were charged with harbouring persistent prejudice against Alevis, whereas the latter were portrayed more positively, Alevis recounting their growing awareness, interest and appreciation for Alevism. At the same time, non-Muslim Germans were said to be frequently unable to differentiate between Sunnis and Alevis, therefore mistakenly subsuming both under the same category. Moreover, most references to the topic of equal treatment were not made in relation to Christian churches but to Sunni Islam, both in Turkey and in Germany. The fact that official recognition of Alevism was still lacking in Turkey and that Alevi representatives travelling to Turkey still had to fear imprisonment, formed the omnipresent backdrop to state-granted recognition in Germany and constituted major ground for its significance.

Most importantly, while the Turkish state enforced a definition of Alevism as a culturally different branch of Islam, Hamburg's local government recognised Alevism as a distinct faith with a separate contract. Alevi participants responded positively, emphasising that they were given the same official status in Hamburg as Muslim communities, an especially

poignant circumstance comparing to the situation in Turkey. In this manner, Zeren, a young Alevi woman, observed:

“It is funny to me that one has seen us and made the same contract with us, that we are of an equal standing [*gleichgestellt*]. In Turkey, they cannot even understand that we are on the same level as the Sunnis in Germany. That is unimaginable. And for us that is a great thing. I don’t want to be classed with them [*gleichgestellt*], because we are totally different. But that we are equally, like, visible.”

Zeren’s use of the same word, which is affirmed in the first instance and negated in the second, may seem contradictory. Yet, it shows that while Alevis in Hamburg cherish their formal equality with local Muslim communities, they do not want to be perceived as belonging together. This quote exemplifies a major tension existing within the Alevi community, which accompanies their official recognition beside Sunni Islam, their equal standing with it, and their simultaneous boundary-drawing from it. The need to draw their boundaries to Sunni Islam stands in line with struggles for emancipation from a history of oppression and assimilation in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. At the same time, existing hierarchies of belonging in Europe create a setting in which demarcating one’s difference from Muslims and co-migrants from Turkey is hoped to elevate one’s own acceptedness, as will be discussed further below.

However, some Alevis remained discontent over the perceived privileging of Muslims by the state. Even though, or perhaps especially because, Sunni Muslims were more visible and “troublesome”, they were given more attention and support, financially, politically and academically. Celal, who assumed a leading position within the Alevi association in Hamburg, recalled that Sunnis had been given a Ramadan reception at the town hall. He relayed a heated and conflictual encounter with a social democratic politician, whom he had angrily accused of giving preference to the Sunni community and from whom he had vehemently demanded to give the same treatment to the Alevi community. In this way, endeavours to claim the same

treatment as an independent group separated from Sunni Muslims and an anxiety that this distinction was not properly upheld by both the German state, the majority society as well as members of one's own Alevi community, together with a feeling of continued neglect and powerlessness, persisted among Alevi community members despite a formally equal standing with Sunni Muslims in Hamburg.

### *2.3. Religious recognition's limited effect on personal feelings of belonging*

While some Sunni participants stated that the contract constituted an important gesture for Hamburg Muslims to show that they were accepted as a valued part of society, many simultaneously denied recognition's influence on their personal feelings of belonging. Alper, for instance, a middle-aged man responsible for the external representation of his mosque community, observed that Muslims have arrived at the centre of society, replacing their isolation and exclusion of previous decades. At the same time, he self-confidently asserted his equal rights and belonging irrespective of the contract, based on his birth and upbringing in Germany, saying that "this country is as much mine as it is yours, and no one can contest that." Alper criticised Muslims' lacking representation in public broadcasting and their negative media portrayal, despite Muslim presence in public broadcasting being one of the contract's stipulations. Furthermore, he displayed a distinct dislike of attempts to "suck up" (*einschleimen*) to German state and society, such as by accepting a state-formed version of German Islam, expressing instead that he stood by his opinions, for which he expected respect, just as he respected other opinions that may be contrary to his own.

Young Selahattin from the DITIB community, while affirming the contract's role as a foundation on which to advance Muslims' inclusion, also denied its influence on his personal feelings of belonging. In his view, the contract had been bestowed grudgingly and could have easily not come to pass. The fact that it eventually did, after years of negotiations, was thanks to the communities' perseverance rather than the city's goodwill. It had not been the initiative

of the local government, but a feat wrested from it and with an insecure status. As Ferhat, a middle-aged man who was an active member of the DITIB community, reflected:

“Yes, surely, I can say, my community signed a contract with the city of Hamburg. That is great. Whether it further concerns me personally, I don’t know. I myself have grown up here, was born here. And also before, I felt like a Hamburger or Bergedorfer. For me personally, not much has changed. It is a great thing, I only repeat that, but for me personally nothing has changed. I don’t see this as anything personal anyway.”

While Ferhat affirmed the contract to be “a great thing” and a feat of the local Muslim community, he denied its personal effect on him and described his personal feelings of belonging to his city and quarter specifically to have been in existence even before the contract. Thus, there was an underlying general idea that the contract *should* be important, although it did not hold personal significance and, moreover, had little currency with respect to personal feelings of belonging. Pertinently, many Sunni participants interpreted the contract as a preliminary step towards a more stable legal status, no longer subject to changing political climates. The fact that the contract has been prone to politicisation formed a major grievance of the Sunni community in Hamburg, as will be discussed in more detail further below.

Rather than being affected by state agreements, feelings of belonging were understood to be processual or generational. As Songül, a woman from the DITIB community who counted herself as member of the second-generation of migrants from Turkey, articulated:

“The first generation has never felt to belong here. The second generation was already a little further. The third generation belongs nowhere else. And those after that, they already took root here. And this is what you have to look for, not for the state contract, but how the person feels [...] And this state contract actually does not have an influence on that.”

This response reflects the fact that official recognition was granted to the part of the population whose members had already been residing locally for many decades or even their whole lives. Accordingly, seeing their religious community receive an official status may not be more than a confirmation after the fact. The following response by Songül also suggests an inverse

relationship between belonging and recognition, the latter an end product of the successful struggle for the former:

“This is maybe why we have this ambition, because we say, we also wanted to belong, and we always wanted to do everything well and better so that people here accept us. And through this state contract we actually only show that we have made it. As [a co-member] always says, ‘Back then, people could not even sit at the same table. Today we sit at the same table and want a piece of the cake. We even want a say in its recipe.’ And we carved this out for ourselves.”

Songül, in this way, described recognition as a reflection or testimony of their successful endeavours to do well and be better than others, in order to be accepted and to belong. Their current relationship of cooperation with the local government and their concomitant position of claims-making, rather than exerting influence over their feelings of belonging, was the result of their own wishes, efforts and ambitions.

Similarly, some older Sunni community members argued that their religious rights contract with local government was especially significant for the young generation, not in terms of their feelings of belonging, but rather their ability to benefit from progressing institutionalisation in the future, for instance pertaining to work environments or the possibility to study theology at German universities and receive religious instruction by German-speaking personnel. They were also charged with an unspoken responsibility to bring the issue forward in the coming years and decades. Young interviewees sometimes confirmed the significance of recognition for themselves, realising their responsibility to expand its scope and adapt it to changing requirements. Yet, especially the contract’s requirement to affirm a common value system based on the German constitution<sup>18</sup> was perplexing to some young Sunnis, who were born and raised in Germany and most often also possessed German citizenship. Yasin, therefore, speculated that these paragraphs were included for African, Albanian or far-eastern Muslim communities, whose members he assumed to have a shorter migration history than

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<sup>18</sup> Article 2 of the contract. For the complete contracts see Appendix.

those of Turkish mosque communities, as well as for the older generation, whose commitment to Germany may not be as strong as their own. Similarly, as his peer Tarik commented on the contract more generally: “It didn’t influence me at all. Well, I grew up here after all, in a German school. I have German friends. So, not me. But maybe an immigrant, who comes here and wonders what is happening here, you could show that to him.” This statement reflects a mismatch between Tarik’s perception of his own belonging and the dominant conception of Muslims’ belonging, also reflected in the contract’s stipulation on a German constitutional value system, which places the latter outside the national community. Yasin’s and Tarik’s statements also point to a racial hierarchy of belonging which migrants from Turkey and successive generations have had to navigate, assigning themselves a higher rank than other groups.

Members of the Alevi community in Hamburg similarly denied a direct effect of the contract on their personal feelings of belonging. Mustafa, a middle-aged man from the Alevi community, said:

“I have always felt well, and this is not directly to do with the state contract, if I am honest. It was a nice gesture, and I am happy that we have such an agreement. And the mayor came to us really very often. And that we are taken seriously, that was really very nice, but personally no.”

Asli, an Alevi woman in her late fifties, initially stated that the contract mattered greatly, but then admitted: “Well, for me personally rather little, because I am too Germanified [*eingedeutscht*]. But it is a gain for Alevism.” Finally, Akin, a young member of the Alevi community, demanded his already existing feelings of belonging be matched on a legal-institutional level: “I am proud of [the contract], in a way, but I still perceive it as only the first step, because I live in Germany, I have always only lived here. I feel alien in Turkey. It’s about getting the same status in Germany, also with regard to religion, even if this never really played an important role.” In this way, these participants attached importance to the contract, calling it

a “nice gesture” and, more broadly, a gain for the Alevi community, and describing their happiness and pride about its existence. Yet, when asked directly about the contract’s effect on their sense of belonging, they attributed it with only minor significance with regard to their personal feelings. At the same time, as will be shown in more detail in the following section, a number of Alevi participants attributed the attainment of official recognition with the ability to make them feel safer. Such a sense of safety is cited, for instance, when these participants report to openly articulate their Alevi identity without fear. While not explicitly framed as such by participants themselves, feelings of security can be regarded as forming part of a sense of well-being and homely belonging within sociopolitical surroundings.

As shown, a written agreement the implementation of which has been invisible to many in their daily and community lives, had little impact on Sunnis’ feelings of belonging. Instead, in such instances in which the contract has made itself felt for Sunnis, it was used as a tool in a politics of belonging that contributed to policing country-of-origin relations, and could not, therefore, upturn the divisions between national majority and Muslim minority which determines the boundaries of belonging. For Alevis, the contract crucially marked their distinction from Sunni Muslims and could increase their sense safety in their self-definition and outward articulation as Alevis, yet anxiety remained over their continued conflation with the latter by members of the general society as well as over their neglect by state representatives. Based on these observations, the upcoming section will focus in more detail on a particular aspect that participants reflected on in relation to their religious recognition in Hamburg, namely the question of safety and security. Sunnis debated the contingency of contractual backing in a context in which the latter was conditioned by wider politics of belonging, while Alevis negotiated not only their political but also their identity security in relation to Sunni Islam following from their officially acknowledged existence.

### **3. The issue of security: Definition, law and fluctuating politics**

#### *3.1. Sunnis' negotiation of legal backing and its contingency*

After the contracts between the senate of Hamburg and the Alevi and Muslim communities had been signed, and before their ratification in local parliament, academic experts and community representatives were invited by the parliamentary commission for further discussions. The legal scholar present at this occasion was highly critical of the contract (Bürgerschaft der FHH 2013). He hoped that community representatives were aware of the fact that what they were agreeing to would remain without legal transformation into state law and thus without legal security of existence. Alongside calls for the levelling of social and legal stratification in German society, especially prevalent among Sunni interviewees, the issue of security was present in different forms in both groups. For Alevis, it referred to their contractually fixed independent and separate existence from Islam, but also to increased security in their self-definition and in their open assertion of their Alevi affiliation, as will be shown below. For Sunni participants, legal security or its lack was a frequently occurring trope. Most often, being able to refer to an official document was considered necessary in acts of claims-making on smaller and wider scales, be it in one's immediate work environment or vis-à-vis state authorities. This was phrased as having legal backing, or something "in your hand", an official reference when called to defend one's rights. It was generally assumed that such rights would not be respected as a matter of course, and non-Muslims would not treat them equally of their own accord. Textualised stipulations in the form of a contract were assumed to force individuals and institutions to act accordingly, against their exclusionary inclinations, which preempted the need for discussion and justification on the side of Muslims. Not only was the contract imagined as backing in attempts to claim rights, but also as a protection against loss or abuse. In such situations, the contract was imagined to be stable and reliable.

In this manner, Selahattin, who through his current apprenticeship at an insurance company was familiar with legal texts and read with particular care the copy of the contract which I had brought to the interview, said that “having something in your hand” when facing employees or teachers was crucial “for you to be able to say, hey guys, look here, this is how it is determined, and you cannot do it differently.” Sedef, a young female member of the IGMG community also stated: “Something on paper stays forever. And if we have problems, we can pick this up and say, hey, here it says this and that.” Melike’s account was especially poignant in this regard. She was a young school teacher and occasionally attended gatherings and events at the DITIB community. At work, she was responsible for circulating emails on religious holidays reminding colleagues of their right to take these days off. In doing so, she was able to use an official document issued by the educational agency, a circumstance which relieved her of a considerable burden, sparing her uncomfortable discussions or strenuous explanations. Finally, Tuğçe, who led the young women’s group in her mosque community, similarly described a greater sense of self-confidence in claiming her rights and even connected this to a greater sense of belonging:

“Related to my own life, exemption from school for my children was very important, that I can say, without having to justify myself, they won’t come to school that day, because we celebrate, that this is self-evident. You are also more self-confident. You think, these are my rights and I take advantage of them now [...] It makes you feel more at home, I have to say openly.”

The fact that Sunni participants believed the contract to deliver official backing in Muslim claims-making, on the one hand implied confidence and defiance, a willingness to stand one’s ground and speak out against perceived mistreatment. On the other hand, Tuğçe mentioning the lack of a need to self-justify and her growing sense of self-evidence in excusing her children from school on a holiday, implied that this has not always been that way. Indeed, the previously introduced image of the contract as an official reference when called to claim one’s rights,

reflected many Sunni participants' impression that their space and status in society was not self-evidently secure but required constant staking-out and defence.

Further to this, contrary to the general image of a written contract as stable and enduring, Tuğçe was keenly aware and highly critical of its contingency and its use in political campaigning, wishing for a more stable and secure legal status, less prone to political attacks. Others observed that the contract was phrased vaguely and consequently precluded accountability for non-implementation. Alper especially emphasised this point. He was a very eloquent and assertive man in his forties, responsible for the external representation of his mosque community. He had even prepared himself for our meeting; he had brought a copy of the contract himself, had read it in advance and had taken notes on the margin. "It always says, The Free and Hanseatic City 'will' or 'can'. If it said 'it is bound to', it would sound different. Then it is law it has to fulfil. But if it says 'will', this can be in the far future. What does that mean? It could, but doesn't have to. And if it doesn't, there are no consequences." Indeed, the contract between the Hamburg senate and the Muslim organisations has been subject to much public and political contestation, which places Sunnis' wish for accountability and stability into stark relief. As will be discussed further below, repeated calls by members of conservative and right-wing parties to end the contracts, spurred on by the perceived misconduct of individual Muslim representatives and associations in relation to their affective and institutional country-of-origin ties, speak of a context in which even so-called equal rights are, for some groups, subjected to the dominant terms of belonging.

### *3.2. Alevi's differentiation and articulation, openness and closure*

For Alevi, the issue of security pertained less to the retrenchment of their rights through German state and society. Instead, it was argued that Hamburg extended its protection over Alevi in their open expression of their Alevi affiliation. Aslı, an Alevi woman in her late fifties, for example, expressed to feel more "secure" [*sicher*] through the contract,

“in the sense that, in the past, when I told Sunnis that I am Alevi, that was at my own risk. But today I know that the State [*Vater Staat*] supports me. He has given me the blessing to present myself without concealment and to say that I am Alevi. And if I see danger anywhere in that regard, I can turn to Him.”

This statement needs to be understood in the context of Alevis’ experiences of persecution and discrimination in Turkey across generations, as well as persistent prejudice from Sunni colleagues, neighbours or acquaintances upon their arrival in Germany. All of this remained obscure to the German state and public, as the so-called guest workers and their children were subsumed under the same national and religious labels. While young and middle-aged Alevi participants might not have lived in Turkey regularly, or only in the early years of their lives, the precautions they have had to take upon travelling there, for instance regarding their outward appearance or social media activity, reminded them of Alevis’ continued precarious status in that country. In this way, for Mustafa, who had migrated to Hamburg as a child, the contract was an official confirmation that Alevis could proclaim their identity “freely”, “without fear” and “without having to worry”.

Moreover, security for Alevis had an ontological meaning. On a most fundamental level, acts of state recognition in Europe such as the contract in Hamburg, confirmed Alevism’s official existence. As Zeren, a young Alevi woman, asserted: “I believe, for our community, it wasn’t really important whether our children stay at home on Aşure<sup>19</sup> or not. They did not know that themselves, after all. But, they were recognised, we exist on paper.” Alevi participants saw their officially acknowledged existence reflected in the fact that Alevism could be taught at school, and pupils could learn about its existence alongside other faiths, that colleagues or teachers asked about it and showed interest, that politicians came to visit or invited them to host a reception in the town hall. The existence of such an official category also entailed the ability

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<sup>19</sup> Alevi (and Shia) holiday, celebrated on the tenth day of the month of Muharrem, concluding a period of fasting in commemoration of the death of Hüseyin, son of Ali and grandson of Mohammed, at the battle of Karbala.

to articulate oneself towards others. This seemed especially pertinent for younger Alevi participants, who reported a certain enforced muteness and ignorance on how to assert and define themselves vis-à-vis Sunni peers in the past. Zeren, for instance, relayed that she had perceived herself as different from Sunnis in her surroundings, but initially put this down to her parents' "modern" way of raising their children. After the contract, she said, she had started to assert herself as Alevi more consciously.

Deren's elaborations were very insightful in this regard. He was a university student in his twenties, whom I met at an event organised by the Alevi community's youth committee. In our interview, he stated:

"If we didn't have all this, you would be more hesitant to say [you are Alevi], because, when the name does not come up, you can easily think, ok, we are not known [...] Prior to these decisive developments and steps, it was always the Sunnis who dominated. We somehow had to submit; we were a bit voiceless, but now we have a voice [...] And [in the past], I couldn't articulate it, either, and say, with us it is like this and that. For instance, among friends, back as a youth, especially through such events and German copies of info-sheets or books about Alevism, which also increased in the past ten years, I could maybe have referred my friends to that and could have said, hey, the mayor visited us and the city of Hamburg takes our religion seriously [...] Finally, the young people can articulate their questions and deliver these responses to their Sunni friends, rather than just staying silent."

Deren's response expresses the importance of possessing a discursive frame and reference points, such as official publications or politicians' acknowledgement, to overcome voicelessness vis-à-vis a dominant group, namely Sunnis. Furthermore, Damla, a member of the Alevi association's youth board, related a feeling of identity security and self-confidence closely entangled with a feeling of belonging to Hamburg as her "home city":

"This recognition which came from the city made me feel more secure [*sicher*] in the city. I thought to myself, Hamburg is really my city, my home city. And now I know that, even if I moved away from Hamburg, it would always remain my home city [...] And it has also strengthened my self-confidence, because, if the mosque on the other side of the street is officially recognised and my community, too, I feel better and I have a clearer feeling within me and can say self-assuredly, I am Alevi and I am from Hamburg. No-one can touch that."

At the same time, a tension was evident, for some even an outright anxiety was felt, regarding the variety and openness of Alevi identities and practice, on the one hand, and the wish for definite definitions, boundaries and closure, on the other. Irfan, for instance, a member of the Alevi community in his early sixties, professed the need for more academic research on Alevism, in order to clarify its historic roots prior to the establishment of Islam and to “cleanse” Alevism from Islamic remnants. He wanted people to fully commit to either Alevism or to Islam, or not believe at all. Inhabiting a middle-ground seemed unacceptable to him. At the same time, he feared a restriction of Alevism to solely religious issues, neglecting social, political and environmental responsibilities which Alevis have traditionally assumed. A further example of this tension was related to the choice and timing of Alevi holidays in the contract. Derya, the young woman chairing the community’s youth group, imparted how she endeavoured to follow to the letter the dietary and behavioural rules connected to the Alevi fasting periods. This is why she panicked over an inconsistency between the dates mentioned in the Hamburg contract and those proclaimed subsequently by the national Alevi umbrella organisation. While some desired certainty, others cautioned against a restriction of diversity and freedom of practice, feeling uncomfortable about an unalterable list of holidays.

Given the means and terms for articulation, Alevis defined themselves as such more self-assertively. This definition was, first and foremost, based on their differentiation from Sunni Islam. Irfan observed that, while some members of the Alevi association used to define themselves as true Muslims, they increasingly asserted their independence from Islam and denied any similarities. For him, the fact that the local government agreed on separate contracts with the Muslim and Alevi communities confirmed this. While the discussion within the larger Alevi community over their relationship to Islam continued, the Hamburg government reached a decision in favour of separation. Irfan contended:

“I have been claiming for years that Alevism does not belong to Islam, and this is now confirmed. I was happy about the contract, because now I can say, look here, if Alevism

belonged to Islam, they wouldn't recognise it. [Instead, they would say,] 'You are Islam. Here is a state contract for Islam. Go there.' But no. This is the proof actually, that it is recognised, that Alevi are an independent religion or faith on their own."

Other Alevi community members gave a slightly different account. Although they equally applauded the existence of two separate contracts and the concomitant definitional distinction, they attributed this to their own passionate demands during the negotiation process. In Asli's narrative, for example, Alevi had initially been pushed into a common contract by state and Muslim representatives, and had vehemently argued against this subsumption. Interestingly, this account contrasts with the manner in which this separation of negotiations was recounted by Sunni representatives present in these meetings, who portrayed the issue as wholly unproblematic and resolved quickly. Thus, boundary drawing from Sunni Islam was, on the one hand, presented as an emancipatory act issuing from the Alevi community itself, and the different accounts of this instance, in which the separation was either portrayed as insignificant or as momentous, speak of the inequalities in power between Muslim and Alevi communities. On the other hand, it needs to be regarded simultaneously in the context of a politics of belonging marked by anti-Muslim racism, which calls on minority groups to vie for acceptance by the white national majority.

Thus, despite the fact that the existence of Alevi has become more commonly known, with teachers, colleagues or politicians showing interest once they learn about participants' Alevi affiliation, Alevi participants have felt the continued necessity to mark their difference from Sunnis and clarify their distinction. This is especially the case, due to a common national origin, language and outward appearance, which led members of the white German majority to class Alevi and Sunnis together persistently. This distinction had, to their mind, not received sufficient attention by the Hamburg state up until the commencement of contract negotiations. Even after separate contracts had been signed and ratified, their conflation continued and was the cause for considerable frustration among some Alevi participants. The following account

by Akin, a young Alevi law student, who fulfilled administrative duties for the Alevi community and participated in a state-initiated deradicalisation network on its behalf, makes this evident:

“On the street you cannot see whether I am Alevi or Muslim. The other day, we had a network meeting, and a superior came. We had only communicated via email; we hadn’t actually seen each other. And she said to me, ‘Ah, you must be from Schura.’ Because, I came in with the guy from Schura, and I am wearing a beard and he isn’t. She had a fifty-fifty chance of getting it right. Tough luck. [...] The consciousness that there is a difference between people who look the way they look is hardly there in the population.”

Aware of his racialisation by members of the white German majority which caused this conflation, Akin responded by denouncing being classed with a group which is disdained by Alevis in light of their history as a persecuted minority in Turkey:

“We have been lumped together with people we never wanted to be lumped together with. The whole reason why so many of us are spread all over Germany and Europe are these people [Sunnis], and this has burned itself into our collective memory. If we had been able to live in peace in our homeland [*Heimat*], we wouldn’t be here today.”

Given their racialised grouping with Sunni Muslims in Europe, as well as their collective memory of their oppression and exclusion in Turkey, Alevis framed their distinct recognition in Hamburg as affording a sense of political and ontological security. Sunnis, meanwhile, demanded legal backing in their claims-making against a white European majority which, they felt, was otherwise disposed to infringe on their rights. The next section will describe the feelings of belonging of Alevi and Sunni participants from Hamburg in more detail, establishing that they mostly do not amount to a sense of having an equal say in the terms of belonging, as experiences of prejudice and exclusion exist alongside feelings of attachment, familiarity and security. This forms the basis for a subsequent discussion of religious recognition as entangled in larger politics of belonging on Muslims and migrants from Turkey in Germany, specifically its policing of country-of-origin relations.

#### **4. Feelings of belonging as a “migrant” from Turkey**

Descriptions of home and feeling at home often occurred quite independently from matters of state recognition of Islam. In this section, I want to show what participants meant when they professed to feel at home. I subsume such expressions under the concept of homely belonging, forwarded by Hage (2000). The larger politics of belonging, reflected in acts and discourses of inclusion and exclusion, are ostensibly kept at bay in such elaborations of homely belonging. Yet, the latter have to be read in a context of wider, local and national, institutional and socio-political processes and narratives. In fact, it will be shown that instances and feelings of exclusion are integral to homely belonging, which designates feelings of familiarity and attachment but precludes a more substantial position as equal participants in defining the very terms of belonging. Instead, participants remain the objects of politics of inclusion and exclusion. The section is divided into two parts, dedicated respectively to Sunni and Alevi conceptualisations of their belonging in Hamburg and Germany more broadly.

##### *4.1. “Hamburger Deerns”: Sunnis’ ambivalent belonging in city and quarter*

Most of my interview partners were born and grew up in Hamburg or spent the majority of their lives there, often in the same quarter and neighbourhood. Some who had moved to other districts of the city or smaller towns on the outskirts of Hamburg often decided to return. Alternatively, proclamations that they did not think of moving elsewhere, even within Hamburg, were not uncommon. Esma, for instance, felt profoundly attached to Bergedorf, the district in which she lived and had grown up and where her mosque association was located. I instantly had a good rapport with Esma when I met her at the women’s breakfast gathering in the DITIB mosque. With the other women who formed part of the mosque’s women’s group, she chatted exuberantly, moving fluently between Turkish and German, even using both languages in the same sentence. Switching to the local dialect, she called herself a “Hamburger Deern”, a Hamburg lass:

“I was born here. I am a Bergedorfer. I grew up here, too. Only once did I move to [town outside Hamburg], but then I came back here. I am at home here; I just feel at home. As I said, I am a Hamburg lass [*Hamburger Deern*] [...] I am always happy when I return from a holiday and see the sign saying ‘Hamburg’. That’s when I think, hallelujah, I am at home.”

Yet, Esma also recollected her childhood in the neighbourhood, in which close emotional ties were simultaneously characterised by outright racism:

“When we moved into this street, I had a German ‘grandmother’, so to say, our neighbour. Our doors always stood open, and we could come and go as we wanted. But she also had problems with us, a Turkish family. She had to get used to that first [...] Her son is my brother-in-law now, which she did not like at all in the beginning [...] It’s normal, when we played on the street as children, an older woman living in the same house shouted to us, Hitler is going to come and get you, because we played in front of her door.”

Esma portrayed the behaviour exhibited by these neighbours as normal and understandable, and her feelings of homely belonging have developed and persisted despite such experiences of overt racism. She even saw the reason for such prejudice in the behaviour of the early migrants themselves, who, out of fear and insecurity, had kept to themselves and maintained a distance to their German surroundings. It was therefore, according to Esma, also up to themselves to establish good neighbourly relations and make sure that their German neighbours felt comfortable in their presence. For example, on moving into a new flat, Esma made sure to introduce herself to her neighbours to allay fear or scepticism.

Selma, a member of the same mosque community, who had moved to Germany at a young age and had spent her teens in the south of the country, explained that she now felt to have “arrived”: “I was in Bavaria, I came here and I said, ok, now I am in my home [*Heimat*]. I go to Turkey, come back here and think, this is where I am at home [*zu Hause*].” Selma felt at home in Hamburg, where she had her house, work and family. Yet, she observed that one would always remain a foreigner in Germany, too: “You have a headscarf; you are a foreigner. And even if you don’t have a headscarf, then you have black hair, and you are a foreigner. It’s not easy.” In this way, Selma described the mosque association, which she attended regularly,

as a place of well-being and a counterweight to prejudice and discrimination, including in the quarter to which she nevertheless expressed profound attachment. Thus, inclusion in a familiar urban environment went hand in hand with experiences of exclusion outside and within these spaces. In fact, homely belonging was characterised by exactly this simultaneity of feelings of well-being in certain familiar contexts, and overall societal exclusion.

Further to this, some defined belonging as conformity with pre-given norms, rules and expectations. For Selma and Esma, it meant being able to speak the language, working, paying taxes and respecting the law. As explained by Esma, “I do have my freedoms, and as long as you behave and really adapt and do what is expected of you, what is normal, so to say, you will never have problems anywhere, right?” Hence, on the one hand, participants felt compelled to adapt and conform to pre-given formal, legal and cultural requirements but, on the other hand, realised that full belonging remained unattainable, being pre-conditioned on possessing certain racial markers, as was already observed by Selma above. The following exchange with Esma in the mosque’s cafeteria was particularly insightful in this regard:

“E: You are a foreigner and you will always remain one. It’s like that.

V: You say that so matter-of-factly.

E: But I don’t mind it! I don’t mind it. You know, if it had bothered me, I would have gotten a German passport. But I don’t have it. I am still a Turkish citizen, because I will always remain one. I used to tell myself, if I had a German passport, do you think a nationalist would come and ask me first, please show me your ID, are you German or foreign? [...]

V: Do you not want to have a political say though?

E: Well, that would be nice, but, by now, I don’t know. Like I said, I didn’t have any problems with my status up until now. I think, as long as you behave, you will be welcome everywhere.”

Feelings of belonging were therefore not attributed to the possession of a legal status, believed to have no influence on one’s perceived foreignness and persistent exclusion as national or racial Other. Tuğçe, a young Sunni woman who was born and raised in Hamburg, felt very frustrated about the continuing impossibility to have the duality of belonging experienced by

many young and middle-aged persons with Turkish parents or grandparents reflected in one's legal status. From her point of view, the fact that migrants from Turkey and their descendants were building houses and mosques, investing in a future in Germany, demonstrated their conviction as to where they considered to be their home: "Of course, I cannot say, I only feel at home in Germany. But if you asked me, where would you want to live durably, I would always reply, Germany. But this is again this debate with dual citizenship. I think you shouldn't block this belonging for people." The fact that expressions of such dual belonging were, however, regarded suspiciously became apparent in public and political debates on the repeatedly raised question of whether the contract between the city of Hamburg and the Muslim community should be continued.

In this regard, Melike, a young Sunni woman working as a teacher, defined full belonging as the ability to disagree and voice discontent without having her belonging fundamentally questioned. Yet, this was still refused to her. She recounted a discussion with her colleagues during which, after expressing concerns on an issue, she was reminded that "we" have to stand up for our values: "And this is where I don't know what is meant by 'our values', if I am included or excluded [...] And this proves to me that there's doubt over what opinion, what values I have and whether they are conforming to the values that apply here." Such instances proved to Melike that her true belonging was deemed to lie elsewhere, her say denied equal weight and legitimacy. Recounting an incident of racist harassment on the train, Sedef questioned the very definition of the terms of belonging and the meaning of German society: "I am also ready to open my mouth and to say, hey, what is your problem?! I am German, you are German. Which also raises the question, what does it actually mean to be German? [...] Who defines it, who says what is normal?" Such conceptualisations of equal belonging and demands for an equal say in its definition, occurred within a context in which the national majority continued to dictate the terms of inclusion and exclusion. In any case, religious recognition did

little to achieve equal belonging, and had little effect on personal feelings of homely belonging, as described above.

#### *4.2. "I have never been discriminated by non-Muslims": Perceptions of inclusion and exclusion among Alevis in Hamburg*

The simultaneity of feelings of being at home in Hamburg and its particular quarters, and overall societal and participatory inequality and exclusion, as shown above in relation to Sunni participants, was less marked in the accounts of Alevi interviewees. Homely belonging did not appear as spatially restricted to specific urban quarters as was the case among Sunni interlocutors. Many Alevi participants professed a strong attachment to Hamburg more generally or, in some cases, Germany as a whole. Akin, the young law student who also assumed administrative tasks for the community, denied any attachment to Turkey and defined his belonging in relation to Germany and even Europe. Only having moved to Hamburg a few years ago, Akin experienced Hamburg as an especially open city, where someone with his appearance, dark hair and a beard, "does not attract attention", unlike in other cities he had previously lived in.

Although, as was just seen, racial exclusion was as relevant for Alevis as it was for Sunnis, it was often not framed as such by Alevi participants. Derya, the young woman who chaired the Alevi association's youth group, for instance, stated that

"in this country [Germany], I have never been discriminated by non-Muslims. They are always open. Sure, when there has been a [terrorist] attack, they instantly think, we are part of them [Muslims], but once you explain to them that this is not our ideology at all, then they are nice to us."

This assertion is insightful in many respects. Derya denied being discriminated against by non-Muslim Germans, but also admitted that the latter presupposed her religious affiliation based on her appearance, believing her to be Muslim, which is a clear example of racism. The fact

that “they” are nice to “us” only after being persuaded that one is not a Muslim and therefore a putative terrorist, not only speaks of a perceived division between Alevis and members of the German national majority, but also reveals a conditionality and hierarchy of acceptance and a lack of equal societal standing. Still, Derya positively contrasted Alevis’ status and treatment in Germany to their past and present experiences in Turkey, and white Europeans’ behaviour to that of Sunnis in Turkey and Germany.

Similar observations can be made about the following response by Damla, another young Alevi woman and member of the association’s youth group: “If you were to ask me, who are you, I would firstly say, I am a Hamburger, I come from Hamburg. But of course, you then get the question, but where are you actually from? When, you know, the person does not look particularly German.” While Damla herself defined Hamburg as her primary reference of belonging, her belonging was questioned or qualified by others based on the perceived foreignness of her appearance. Zeren, an Alevi woman in her thirties, was rather apologetic about people asking for her real origins based on her allegedly foreign characteristics, saying that she did not feel offended as long as no offence was intended: “Some feel excluded, like, ‘but I have a German passport!’, but I mean, I just don’t look like that, it is like that, it’s fine.” Such instances of racism issuing from the national majority were given less significance by Alevi participants than being erroneously grouped together with Muslims and, above all, being the object of prejudice of Sunni Muslims themselves. The importance of being perceived as different from the latter was a constantly recurring topic, and it formed a major frame of significance of state recognition for Alevis from Hamburg, who look back on a history of discrimination and violence in Sunni-majority Turkey. At the same time, distancing oneself from Muslims in a context of European anti-Muslim racism, was arguably necessary to establish one’s belonging to Germany and Hamburg within a hierarchy of acceptedness, which reveals this belonging to be conditional and fragile.

In the accounts of belonging described above, experiences of prejudice and exclusion existed alongside feelings of comfort and familiarity. The latter were attributed, first and foremost, to the city and even the very quarter and neighbourhood in which participants resided and were articulated seemingly irrespectively of matters of state recognition. Yet, they have to be read in conjunction with a larger politics of belonging, of which recognition forms a part. Instances and feelings of exclusion were, in fact, integral to homely belonging, which included feelings of localised familiarity and attachment but precluded a position as equal participants in defining the very terms of belonging. Instead, participants remained the objects of a racialised politics of inclusion and exclusion, particularly with respect to their country-of-origin relations. This circumstance forms the focus of the following section.

## **5. Politicising recognition, policing country-of-origin relations**

### *5.1. Alevis' and Sunnis' relationship to local government*

#### 5.1.1. Alevis' wish to be taken seriously

While many participants agreed that society's acceptance and correct perception of them was only partly or even marginally influenced by the contracts in Hamburg, the relationship to the local government was more directly affected. For both groups, this relationship was conflicted. Some Alevi participants, on the one hand, appreciated the solidarity and support shown by state representatives. For example, German politicians had travelled to Turkey to attend the trial of Turgut Öker, one of the founding members of the Hamburg Alevi community, who had become a functionary of the German Alevi federation and had been seized in Turkey on charges of political dissidence. Furthermore, the good relations with the city government, reflected in occasional visits of politicians to the association or, even more significantly, the hosting of an Aşure reception in the town hall, were applauded and kept as fond memories.

Celal, a long-standing active member of the Alevi community, recounted the town hall reception especially vividly, drawing a contrast between the state's past treatment of them as foreigners and its current recognition of them as Alevis:

“Many have never seen the town hall from the inside. And you are *taken seriously*. Where, in the past, they went to the foreigner's registration office [*Ausländerbehörde*] for the smallest things and were treated like scum. And now the State receives them in such a hall, such a building, and recognises them.”

For Damla, the town hall reception signified that Alevis possessed the same political access to the city as other groups. This was not only reflected in visits by the mayor or other politicians and receptions in the town hall, but also in the presence of politicians with an Alevi background or Alevi employees in local government agencies. Derya imparted her wish to enter such a career in local administration herself and felt confident in her success after a job interview, during which her engagement for the Alevi community had been received with much appreciation. For her, the fact that the social agency financially supported their youth projects was a sign of its approval and even praise. At the same time, Derya, who was born and raised in Hamburg, describing instances in which state representatives defended, visited or hosted them as making her feel “welcome”, speaks of an unequal access to full and uncontested belonging, as such acts and gestures of inclusion depend on the approval by members of the white majority. While Celal's account above contrasts past deprecation by state authorities with current concession, I argue that the latter similarly works in accordance with assumptions on who ultimately retains ownership of decision power in national society.

Furthermore, Alevi participants continued to negotiate hierarchies of belonging. Celal himself recounted the conflictual encounter with a state representative, quoted further above, in which he challenged the latter over the fact that the Muslim community had been granted a Ramadan reception in the town hall, which led to the Aşure reception described by him previously. In this manner, some Alevi participants complained that they had been persistently

ignored by state authorities, such as in the allocation of financial means, but also in their warnings against Sunni-Muslim organisations with Turkish affiliations, such as DITIB and Milli Görüş, and in their assertions of their own compatibility with European values. Akin was disappointed by this, given that Alevis should be acknowledged by German state authorities as the latter's "natural allies":

"We are the ones who say, we want democracy, and the others [Sunnis from Turkey] covertly don't. And we always knew it and always said it, but we were never *taken seriously* on that point. But now it changes a bit, and this is quite satisfying. Not because we want them [Sunnis] to suffer, but because we want to set the record straight."

In this way, the state might finally become aware of Alevis after their long neglect. Yet, as will be shown further below, religious dialogue settings did not grant Alevis the opportunity to "set the record straight" on their past and present discrimination in Sunni-majority Turkey.

Moreover, being perceived as an ally by the German state came with further racially inflected dynamics which cast Alevis as migrant integration models. This assessment was forwarded by Celal, who viewed ongoing processes of state recognition in Germany, on both local and national levels, in a critical light. He was of the opinion that the underlying reason for Alevis' inclusion in such platforms as the German Islam Conference alongside Sunni Muslims, despite the fact that they were the opposite of a "troublesome" minority, was their use by the German government as a means to integrate Sunni Muslims: "We are inconspicuous, but the State wants us to be there. They cannot say 'integrate', so we say it for them to those who need to be integrated." Celal thus saw recognition of Alevis as part of the state's integration agenda towards Muslims, their role being that of a model minority able to articulate demands which, coming from the state, would be illegitimate.

With regard to the Hamburg contract, Akin followed a similar line of argument when he pointed out that parts of the contract, such as separate burial spaces, were actually superfluous as Alevis did not require special rights, exemptions or privileges the way Sunnis

did. Instead, what mattered most to him was Alevis' distinction from Muslims, with whom Alevis were lumped together based on racist presumptions determined from their similar appearance. In drawing his boundaries, Akin, at the same time, coincided with European stereotypical portrayals of Muslims as terrorists and extremists:

“We don't want to be buried on a Muslim cemetery, but otherwise it's pretty much the same to us whether we are buried on a Christian, Protestant or Catholic cemetery [...] I don't even expect that people should show understanding when I leave the lecture hall at university because I need to roll out my [prayer] carpet somewhere. And I don't want anything like that. I would just like recognition in the sense of *respect*. Like, this is an Alevi, and they are not radical, although they look the way they do.”

Akin observed that content and language of the contract were in large parts adopted from the Muslim counterpart, for whom, Akin argued, the city government had agreed on these concessions as they also granted more control over the Muslim community, regarding for instance the transparency of mosque activities and religious teaching. Formal religious recognition was, in this way, only really necessary for groups that needed to be brought into line, which Alevis believed did not apply to them. Hence, while critical of official religious recognition, Alevis in Hamburg often reiterated their racialised assignment as “good” migrants by confirming their compatibility and inconspicuousness. Despite their criticisms, Alevis wished to be noticed, distinguished correctly and taken seriously by German authorities. More broadly, the preceding statements reveal Alevis' navigation of racialised hierarchies of belonging through practices of boundary drawing from Muslims.

#### 5.1.2. Sunnis' move from being surveilled to being “seen”; and back

A desire to be acknowledged was not uncommon among Sunni participants, either. However, rather than being ignored or overlooked, they felt to have been the target of unwarranted surveillance. While Alevis regretted to be classed together with Sunni Muslims, the latter believed to be wrongly equated with Islamists. In Hamburg, this was felt very strongly after the incidents of September 2001, as some of its perpetrators had frequented a local mosque.

Sedef mapped out this contrast between past surveillance and present acknowledgement. She had invited me to a meeting of the young women's group at their mosque in Wilhelmsburg, after which she took me on a tour through the women's section. She emphasised the positive work that was done at the mosque, based solely on donations and time which members gave voluntarily besides their jobs and daily duties, consisting not only of religious service and instruction but also social work. The building was completely renovated and offered ample space for teaching, homework supervision, sports, prayer, free time, gatherings, cooking and eating. Sedef was visibly proud of this achievement. Later, we sat down for an interview in one of the classrooms. She had already read the contract quite a while ago, because, having been the only Muslim woman in her university cohort, she had felt that she needed to be informed and up-to-date to be able to respond to questions. When she perused the contract again during our interview, she pointed out the preamble as particularly noteworthy, because it described Muslims as a "significant part of the population".

"For me it was the coolest thing ever that the state is even ready to cooperate with Schura. For me that was revolutionary [...] You are happy to ultimately see that your work is recognised and *seen*. [...] Revolutionary because for the first time the state was ready to enter into dialogue, a cooperation. That didn't exist before. You have to imagine, 9/11, this guy from that one community, all hell broke loose. Defence of the Constitution, police, pressure to the max, controlling everything twice [...] And that it developed in a way that you are no longer a victim, but to the contrary, that the state says, hey, *we see you*, and we like what we see, and we are willing to enter into a state contract. That is a huge step, from my point of view."

In this way, Sedef was happy that past control and surveillance had been replaced by what she described as being "seen", a trope denoting an approving and sympathetic (white) gaze, which correctly discerns one's true character and recognises one's achievements.

In a similar manner, Alper, the public relations officer of the same community, who had taken the time to carefully read the contract prior to our meeting, described the relationship between the state and Muslim representatives reflected in the contract as one on "eye-level". Alper noted that, in general, the German government was in the habit of patronising Muslims,

wanting to educate them, prescribe a desirable kind of Islam and “play the know-it-all.” He did not find such paternalism, however, in the contract. Quite the contrary, for Alper, it reflected a trusting and respectful relationship. Others were even of the opinion that the contract and closer ties between state and Muslim communities could help to dispel the negative image of Muslims, or at least could be used to achieve this end, by distinguishing them from extremist or other non-approved groups. In this manner, as stated by Tuğçe who led the young women’s group to whose meeting I had been invited, it was important to maintain transparency in one’s cooperation with the state, to show that one’s activities were conducive to state interest and not threatening or covert.

However, although a contractual agreement was perceived as a positive departure from state surveillance, the continuous need to prove one’s peacefulness implied the persistence of certain presumptions entertained by the state and showed that the relationship was not altogether equal and trusting. The unequal distribution of power between the recognising state and the communities receiving recognition was also expressed in Esma’s statements. She thought that one could ask for recognition, but granting it would lie at the discretion of the state, and if it denied it, there was nothing one could do about it: “If it is possible, all the nicer for us, but if it isn’t, it is like that. I won’t stand somewhere waving a poster, protesting.”

## *5.2. Sunnis’ reflections on the public contestation of their contract*

While the contract itself did not, for the most part, include prescriptions that Sunni participants perceived as restrictive, and even specifically pronounced Muslim citizens in Hamburg as significant members of society, developments surrounding it have dissipated its positive reading. The contract between the Hamburg senate and the three Muslim organisations Schura, VIKZ and DITIB has been subject to repeated political contestation, amounting to calls to nullify the contract altogether. Such demands were made on the grounds of a number of incidents, such as Turkish-nationalist social media posts by community representatives in

which they had stated their support for Turkish military interventions, as well as institutional ties to the Turkish and Iranian governments. Such local events coincided with deteriorating national relations between Turkey and Germany, especially from 2016 onwards. While the contract has remained intact until now, politicians repeatedly called for its cessation, individual project funds were cut and relations between authorities and Muslim communities became strained. Politicians who used to visit community centres, no longer followed up communities' invitations. For Sunni participants, this created the impression that their communities had been put on probation, that their loyalties were under constant scrutiny and that their standing was dependent on the political atmosphere of the day. As Söngül, an active member of the DITIB community, explained very lucidly:

“I am German. It is the same where I am going, I have a German passport, I am German. But I am also a Muslim, and no one can change that. And there are many people like me [...] And you should think a little bit about that. These are all pretences to look for something so that you can change or cancel things again [...] Of course, this contract is just on probation, and there will always be someone who tries to destroy it or reverse it.”

Here, Songül criticised the circumstance that, while she perceived her identity as a German and a Muslim as unchangeable and unquestionable, this was not generally accepted, and agreements such as the contract in Hamburg were attempted to be withdrawn under false pretences.

Alper's office as a public relations representative of his mosque community had been brought into existence as a reaction to nationalist social media posts of some individuals associated with DITIB and Schura. As he pointed out, such an occurrence has the power to void all the work done by the community in matters of forging ties with state and society, as it is assigned responsibility for the actions of individual members. Bahar, who was the social media representative of her mosque's youth committee, had been asked by the mosque board to exert special caution when posting anything and to abstain from it altogether when it pertained to political events in Turkey. She also recounted that an educational programme she had

participated in, organised by DITIB and supported by the city, had been suddenly called off. She reflected: “You could also see this as a consequence they drew, a punishment. Like, ok, you watch out what you do, and if you don’t, we will dissolve your project. You could see it like that, though I want to believe that it was well-deliberated.” The contracts were thus part of a wider debate about community members’ belonging, where real or imputed relations to a so-called home country were suspected to pre-empt their loyalty and full belonging to Germany.

Even politicians who supported the continuation of the contract were viewed suspiciously by Sunni participants when they tried to politicise the subject and gain Muslim votes. Tuğçe, the young female member of the Milli Görüş-affiliated community, explained that her ability to feel belonging depended on the political atmosphere prevalent in society and the political leaning of the parties in power. Past electoral success of the far right deeply disquieted her and she wondered if she could still feel at home with them in power. As our interview took place during the upcoming local election campaigns, which were to decide the fate of the contract, Tuğçe was able to recount the following:

“Of course, politicians told us, ‘If you vote for us, we will continue the contract.’ I find that ... Sure, politicians want to be elected, it is always a give and take. But I think it is a pity that the issue still isn’t secured legally, legally stable [...] There are parties who take advantage of this, and this is why it is important to firmly fix it, so that they can no longer say, ‘Oh, do we still want to work with you?’ That is like a threat, like, ‘If you don’t do this, you are no longer part of the game. If you don’t play along like we want it, we will stop.’”

As Tuğçe observed, given that political contestations of the contract’s validity were triggered by what were deemed misguided political loyalties of Muslim representatives towards their countries of origin, threats to nullify the contract as well as promises to maintain it were used as a tool to assert a particular conception of belonging. In this conception, support for the Turkish government by Muslims living in Germany, and in many cases possessing German citizenship, was deemed unacceptable.

At the same time, depending on the state of relations between Germany and Turkey, the level of outrage over affective and institutional ties to the latter fluctuated. Therefore, what participants wished for, as mentioned by Tuğçe above, was a stable and more unconditional relationship to German state authorities, who would recognise their belonging unquestioningly or, in the words of Songül, “where you are not always kicked out again at the first opportunity and then have to build up everything from scratch, but where you really support each other and say, ‘We have started this, how can we make it better?’” When one’s ability to belong hinges on fluctuations of political relationships between so-called host and home countries, the wish for a reliable legal backing that many Sunni participants expressed, as could already be seen further above, is set into relief. At the same time, they had to realise that even a written contract with basic stipulations on equal religious practice was prone to the vicissitudes of politics and could be withdrawn, should the manner in which participants felt, spoke and acted about their country of origin be deemed inappropriate. To my question of whether, to a person born and raised in Germany and with German citizenship like herself, many of the contract’s stipulations should not go without saying, Sedef answered:

“Of course, I think, ‘Shouldn’t that be self-evident?’ But I do not have the luxury to think that way, because things can easily take a different route. You cannot just sit back. We always have to be active and show that we are there, because we always meet with resistance. Things can change, you can never be sure.”

Given that even such minimal agreements as those enshrined in the contract were subject to political debate, they could not be taken for granted which, according to Sedef, obstructed the progress of Muslim institutionalisation and, I would add, their equal belonging. While belonging to Germany needed constant proof, expressions of pro-Turkey sentiments allegedly revealed Muslims’ true loyalties. In this manner, rather than including Muslims more equally into state and society, the use of the contract as a tool of local and national politics of belonging may have further cemented their alienation from it.

### *5.3. Alevi's inability to address country-of-origin conflicts in religious settings*

The contract signed with the Alevi community has not received the same negative political attention. Among numerous parliamentary submissions to end the contract with the Muslim community, the Alevi contract was the subject of only a single parliamentary enquiry by the local Green, party five years after its ratification, which served to emphasise that there was still another contract which was going well.<sup>20</sup> The concomitant evaluation of the cooperation between the city and the Alevi community reached an overall positive verdict (Bürgerschaft der FHH 2018). Yet, as many responses given by Alevi participants showed, they did not believe to have the “luxury” to sit back and do nothing either, and instead felt the necessity to assert their distinctness from Sunni Muslims. Further to this, as was already alluded to above, their raising of country-of-origin issues was not taken seriously. Their warnings about Sunni organisations with relations to the Turkish state, such as DITIB, and their own position as ally to and defender of German democracy has not been sufficiently acknowledged. As the young community member Akin deplored, as Sunnis and Alevi share a migration history, they are racially conflated and their different political stances and positions are overlooked.

Furthermore, in interreligious dialogue settings, for instance in a state-initiated working group on the prevention of extremism or in a committee of the religious studies institute at the University of Hamburg, Alevi and Sunni representatives were forced to sit at the same table. Berat was a middle-aged man who had moved to Hamburg from Turkey to pursue his academic education and had been actively involved in the local recognition process of the Alevi community. He related his frustrating experiences in these interreligious forums. While frames such as extremism prevention grouped together representatives of “foreign” religions, based on a common country of origin, any conflict related to country-of-origin politics, such as the

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<sup>20</sup> This information was obtained in an expert interview with Filiz Demirel, member of the Green party in Hamburg, who had made that parliamentary enquiry about the Alevi contract.

discrimination of religious and ethnic minorities in Turkey, was unwanted. As recounted by Berat, when he or his colleagues called out the perceived hypocrisy of Turkish-Sunni representatives who, he argued, preached peace and dialogue in Germany, yet at the same time supported Turkish nationalism and militarism on social media, white German participants were discomforted and attempted to steer away from such debates, even accusing Alevis of hampering their work.

“We don’t do it because we enjoy it. These are difficult topics. We’d rather not have these debates. We’d rather that they [Sunnis] were a liberal and open community. We are very interested in dialogue with our Sunni brothers in faith, but this is political Islam! This influences our life on German soil, too! Many act as Erdogan lobbyists here in Germany! What does Erdogan do with Alevis in Turkey? We cannot blind ourselves to these facts. [...] We have nearly lost Turkey, and we do not want to lose Germany, too, because we enjoy freedom here. And many people do not know, are not aware, I would say, and they do not want to leave their comfort zone, this comfort [*Bequemlichkeit*].”

Hence, in recognition and dialogue settings, Alevis, as well as Sunnis, were epistemologically confined to their religious identity, and country-of-origin conflicts, which for Alevis constituted a major frame of significance of recognition in Europe, were smoothed over.

The conditioning of religious recognition on country-of-origin politics and the attempt to overlook political conflicts and power relations within a group from the same country of origin frustrated Sunnis and Alevis respectively. Sunnis lamented the fact that their behaviour was being policed under pain of cancelling the contract. Alevis wished to express their grievances related to their minority position in Turkey and Germany but were not, in their view, given sufficient attention by local authorities as a group that assumed a very different position, despite “looking the way they do”, as was it was phrased by Akin, who thereby clearly identified the racial basis of religious recognition constellations. This racialisation leads, on the one hand, to a conflation of religious recognition with country-of-origin politics, and on the other hand in seeming contradiction to this, a suppression of country-of-origin politics when conflicts arising from power inequalities in Turkey are raised in religious settings. In both instances, relations to

the country of origin were deemed to exceed the acceptable measure. For Alevis, not only did recognition settings and processes reproduce their racialisation, which they themselves at times confirmed, but they could not address Alevis' experiences of violence and oppression in Turkey. Still, as became evident in the above statement, Alevis depended on not "losing" Germany, too. Although Alevis, as well as Sunnis, felt attached to Germany, they were excluded from the decision over the terms of belonging. The definition of the acceptable was theirs to contend with, but not theirs to set.

## **6. Conclusion: Religious recognition and belonging in Hamburg**

From the accounts presented above, a number of conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between state-granted religious recognition and feelings of belonging of Sunni and Alevi community members in Hamburg. The kind of belonging which participants described to me and which I have termed homely belonging, drawing on Hage (2000), signified feelings of attachment, familiarity and security to the city and its quarters. Those feelings have often already been in place before the attainment of official recognition as contract partner to the senate, but a number of Alevis reported that their recognition had increased their sense of political and identitary safety and confirmed their good relations to local government. Feelings of homely belonging, however, went alongside experiences of exclusion. Moreover, official religious recognition has been largely unable to induce a sense of governmental belonging, i.e. having an equal say in the terms of belonging rather than being the object of a politics of belonging (*ibid.*), and is instead embedded in and reiterating existing scripts and hierarchies of belonging.

In this manner, some Sunni community members portrayed the contract as an issue of politics and elites, something negotiated among politicians and upper community functionaries

and hence of limited concern to ordinary members. Accordingly, Sunni participants criticised the politicisation of the contract and the numerous threats of its cancellation upon putative misconduct of individual community representatives related to country-of-origin relations. The fact that the contract was thus prone to political contestation meant that the societal standing of Sunni participants was subject to changing political climates, especially with regard to nation-state relations between Germany and Turkey, and political power dynamics. Although the contract text itself promises inclusion and equal treatment, it has been subsequently turned into a tool of a wider politics of belonging on the loyalty of Muslims and migrants from Turkey in Germany. This sets into relief Sunni participants' desire for legal backing to help them counter the contestations of their claims-making, a security that, however, was not granted by their contract.

While the existence of a distinct contract for the Alevi community reflected their official acknowledgement as an independent religious community, Alevis still felt compelled to assert their distinctness from their Sunni counterpart by stressing their compatibility with European majority society, both in light of Sunnis' persistently more powerful position and their own racialised grouping with Sunni Muslims as migrants from Turkey. Accordingly, while relations between local government and the Alevi community were praised on both sides, Alevis deplored the circumstance that their difference from Sunnis and their history of oppression in Turkey have not been given sufficient attention by state representatives and members of the majority society. Some community members, in this way, called for more respect and acknowledgement and criticised their own inclusion in recognition settings which, in reality, served the integration of more troublesome minorities, such as Sunni Muslims. However, too much divisiveness with the latter over country-of-origin politics was deemed disruptive by state officials in religious dialogue settings. Alevis calling out the perceived hypocrisy of Sunni representatives, for instance, made visible the fissures of such racialised settings. A real

acknowledgement of Alevi grievances, whose lacking recognition in Turkey formed a major frame for meaning-making of received recognition in Europe, was thereby largely preempted.

Both a conflation of religious recognition with country-of-origin politics and a suppression in religious settings of conflicts arising from, and giving rise to, power inequalities in Turkey are instances in which relations to the so-called home country are deemed excessive. Although Alevis, as well as Sunnis, felt attached to Germany and especially to the city and neighbourhood in which they lived, they have been excluded from defining what is considered excessive and acceptable. Instead, recognition's use as an issue of politics and a tool in the politics of belonging with regard to the Muslim community, and the continued necessity Alevis have felt to set themselves apart from Muslims, shows that official religious recognition was set in and worked in continuance with racial hierarchies of belonging. In a context of European anti-Muslim racism and Muslims' exclusion from narratives of German national community, the recognised had to prove their belonging for the white majority and against one another, as Sunnis were put on probation over their true loyalties and Alevis asserted their distinction from Muslims. The continued need for such avowals shows that this belonging was not self-evident, but conditional on affirmation of loyalty and compatibility. Hence, while participants could be more or less of a tolerated minority in the country, they were not fully regarded as part of the national community. Such navigations of European hierarchies of belonging took place in light of a continually unequal distribution of belonging in Turkey and continued power disparities between Alevis and Sunnis in Europe, which informed Alevis' boundary-drawing to Sunni Muslims and their arguments for their value compatibility in Europe, as well as Sunnis' demands for equal belonging in Germany despite their institutional and personal connections to Turkey.

In the next chapter, I will present the most complex and contested of the three recognition constellations included in this dissertation. In Vienna, the past decade has seen an

array of wide-reaching transformations in terms of religious recognition. Austria has a national religious recognition regime which goes back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The 1912 Islam Law, devised in the aftermath of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was amended in 2015, causing an outcry within the Muslim community, as it proscribed foreign financing and personnel. It was revised once again in 2021 as part of the government's anti-terrorism programme to include even stricter measures. The 2015 Islam Law also included a recently recognised second Muslim confession, namely the Alevi faith community. This had been preceded by a major split dividing the Alevi community, and the Alevi group which defines itself as an independent non-Islamic faith was refused official recognition. It will be shown that Sunnis as well as recognised Islamic Alevis and non-recognised non-Islamic Alevis negotiated their differential positionings within an Empire-inflected regime of governance of Islam. This is the third instance of recognition's embeddedness in larger politics of belonging on the place of Islam in Europe and its reiteration of racial hierarchies of belonging.

# Chapter 7: The Good, the Bad, the Unheard - Empowerment, Exclusion and Alienation in Vienna

## 1. Introduction

Looking up to the monumental statue situated on the exterior wall of the famous St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna's city centre, you first behold a lying, half-naked male figure of giant proportions, with an open mouth, wide nose, long moustache and a bushel of hair on top of his otherwise shaven head, seemingly about to fall from the pedestal. Letting your gaze travel further up, you see that a flag pole is pushed into his ribs, and another figure is trampling triumphantly upon his body, donning a Christian garment and a golden halo. Above this standing figure hovers a band of angels, holding up a splendid array of golden rays. As one can learn from the inscription, the dying and defeated man is "the Turk", on whose body poses John of Capistrano, a "hero against the Ottomans" who, in the fifteenth century, preached for battle against the Turks.<sup>21</sup> Walking around Vienna, as I often did in times of Covid-induced contact restrictions, it was not only the street names and monuments that reminded the current inhabitants of their troubled history with the Turks. On the posters for the upcoming local elections in October 2020, the right-wing party's candidate stood smiling and pointing towards an image of St. Stephen's Cathedral, showing "our home" to a little blonde girl next to him. The counter-scenario presented a room housing a group of figures wearing black burkas. Through its window, the cathedral could be seen in the distance, its peak framed by a light-red half-moon in the sky.

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<sup>21</sup> "Kapistrankanzel", inaugurated in 1738, see <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tuerkengedaechtnis/home/denkmaeler/ort/stephansdom-kapistrankanzel> [accessed 11.3.2022]

The Austrian Empire responded very differently to Turkish and Bosnian Muslims, the former cast as an external enemy threatening to invade from the East, and the latter annexed and recruited as loyal defenders of the Empire. It was for the latter that the Islam Law (*Islamgesetz*) was created more than a century ago, in 1912, after the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Yet, this law now majorly affects migrants from Turkey and their descendants. Islam in Austria is recognised on the basis of this law, but is by now strongly shaped by Sunni Turkish-origin organisations. Starting with labour migration in the 1960s, people from Turkey have been transformed from an external enemy to aliens within, albeit in possession of a legal status that, although initially not meant for them, grants them formal equality with the Christian Churches. Meanwhile, the Austrian Sunni community has been the object of increasingly restrictive integration and security politics, which have been conflated with religious recognition legislation, as shown in the repeated amendments of the Islam Law in 2015 and most recently in 2021 after the shooting attack committed by an ISIS sympathiser in Vienna's inner city.

Discussions on the amendment of the Islam Law as it approached its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, moreover, coincided with the official recognition of a second Islamic group, namely the Alevi faith community. Hence, other than in Switzerland and Germany, Alevism in Austria received its official recognition as a Muslim denomination within a national Islam Law, rather than within a local frame as a religion in its own right. The granting of official religious recognition and the ongoing relationship between state and religious communities is the Austrian national government's responsibility. Both the Islamic (predominantly Sunni) (IGGiÖ) and the Alevi (ALEVI) faith communities in Austria possess the same formal status as the established Christian churches, as public corporations.

The official recognition of Alevism, however, was preceded by a grievous split within the Alevi community. The second Alevi group, which is the Austrian representation of the

European Alevi federation (AABF) and of which the now-recognised Alevi community was a splinter group, defines itself as a non-Islamic religion. Their claims that the “Islamisation” of Alevism by the Austrian government mirrors Turkish state practice, point to the transnational backdrop to Austrian constellations of religious recognition, namely Alevis’ present and historical discrimination and assimilation in Sunni-majority Turkey. The unmet claims of the non-Islamic Alevi group have been the subject of a protracted legal and administrative process which not only caused financial losses for the two Alevi communities, but further deepened animosities between the groups, breaking friendship and family ties. Between September and November 2020, as I interviewed members from both Alevi groups in Vienna, I found myself between their mutual accusations, suspicions and contrasting accounts. Meanwhile, in my interviews with members of two associations of the Austrian branch of the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (ATIB), as well as members of the Islamic federation’s (IF) student organisation, I was confronted with a wide divide between Sunni Muslims’ high, formal recognition status and their feelings of societal exclusion.

In this chapter, I continue exploring the relationship between official religious recognition and community members’ feelings of belonging. As in the other two cases, presented in the preceding two chapters, religious recognition in Austria was embedded in and infringed upon by larger politics of belonging on the place of Islam and the integration of Muslims and migrants, which affected participants’ feelings of belonging. Given that religious recognition in Austria is a national government prerogative and given the existence of an old law on the incorporation of Islam, such national politics of belonging were arguably even more entangled in questions of recognition than in the other two cases. For Sunni participants, this constituted a paradox between formal recognition and societal exclusion, although many pointed out that the Islam Law itself increasingly constituted a means of their regulation and control. Unrecognised Alevis have similarly come to the conclusion that religious recognition

in Austria is more a matter of government interest and politics than it is about equal treatment. Their experiences have deeply disappointed and alienated them from the Austrian government. Recognised Alevi, on the other hand, cherished the acknowledgement and valuation concomitant with their official status. Above all, they felt empowered vis-à-vis Sunni Muslims, under whom they had been oppressed in both Turkey and Austria. Yet, their ability to assert themselves against Sunni Muslims was circumscribed by predefined terms of belonging, in which their critical stance against Sunnis at times fell in line with the dominant integration and domestication discourse.

Following the preceding two chapters' presentation of integration requirements and country-of-origin politics as two ways in which national politics of belonging pervade recognition processes, and participants' accounts of these, this chapter showcases how Alevi and Sunni participants in Austria negotiated their perceived roles in the governance of Islam. First, I will outline what significance recognition held for my various groups of interview partners in Vienna and explore the ways in which the relationship between recognition and belonging was negotiated by them. I will elaborate on the differentiation made by participants between legal and societal recognition, through which they pursued the question if and to what extent official recognition has had an effect on their standing in Austrian society. In the following section, I begin by relaying participants' discussions of their feelings of belonging in a context of their racialised exclusion as migrants from Turkey. I will then delve into their discourses of boundary drawing in the meaning-making of recognition, whereby participants negotiate their worthiness of that status and navigate hierarchies of "good" and "bad" Muslims, or refuse the forceful imposition of the category of "Muslim" altogether. The next section will once more take up the issue of governance, first describing participants' various conceptions of and relations to the Austrian state, and then showing their differential negotiations of recognition as either empowerment vis-à-vis the state and other Muslim and Alevi groups, from

the point of view of recognised Alevis, or as a means of governing Islam, both by regulating the Sunni subjects of the Islam Law and by attempting to force Alevis into this law. Finally, the conclusion will sum up the main findings and arguments of this chapter.

## **2. Recognition's significances and frames of reference**

### *2.1. Sunnis' recognition on paper and in real life*

Many of my Sunni participants did not know the exact content or historical background of their official status in Austria. Feride, a young female university student, reported that she had only learned about its history in a university seminar for prospective religion teachers. "I thought to myself, oh, we actually have so many rights, but we didn't notice or realise that these are rights which we received later on and which are unique for Muslims in Europe [...] But, at the moment, it's like in other countries, and there is no difference." In this manner, my Sunni participants in Vienna often observed a perplexing discrepancy between an ostensibly strong legal status on the one hand, and a persistent lack of societal acceptance and increasingly adverse socio-political conditions on the other. Kerime, a woman who was already in her late sixties and had moved to Austria as a young girl, also wondered at this apparent shift in Austria's relation to Islam: "Of all countries, Austria was the first to accept Islam. Why is it now against it? I wonder why."

Sevtap found the situation in Austria frustratingly incongruous. I met Sevtap, a middle-aged Sunni woman, at the entrance of the mosque of whose board she was a member. Together, we proceeded to the women's section where we sat down on the carpeted floor of the then empty prayer room. Sevtap spoke fast and animatedly. At the beginning of her narrative stood a decisive turning point in her life, namely, her decision to start wearing a hijab in her early twenties. As a schoolgirl, she never perceived herself to be any different to her "Austrian"

classmates. However, once she started wearing a hijab, she experienced rejection and harassment: “As soon as I started wearing it, I was hit with all these prejudices, like, foreigner, go home [*Ausländer raus*].” At her job in a supermarket, she had repeatedly been asked to take off her hijab, a demand she complied to for fear of being laid off, even though it made her feel profoundly uncomfortable, as if leading a double life. Although she had spent all her life in Austria from the age of eight, she wanted to move to Turkey permanently at some point. She did not at all feel accepted in Austria, as there was no valuation of Muslims’ societal and economic contributions, despite the existence of public-legal recognition.

“It only exists on a sheet of paper. But that you really live in a community? No. [...] And then I wonder, why did you call us here in the first place? Now [economy is] in full swing and you don’t need us anymore? I have seen for years that we are being oppressed. We all feel that. [...] When they don’t accept us, why did they do this [recognise] in the first place? But now they have, they should leave us in peace and don’t play with us! [...] It doesn’t matter whether Islam is written there, whether we have a cemetery, it still isn’t recognised. When I go somewhere, ah, foreigner [*Ausländer*]. [...] There is a Muslim cemetery, but that is not enough. They really have to show that we are recognised.”

What emerged from this response was the conviction that extant official recognition, including certain formal concessions, such as the existence of a Muslim section at the central cemetery, did not amount to full or real recognition, as societal acceptance of Muslims was still lacking. Moreover, and as will be discussed in more detail further below, Sevtap expressed her disappointment and sense of injury over the way Sunnis from Turkey in Austria are treated, despite their being invited as labour migrants and their economic contribution to the country.

Recognition in Austria, from these participants’ perspectives, existed only on paper and was not tangible in daily life or societal relations. Sabri, who chaired the board of the same mosque also frequented by Sevtap, stated accordingly:

“I would say it like this: Islam is recognised, but we live in a Christian country. And there, you have to adapt to the majority. [...] It is recognised, but I am not allowed to build [mosques with domes and minarets]. Imagine that! [...] Here, you are partly respected, but only partly, although people have already been living here for 40, 50 years. As I said, it is only written on paper, the whole thing.”

Similar to Sevtap, Sabri observed that Sunni Muslims from Turkey are not respected or allowed to fully practice their religion in Austria, despite their long residence and possession of official recognition, citing their minority status in a predominantly Christian country as reason for this. Yücel, the middle-aged chairman of a mosque association in a different district, also noted a discrepancy between legal recognition and the political abuse and securitisation of Islam and Muslims in Austria.

“It has been recognised for many years. Yes, and that’s where politics comes in again. Politicians need to understand that. The people. It doesn’t matter, recognised or not, I open the newspaper and read Islamic terror. [...] My religion is recognised in Austria, but *I* am not recognised. It’s a political decision. A country that used to say yes [to Islam] now says no.”

What is particularly striking in this response is how Yücel admitted the existence of recognition for his religion, but denied being recognised as a person, a Muslim migrant from Turkey. Austria’s move from a country which had affirmed Islam to one which negated it, was interpreted as a political development by Yücel.

Legal recognition does not change the fact that anti-Muslim sentiment has swelled and ebbed depending on international events or national voter mobilisation. Further to this, even legal provisions have been subject to so-called amendment. The Islam Law has been changed twice in recent years, most recently in light of government attempts to rein in Islamic terrorism. Its reverberations, such as the expulsion of imams from Turkey due to the law’s proscription of foreign financing of Muslim organisations in Austria<sup>22</sup>, put many Muslim associations into a state of precarity. The sense of insecurity and uncertainty for the future became obvious in Feride’s account. Worried by recent debates on banning headscarves in schools and the attempt to bring about a law to this end, she questioned her choice of studying to become a teacher, fearing that she will never be fully respected by colleagues or parents, or might eventually not

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<sup>22</sup> As stated in §6(2) of the Islam Law. For the complete 2015 version of the Islam Law see appendix.

be allowed to wear a hijab anymore: “It simply is such an insecure feeling. You don’t know what can happen tomorrow. You don’t know how your children will get on in future.” Many Sunni participants, in this way, attested that their legal status did not reflect or lead to societal acknowledgement, could not protect them against discrimination and even itself effected a restriction of their religious practice.

## *2.2. Recognised Alevis asserting equality with and independence from Sunnis*

While official recognition for many Sunnis is only a sheet of paper without real-life substance, for recognised Alevis, it testifies to their official existence as a group in their own right, which has long been denied to them, and whose effects reach into society. Tied to this is the ability to openly articulate their religious affiliation and a greater ease of explaining and identifying themselves to community outsiders. Vis-à-vis non-Muslim Austrians, they can state their existence after decades of obscurity under the umbrella of Sunni Islam, while vis-à-vis Sunnis they can assert their status as their own confession. Official recognition, for these participants, also comes with respect and valuation instead of denigration.

Recognition in Austria was framed by many Islamic Alevi participants as a struggle against their previous subsumption under a Sunni-dominated organisation that had monopolised Islam in Austria. It was frequently asserted that the Islamic faith community in Austria had been against Alevis’ recognition as a second Muslim community, in particular their inclusion into the Islam Law. Their current legal status, on par with the Sunni community, was thus described as their defiance against such opposition. As Hilmi, a young music teacher of the community, said, “We are treated as equal, we are recognised, put on an equal footing with Sunnis, with other Muslims. For the first time this happened in Austria, and that is really great. There is not much more to say about it.” Eraydin, an older member of the community who had come to live and work Austria when young, added, “Back then you were nobody, as Turk, as Muslim, for these gentlemen [sarcastic, meaning Sunnis], because they were the rulers. With recognition we

have the chance to sit next to them.” For members of the Islamic Alevi community, their public-legal recognition constituted their assertion against, independence from and equality with Sunni Muslims in Austria.

This significance of recognition in Austria stems from Alevis’ history of oppression in Sunni-majority Turkey and the continued lack of recognition there. As Rasim, a middle-aged male community member, articulated:

“For 1400 years, we have not had a country, a state, nothing. And we come here to work, as guest workers, got together, founded an association and were recognised by Austria. For us, this is more important than everything else, than work even, because a country says, we recognise these people [...] But until now we stay oppressed in Turkey.”

For recognised Alevis, inscription in law was an official testimony to their existence, to their independent identity and to their worth as Muslims and as humans. As Sayan, a leading member of the community in his fifties, poignantly stated, “You have to imagine, the Anatolian, who was in hiding for decades or centuries, should declare himself in front of the state with a seal, with an identity card, I am Alevi.” A question which, as a consequence, arose among Alevi participants was whether legal recognition has led to greater awareness in the general Austrian population and whether the latter was more likely to “recognise” the differences within Islam. Rasim and his daughter Defne, a young law student, experienced a growing awareness among white Austrians of the existence of Alevism and its distinction from Sunni Islam.

“R: I have a colleague from lower Austria. He always makes fun and says, ‘You are like me now, an Austrian, since the recognition. Yes, we recognise you; Alevis can do everything here.’ [...] Many people really know us, also that Alevism is recognised [...] Since the recognition, Austrians have much interest. [...]

D: They notice that a new religion was recognised. Before that, you tried to explain all the time. You tell someone, I am Alevi, and the person asks, what is that? Then you wonder, how am I supposed to explain that? They are only familiar with Sunni Islam, after all. And then you had to explain that it is also a part of Islam, but that we have different prayers and think a little differently. And now, when you tell someone, they say, ah yes, I already heard or I already read somewhere [...] And you’re happy that no one tells you, you’re not a human being, but you are there, publicly, as an Alevi, and everyone respects you.”

While Defne felt happy, respected and freed from the burden of explanation and articulation, Macide considered this burden still in place, because recognition has not, in her view, led to wider awareness of and interest in Alevis. Macide was a confident and outspoken young woman, who had been actively engaged in the community's youth section and now taught Alevi religion to primary school students. She noted that most members of the general population did not exhibit any greater interest in the differences within Islam. In this way, she also contrasted official and societal recognition:

“You have to differentiate. Recognition by the state does not mean recognition by society. [...] I would rather, all Austrians knew who Alevis are and recognise them, and have the [official] recognition 20 years later [...] Try going to a village somewhere in Kärnten and see if any fellow countryman knows an Alevi.”

Moreover, those who were familiar with Alevism had, according to Macide, a wrong understanding of it. White Austrians perceived Alevis as less strict than Sunnis in terms of dietary or dress requirements. Macide, however, refused this portrayal of her faith as easy-going, casual and noncommittal, which she believed to be spread by non-Islamic Alevis seeking to distance themselves from Islam in the eyes of the white Austrian population.

“They don't exactly know what we do and how, who we actually are. ‘They are those, where the girls can do everything. Those are Alevis.’ I always hear from Austrians, ‘You are a little more easy-going, you are without headscarf, you don't go to mosque, right?’ [...] No matter where I am, I get to hear, ‘You are those who are a bit more casual.’ We are not!”

Macide upheld that full societal recognition, a general and “correct” understanding of Alevis' beliefs and practices, rather than just as a casual branch of Islam, would take time and a change of generations. “When my child enters school, I don't want someone to ask her, Alevis, what's that? [But instead say] Ah, you are Alevi. Great, and I am Christian. Full stop and finished.”

### *2.3. Unrecognised Alevis calling out Islamisation*

The wish to be valued as a human being, expressed in Defne's response, has also been entertained by members of the Alevi Federation, who have been struggling for recognition as a non-Islamic faith. Yet, while Islamic Alevis have apparently come to feel treated humanely, Federation Alevis still yearn for this. Ismihan's account was proof for this. She was an openhearted and affectionate middle-aged woman, who treated me to a home-cooked dinner in her small apartment. After a difficult divorce, she had been left to care for her children on her own, with sparse financial means. The strain had induced a stroke, the consequences of which she was still struggling with, including some memory loss, anxiety and a fear of closed spaces. Ismihan imagined how she would feel, were recognition granted to them: "When it comes, I know, I would be a normal human being, too. [...] Then I am content and scream like a little child. [...] Even if it is just for one year, but I want to live as a normal human being. Just that. I don't want to live long and badly. Like a butterfly, only for a day, but fully." Further to this, while many Islamic Alevis feel more noticed, non-recognised Alevis feel invisible and unheeded. Ismihan repeatedly said that she and her fellow community members have been shouting and screaming to be heard, but the Austrian state did not hear them or actively ignored their claims.

For many Federation Alevis, the existing state recognition in Austria ignores Alevism's fundamental difference from Islam. For them, it is a perplexing state of affairs that, while other European states treat Alevism as an independent faith, the Austrian state neglects this. Ismihan was adamant about her non-belonging to Islam and was passionate for her wish to be known for who she truly was, which state-granted recognition currently denied. The situation in Austria, she argued, mirrored the Islamisation of Alevis in Turkey.

"I don't fast. I don't pray. I don't visit the mosque or say, I am Islam. I don't follow the five rules. I don't do that [...] But those people say, I am Islam. I am not Islam! I am not Islam! The same problem existed in Turkey. Why did I come here? Why did I come here? I thought, in Austria or in Europe, people just live normally. But now we fight. We, eighty thousand Alevis, fight. For what? So that I can say, I am not Islam. [...] I know that my name is Ismihan. But

you tell me, you are not that, you are someone else. I say, ‘My name is Ismihan’, and you say, ‘Your name is Ayşe.’ No!”

In this statement, Ismihan’s frustration about the forceful imposition of an identity which is not hers becomes apparent, as she repeatedly stated that Islam is contrary to her being and practice. For her, this was comparable to being called a wrong name.

Even after repeated setbacks, giving up the fight was out of the question. Yet, many members of the unrecognised Alevi community feel oppressed and powerless vis-à-vis the Austrian state. They bemoan the fact that neither state representatives nor the general public show any interest in their plight. The state has even rejected their claims. Others draw a distinction between a neglectful state and state representatives on the one hand, and a generally interested population on the other, especially as the latter is believed to be disfavouredly inclined towards Islam. Accordingly, some are of the opinion that, while Islamic Alevi have been given legal recognition, they themselves possess societal recognition. Emel, a young woman of that community, stated repeatedly that the official status itself was only secondary, while their primary aim was to establish Alevism as an independent faith.

Still, official recognition of Alevism in its own right remains of great significance to Federation Alevi, especially after a history of oppression and subsumption under Islam in Turkey. As Ismihan argued, “Recognition, I see it as a passport, like an identity card. [...] With a passport, you know who a person is. Everyone already has an identity card with their religion written in it. In mine there is none [at the moment]. In the past, we were afraid because in our identity card it said Islam.” Recognition on paper thus meant the correct identification of a person as well as protection and security, not only in light of past persecution in Turkey but also more recent incidents in Austria. Here, the recognised Alevi community demanded the closure of non-recognised associations and laid sole claim to the use of the name and symbols. Alkim, a male community member in his early forties, therefore contended, “It’s important that

you tell people, ok, you feel Alevi, then you are Alevi, and you have the legal frame so that no-one can harm you.”

#### *2.4. The place of belonging in issues of recognition; recognition's place in the politics of belonging*

On introduction of the fact that Austria had given Islam a comparatively strong legal status very early on, Sunni participants often interposed with a “yes, but” and stated their persistent exclusion and non-belonging as Muslims and migrants from Turkey. Within the Sunni community, the Islam Law was therefore clearly linked, albeit antithetically, to issues of belonging. This derived from the document itself, as its stipulations on German language requirements for religious personnel or its proscription of foreign financing aimed to sever ties with the so-called home country and establish an Austrian Islam. Moreover, such responses resulted from the embedding of official recognition in larger exclusionary politics of belonging on Islam in Austria. These explicit links between official religious recognition and issues of belonging were made more frequently and unsolicitedly in Vienna than in the other two cities. As religious recognition is the prerogative of the central government, debates on Islam's legal-institutional status reverberate more strongly and are even more frequently conflated with issues of integration, security and belonging. In this manner, a national recognition status, due to its even closer entanglement in national politics of belonging, affects Sunnis' feelings of belonging more negatively than a local status.

Some members of the publicly recognised Islamic Alevi faith community, however, attested to a positive relationship between received recognition and feelings of belonging. Rasim's account was an example of this. He invited me to come to the community's *cem evi*, a building that, unlike other Alevi prayer and community houses I had visited, was specifically designed and built for that purpose, featuring a large representative entrance hall, a twelve-edged prayer room with a glass dome, as well as a café, offices, classrooms and conference

rooms. Its opening in 2015 was referred to by many participants as a major occasion and was attended, among others, by prospective chancellor Sebastian Kurz. Rasim still remembered the day on which they first received official recognition, which was the 10th of Muharrem<sup>23</sup> (December 16th) 2010. He told me that when he received the call to tell him that their application for recognition had been granted, he was so happy that he cried from joy. He continued:

“This is very important to us. This is my country, Austria, really. Because in Turkey, we did not even get respect from the people, but here people gave us respect and above that, the country recognised us [...] We are here now, have the Austrian citizenship, our children are born here, our parents stay here [to be buried] [...] This is our country. We feel that way. Austria is more important than Turkey for me [...] Now, Austria is my country, because, here there are human rights, religious rights. And when Austria recognised us, it became more. Since then, we say, it is our country. We say so now. This is our country. Austria is Alevitistan [laughs].”

The significance of his last sentence, in light of Alevis’ historically troubled relationship with state power and their exclusion from substantive citizenship in Turkey, cannot be overstated. Sayan, who was himself actively involved in the recognition process of the Islamic Alevi community, also instinctively connected recognition to belonging. “I love Austria, simply because it allows me as an Alevite. With all my rights. Also duties, but I have rights, damn it. And this is incredibly important for an oppressed community.”

Furthermore, a direct link between recognition and belonging was established through the use of possessive pronouns attached to either Turkey or Austria. While Rasim, in his above statement, repeatedly termed Austria his own country for having granted a recognition status that Turkey continues to refuse, others articulated the paradox that “your own country”, meaning Turkey, denied a recognition status which “another country”, meaning Austria,

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<sup>23</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharrem (Aşure day) is an especially significant day for Alevis (as well as Shiites), as they commemorate the death of Ali’s son Hüseyin.

subsequently supplied. The following reply by Hilmi, a young man who taught music and dance in the Islamic Alevi community, is an example of this:

“The *cem* houses are not recognised in Turkey, but they are recognised in Austria. So, in your own country, you are not recognised as an Alevi. [...] And suddenly, a state like Austria comes and recognises them. It is funny really. In my own country I cannot say that I am an Alevi, but in Austria, I can say it openly.”

Yet, on further questioning whether they would indeed describe Turkey as their country, some expressed that actually it no longer was. Others confirmed their previous designation adding, however, that theirs was a troubled relationship and that the continuing discrimination of Alevis in “their” country filled them with sorrow. By attributing the possessive pronoun to Turkey in the first instance, participants seemed to suggest that recognition would be natural if issued from Turkey, as the country of origin of Alevis and Alevism, while it was astounding and remarkable in Austria, where Alevism was a foreign religion. For recognised Alevis, this created feelings of gratitude or indebtedness towards Austria.

Some members of the non-recognised Alevi community, conversely, stated that they had lost their faith in the state apparatus. For Emel, an assertive and critical woman in her twenties with whom I talked via video call, the actions of the Austrian state, forcibly dictating the religious location of a community, was illegitimate and further disrupted her relationship to it, already strained by its hostile stance towards immigrants. Other than many Sunnis, however, some non-recognised Alevis believed that granted recognition could have a restorative effect in terms of their belonging. Alkim, a man in his early forties, and his wife invited me to their flat, where, over after-dinner tea, Alkim pictured his hypothetical state of being upon his recognition very vividly:

“It would strengthen me as a person. I have an affiliation that is recognised, because [now], I am not recognised as Kurd, I am not recognised as Alevi, I am not recognised as human, because someone thinks, well, you are alright, but you are not Austrian. You live in this world, but you are not recognised, no matter how. So, it would be a partial success if my religion was recognised. That already is something for me to hold on to. [...] When we are recognised, we

will all shine brightly. As people who for decades have been oppressed, killed, persecuted, expelled and seen as different people.”

In this way, Alkim related official recognition to his self-worth as a human being, given the fact that the major aspects of his identity, Kurd, Alevi, migrant, have historically been misrecognised. It would constitute at least a partial acknowledgement of his multileveled identity, an instance of support and an official point of reference (“something to hold on to”).

In this section, I outlined the various stances which Sunni and both recognised and unrecognised Alevi participants assumed towards existing and lacking state recognition: a paper unable to counteract societal exclusion, a means to be on par with former oppressors or, conversely, an oppressive device of Islamisation. Members from all three communities drew direct connections to the issue of belonging, either to state their persistent exclusion and alienation or their sense of inclusion. Yet, as will be shown in the next section, even feelings of gratitude and acknowledgement do not amount to an equal say in the rules of belonging, structured by racial boundaries and hierarchies of deservingness that impinge on recognition processes.

### **3. Feelings of belonging and boundaries of deservingness**

As shown previously, both Alevis and Sunnis reflect on the relationship between recognition as a legal status and their position in Austrian society more generally. Alevis do this with reference to either their Sunni counterpart or the other Alevi group, while Sunnis mostly convey their discrimination by members of the white-Christian majority. The Austrian recognition setting, in which Islam had public corporation status but remained the object of heated integration and security debates, while one Alevi community had been given public approval simultaneously denied to the other, spurred on a claiming of and competition for

deservingness. Drawing these boundaries against others took place in a context of broader public and political debates on the racialised terms of belonging, and more particularly in a context of entrenched anti-Muslim racism in which one's relationship to Islam had a vital impact on one's ability to belong. Sunni and Alevi migrants from Turkey and their descendants had to position themselves within and against these terms, thus navigating racial hierarchies of belonging. Yet, it was not only the European context of anti-Muslim racism that bore on participants' responses, but also Turkey's racial hierarchies in which Sunni Turkishness defines national belonging, to the detriment of the inclusion of Alevis and other minorities.

### *3.1. Unattainability of full belonging as racialised subjects*

Members from all groups of participants reported experiences of daily and structural racism. Yet, despite their ongoing racial exclusion in Austria, Alevis attached great significance to legal recognition, which they had either already attained or for which they were still struggling. For Sunnis, on the other hand, their ostensibly strong legal status was rendered insignificant by their societal exclusion; they even saw the former eroded by increasing legal restrictions. Moreover, Sunnis especially voiced their frustration over the fact that, while they had sacrificed a lifetime of labour, contributing to society and the economy, their claims to belonging were rejected. The idea that equal belonging was plainly unattainable, the sense of injury resulting from this, given one's sacrifices and contributions to Austria, as well as the feeling among Sunnis that the situation would further deteriorate, were quite unique to Vienna.

Feride was in her mid-twenties, born and raised in Vienna, an Austrian citizen and studying to become a school teacher. The wearing of a headscarf became an important topic of our conversation. It was the cause of daily experiences of racism, and debates on the introduction of a headscarf ban had also induced her to choose Islamic pedagogy as her main subject. Though she had long wanted to become a teacher, religion had not been her first choice. Yet, she hoped that the likelihood of being asked to take off her headscarf at work would be

lower as a teacher of Islam. However, she was still afraid of the possibility of a headscarf ban, in which case she would no longer be able to do her job. The amendment to the Islam Law had also instilled such fears of further restrictions of Muslim practice. She reflected:

“And these are moments when I think, ok, I am in this country, I was born here and grew up here, but what does it say about this country, when I cannot practise this job as I am? What does it say about this country and my belonging to it? Am I welcome here as I am or do I have to change, do I have to shed something, to be able to do what I want?”

She argued that even when following implicit and officially stated integration requirements, full belonging was still unattainable. “No matter what you do, there is no end point. It just always is, adapt, adapt, adapt. And I believe the aim is actually ... you don't what to say it, but the aim is that you assimilate completely and shed everything that differentiates you.”

Sunni participants believed that a legal status should, but in reality did not, exempt them from suspicion, prejudice, discrimination and exclusion. This concerned not only their official religious recognition, but also their status as citizens. Yücel recounted how he, as the board chair of a mosque association, had been questioned by the government on a possible infiltration of his community. “And then they said, ‘Are you a fan of Erdogan? [...] Even if I was, what business is it of yours? I am an Austrian citizen, I could not vote for him, even if I wanted.’” The fact of being an Austrian citizen, unable to act on one's sympathies with another government, even if they did exist, was all the Austrian state should concern itself with. The Austrian state's attempts to probe its citizens' emotions and loyalties were perceived by Yücel as an illegitimate intrusion. Moreover, this raises the terms of inclusion and the requirements for full belonging in a context of increasing legal equality attained by migrants and their descendants (Ayata 2019b). Yücel reserved for himself, as an Austrian citizen, the right to feel emotions the state might not agree with.

Even though it placed its bearers on an ostensibly equal legal footing with white Austrians, citizenship was believed to be hierarchised, based on perceived ethnic and racial

differences. Sabri contended, “I always say, the first class are real Austrians with a passport and the second class those who bought it, because you have to pay for it. You don’t get it for free, after all. You remain a foreigner [...] I think that is not just because of religion, but also skin colour, origin, name.” As a consequence, affirmations of one’s equal legal status could not change the white majority’s notion of one’s actual origin and belonging. Feyza, a Sunni woman in her late fifties, pointed this out, saying that “I have had the Austrian citizenship for thirty years, but I am always a foreigner, I am always a Turk [...] It is the same for my children. You get to a point, aha, you are a Turk. And my children are born here, and they are both born as Austrian citizens.”

Being continually barred from full belonging presents itself as injury, unfairness and even deceit, especially to Sunni participants. They assert their rightful belonging with recourse to their social and economic contribution to the country, believing that decades of residence, work and ever higher levels of education, as well as the fact that they do not rely on social benefits, should entitle them to full belonging. Having sacrificed years of their life and their labour to Austria, being denied full acceptance in return, therefore, appears as gross injustice. Sabri, head of a mosque association, argued that loyal, diligent workers have been denied any demands they have made in return, such as those pertaining to their religious practice. “A friend of mine asked to pray once a day [at work]. And they didn’t want that and fired him under some pretext. He had worked there for thirty years, and suddenly they don’t want [him] anymore.” Such a sense of injury was strongly expressed by Yücel who, as mentioned above, was questioned on suspicions of harbouring Turkish government spies in his mosque community and even being one himself. Yücel was saddened by the fact that although he had proven his loyalty to his “home” [*Heimat*] over decades, working hard and volunteering as a football coach for disadvantaged youth, he was still suspected of being a traitor and a terrorist.

“And this hurts all the more. They don’t look at what you accomplished for this country, what you did. After 40 years, you are a spy. I came as a child without a clue about what happens in

Turkey. And I come here and work for this country, and then I am told, you are a spy. No, I am an Austrian citizen.”

Being referred to as a spy constituted an injury to Yücel, as it spoke of lack of trust and acknowledgement despite formal-legal parity and decades of loyal “service” to the country.

Sevtap wondered why people from Turkey had been invited to Austria as labourers in the first place, if they were not wanted, by which she expressed a sense of being exploited and then discarded and that an implicit promise had been broken. She conjectured: “As long as the prejudices are not cleared up for good, there will never be proper integration, recognition. Recognition. Everyone does their best to be integrated here, but when will we see recognition from them? No idea. Not until now.” Being in possession of a legal recognition status and despite her efforts to integrate, she nevertheless attested to a lack of recognition. To my question what recognition would have to look like to have an effect on her life, Sevtap replied: “That will never happen. There will always be politicians that negotiate over the heads of foreigners. That will never happen. I don’t see it. It only gets worse and worse [...] I always say, what will lie ahead for our children in ten years’ time?”

Some members of the unrecognised Alevi community were similarly pessimistic about future societal changes. Üner, a man in his late thirties who migrated to Austria with his parents at a young age, related very spiritedly and in much detail his and his family’s difficulties in attaining citizenship, his experiences of discrimination at school, migrants’ segregation into separate classes and urban quarters, and his daily encounters. He also described the difficulties faced by the Alevi Federation on moving into a new community centre after the internal split between Islamic and non-Islamic factions, as inhabitants of the neighbourhood in which the new building was located protested against them, believing them to be Muslims and their building to be a mosque, despite the fact that the community defined itself as non-Islamic. He reflected, “I am used to this. I had to go through a lot as an Alevi in Turkey [...] But I cannot

tell the generation after me, that's just what it's like in Austria. I hope that things in Austria will change, but I am very pessimistic." Yet, other members of the Austrian Alevi Federation retained the conviction that once recognition was achieved, which many saw as only a matter of time with international law on their side, feelings of self-worth, wellbeing, completeness and belonging would ensue. They held onto the promise of recognition in Europe and, given the lack of any other state's backing, continued to believe in recognition's ability to restore a lacking or disrupted sense of belonging.

Islamic Alevis also believed that the lives of future generations of Alevis would improve, given that they could build upon the foundation which the current generation laid for them through their official recognition. Yet, they also reported daily instances of anti-Islam prejudice and racism, as well as structural dynamics of exclusion. Macide, a young woman and member of the Islamic Alevi community, recounted that she and others, whose parents migrated from Turkey, had been forbidden to speak Turkish at school, or indeed any language other than German. Perceived differences of national and ethnic origin were not the only grounds for exclusion at school, but also their religious affiliation:

"Back then, in primary school, I was one of two foreigners in the whole school. In my class, I was the only one [...]. And I was always aware of it when, in religion classes, I was told to go. That was always a point, which, already as a child, made me feel extremely low. And from the second grade onwards, I attended the religion classes, not the Islamic one, not the Alevi one – that didn't yet exist at the time anyway – but the Christian one, because I felt excluded."

Even with Islamic-Alevi classes in existence, a particularly upsetting account was provided by Mihriban, a middle-aged woman from the Islamic Alevi community. On her daughter's first day in secondary school, rather than being placed in the same class as her white friends as the parents had requested, she was put in a so-called integration class comprising all those students with a "foreign" name, or as Mihriban put it, all those whose names the headmaster was unable to pronounce.

Furthermore, as was already alluded to in Üner's account, both Sunnis and Alevis, including those who distanced themselves from Islam altogether, were faced with preconceptions about Islam such as its equation with violence, terrorism and extremism. Emre, who headed the youth section of the Islamic Alevi association in Vienna, recounted:

“I just like my beard, and when I grow it a little longer, people look at me a little scared. They don't even have to say anything, I can already tell from their eyes what it is they think. [...] Of course, you can tell that I have Turkish origins. And it happens that I am put into that group, but when they are scared, you can't change that. And you have to find a way to live with that.”

Hence, experiences of anti-Muslim racism also play a role in Alevis' daily lives in Austria. Their acts and discourses of boundary drawing against Muslims take place in the same context of anti-Muslim racism in Austria and more broadly in Europe, but simultaneously reference Alevis' and Sunnis' unequal power status in Turkey, as will now be shown.

### *3.2. Alevis and Sunnis under the Islam Law: The “good” and “bad” of Austria's politics on Islam and migration*

According to my Sunni interview partners, their official recognition as a religious community, formally on par with Christian churches, did not protect them against the negative portrayal of Muslims or their persistent exclusion as racialised migrants from Turkey. Sunnis from Turkey rejected their labelling as “bad” terrorists and radicals, as foreign intruders or agitators of integration problems in Europe. Moreover, they either denied Turkey's alleged backwardness and autocracy or refused to be perpetually connected to it and held accountable for its leadership. Meanwhile, as shown above, some Sunni participants engaged in a discourse of deservingness. Their lifetime sacrifice and labour, as well as their social and economic contribution was believed by Sunni participants to establish their deservingness of Austrian society's recognition. On a few occasions, Sunni participants also drew boundaries with respect to migrants who had arrived more recently, such as Arab or African refugees, whom they argued to be louder, more aggressive and less integrated.

Only seldom did Sunnis, on their own accord, refer to Alevi's reception of official recognition in Austria. In one such rare instance, Mazlum, a Sunni man in his early forties who talked at length about the discrimination he experienced in his company, where he had been kept from advancing to the same degree as his white co-workers, commented on the way in which Alevi were perceived as more compatible and integrated by members of the Austrian majority society, based on their differences to Sunni Muslims, such as in matters of dietary habits. He expressed his frustration over the fact that Austrians would view similarity to themselves as a prerequisite for granting acceptance, "Along the lines of, 'You don't drink beer? How is this possible? Ok, not integrated.' But perhaps the Alevi or the Kurd, for them it is a little different. 'Ah, they eat pork, too. Great! Fully integrated! [...] You invest so much but you are still not integrated.'"

Islamic Alevi delineated their distinction from Sunni Muslims and asserted their own deservingness of recognition as a Muslim group that is more compatible with imagined European values and practices. This was frequently done by recourse to the role of women. As declared by Hilmi:

"The Austrians know exactly that the Sunnis are strict Muslims, that the women wear headscarf, that the daughters have to wear headscarf from childhood [...] And they [Austrians] know Alevism and they say, 'When I look at you, you are not so strict, you are open, democratic and so on.' And I tell them, 'Of course, it's like that with us.'"

Some Alevi women also described themselves as better integrated and more open and modern than Sunni women, relating instances when white colleagues, employers or acquaintances had pointed this out to them. This could be seen in Mihriban's account of her first meeting with the headmaster of the school at which she was employed to teach Alevi religion: "Our first encounter was very positive. He was happy, because he said, 'I saw that the new teacher would be a woman, and I thought that you'd wear a headscarf.' And then he saw me and said that he was positively surprised." Such instances, in which members of the white majority expressed

their approval of Alevis' difference from their preconception of Muslims, were seen by Alevi participants in a positive light. Although such assertions were based on Alevis' racialisation as Muslims in Europe, their differentiation from Sunnis in light of a history of oppression in Turkey was of greater significance to them in such moments.

Meanwhile, some young members of the Islamic Alevi community refused to portray themselves as "good" Europe-friendly Muslims in order to affirm their deservingness of recognition. Macide, a young female community member, asserted:

"I always speak honestly, and I will never sugar-coat my religion to an Austrian. I will never tell an Austrian, 'Ah, look, we are not like the others, we don't wear headscarf' to get recognition [...] I am not going to explain to an Austrian or a Christian, 'Ah, we are not wearing headscarf, for us men and women are equal.' Sure, they are equal, but I am not going to tell it so that you like me more."

Here Macide was, in fact, critical of the way in which members of the non-recognised Alevi community stressed their distance from Islam to be, as she argued, more acceptable to the Austrian state and society. In this way, Islamic Alevis also drew their boundaries against the non-recognised Alevi group. It was, for instance, argued by members of the recognised Islamic Alevi community that their own application was accepted by the Austrian state, because the latter realised them to be the true and genuine representatives of Alevism, while the others' agenda was merely political. In this manner, members of the Islamic Alevi community accused Federation Alevis of mixing religion and politics as well as of treating Alevism as a so-called culture rather than a proper religion.

### *3.3. "Good or bad, I don't belong to it": The place of unrecognised Alevis*

Federation Alevis, in their turn, addressed Islamic Alevis in their discursive boundary drawing, although for them the latter formed part of a more general counterimage, namely Islam. Alkim was particularly adamant about upholding a strict separation between Islam and Alevism, seeking to free Alevism from any Islamic remnants which had, from his point of view,

only been imposed on it in its recent history. In doing so, he would even occasionally equate Alevi and Sunni Muslims: “We no longer want to allow that we are being killed. And it is the same, whether these are Islamic Alevis or other Islamic organisations. We don’t want to differentiate there anymore.” There is a stark polarisation between an Islamic Alevi group, some of the members of which revisited the Qur’an and did not want Alevis to be seen as less strict than Sunnis, and an Alevi group, some of whom distanced themselves from Ali<sup>24</sup> in their attempt to mark their boundary from Islam. This needs to be viewed in light of not only Alevis’ history of exclusion and subsumption in Turkey, but also Austria’s differential granting of official religious recognition in combination with its political treatment of Islam.

While for Islamic Alevis, recognition signified their assertion against and equal standing with Sunni Islam, Federation Alevis interpreted the existing recognition of Alevism as a Muslim confession as an act of forced Islamisation. The situation in Austria was deemed particularly painful as participants had hoped to flee Islamisation in Turkey, but now found themselves confronted with a similar challenge. Arat, an elderly community member who had been active in the leftist movement as a young man in Turkey, was very vehement in pointing this out:

“We have fought against Islam for 1500 years and were not assimilated. So many massacres, so many genocides we endured from the Muslims, but still. Unfortunately, we had to die as Alevis, but we weren’t assimilated. And now Austria plays with us. This is really hard [...] In Austria, they think that we say, ok, we give up. I don’t want that, to live like this! [...] How can Austria say, you belong to this religion? Good or bad, I don’t care, but I don’t belong to it!”

This last sentence, which also serves as the title of this subsection, already points to Arat’s awareness that Alevis and Sunnis in Austria have implicitly been assigned the labels of “good” and “bad” Muslims, yet he refuses subsumption into Islam altogether, given the violence Alevis have historically had to endure under its banner.

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<sup>24</sup> Ali is the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Mohammed. Shiites believe Ali to be Mohammed’s rightful successor. Alevis mostly attach great importance to Ali, too.

In their encounters with white Austrians, Federation Alevi were, however, subjected to the same racialisation as their Islamic Alevi rivals, and their attempts to counter this sometimes appeared similar on the surface, as the difference between boundary drawing from Sunni Islam or from Islam in general becomes lost in a context of Muslim racialisation. Like Emre, who was cited above saying that a longer beard already leads to suspicious gazes in public, Oğuz, his peer from the non-Islamic Alevi community, reported to be the victim of anti-Muslim racism, such as his colleagues jokingly cautioning each other to treat him nicely, or else he will blow them all up. In countering such generalisations, both Emre and Oğuz described Alevi as less exacting about dietary and behavioural proscriptions than (Sunni) Muslims. Although Oğuz framed the incident he recounted in the following statement in a rather humorous light, it evinces Alevi's racialisation by showing the white Austrians' categorisation of Alevi as Muslims, based on their appearance and their surprise to find that they may not fit their preconceptions:

“Austrians, who know about Alevism, like Alevi a lot. Because we are like ... how should I explain [...] We are more casual, I think. I eat pork, for instance [...] And for Austrians it is always great when they see that you eat pork as someone with dark skin. In the canteen, I once ate Frankfurters. ‘Oh, but you are a Turk, why do you eat pork?’ Or when you drink alcohol. That puzzles them extremely. They have something else in their mind.”

Despite the fact that this puzzlement is followed by appreciation and approval, it is reflective of a hierarchisation within a group that is racialised as Muslim into more or less similar, compatible and desirable representatives.

Although the different manners of boundary drawing, in which both Alevi groups engage, may get lost on members of the white Austrian majority as well as on Sunnis, who are not fully aware of differences within the Alevi community, such differences are insightful in terms of their use to navigate racial hierarchies of belonging. Claims of being a “good”, because less strict and more compatible, Muslim versus claims of being no Muslim at all and therefore

closer to European values and ways of life, diverge greatly in this regard. Judging from the present outcome of recognition efforts and processes for both Alevi groups in Austria, it appears that the former stance has been more successful in gaining state attention and approval. By presenting themselves as more or less removed from Islam, many Alevis not only have been seeking to rediscover true Alevism and emancipate themselves from Sunni Islam, informed by a history of oppression in Turkey, but in doing so have also been fashioning themselves as (more) deserving of recognition and belonging in Austria. I frame such discursive practices as attempts of negotiating transnational racial hierarchies of belonging. The following section will make clearer how, in Austria, these are instantiated by a differential positioning of “Muslims” within and outside national legislation on Islam. This will be preceded by a description of the different participant groups’ conceptions of and relationships to the Austrian state, providing the basis for the subsequent elaboration on the way in which they have been vying for its recognition in a setting perceived by them as marked by state governance of Islam.

#### **4. Vying for recognition under Islam’s governance**

##### *4.1. Conceptions of and relationships to the Austrian state*

###### **4.1.1. Recognised Alevis between gratitude and claims-making**

In speaking about state recognition, participants verbalised particular images of the Austrian state and negotiated their own political subjectivity in relation to it. Some members of the Islamic Alevi community, who enjoy official recognition in Austria, conceived of the Austrian state as a provider and supporter, accommodating them on all levels: labour, welfare, education, citizenship and now also religion. Moreover, the state-granted attention and appreciation was evident, for instance, in the fact that local and national politicians had attended the opening of the Islamic Alevi prayer house. The Austrian state was portrayed as one to be

trusted and respected, as the state itself had demonstrated its own trust and respect by giving its recognition. As was opined by Eraydin, the chair of the Viennese association of the community, “We can go there, to the federal chancellery or the district in Vienna, and they come to visit us, the mayor, the head of the district, to get to know us. And they have a good feeling, ‘There I am safe, nothing will happen to me.’ [...] We need to have this mutual respect.” At the same time, he argued that the Austrian state had, in the past, been too neglectful of Alevis and particularly of their warnings against a too generous treatment of Sunni Muslims. Hence, anxiety over Alevis’ lack of power vis-à-vis Sunnis remained.

For several Islamic Alevi community members, the Austrian state was, furthermore, an object of gratitude. This feeling was expressed particularly strongly by Eraydin, who began his account in the following way:

“First of all, my thanks to the country of Austria, for recognising us, for giving us this chance. Of course, my first thanks to our religious leaders, but the second thanks to Father State [*Vater Staat*]. [...] We are very grateful that, after 40, 50 years, they have given us this chance, have recognised us. We are grateful for that. [...] This feeling as a human, ‘Here, I can live.’ This is the only thing that has given me joy for over 40 years. [...] Austria has, next to the Catholic, the Evangelical, all the Christian churches, has really ... helped us.”

Eraydin repeatedly stated his gratitude to the state of Austria and the Austrian people (“they”) more generally, for having given Alevis this “chance” of recognition, for having “helped” them in this way and ultimately, for treating them as human beings. He even used the expression *Vater Staat*, placing the state in a position of care and protection. By referring to the number of decades he and other Alevi migrants from Turkey have already resided in Austria, Eraydin not only showed that Alevis have established themselves in Austria, but also argued for their deservingness of recognition.

These conceptualisations of the Austrian state exhibit a rather passive role of the self in relation to state practice. Being thankful generally follows an act of kindness or generosity which cannot be expected, demanded or taken for granted. Although Eraydin also thanked the

community leaders for their role in the process, recognition was believed to be at the discretion of a magnanimous state. This also implies that the receiver of recognition is dependent on such generosity and has to accept the time and form in which it is bestowed, rather than having a say in its terms and conditions. This goes hand in hand with discourses of deservingness described above; one needs to portray oneself as worthy of such state-granted approval as opposed to others.

Meanwhile, recognition was also conceived by some members of the recognised Alevi community as result of their own active assertion against the power and monopoly of Sunni Islam. These participants claimed to have received an equal say in socio-political debates. Sayan, a middle-aged man who had been actively involved in the recognition process, stressed the importance of gaining entrance to state structures, arguing against non-recognised Alevis' refusal to be subsumed into the Islam Law:

“I need to be a part of it in order to determine. If I had stayed out of the Islam Law, what good would it have done me? Nothing! The Sunnis would have gotten their rights in any case and we would have stayed outside without any rights, like in the past. Why? What is bad about saying, I want that, too? [...] It is also *my* state, after all. It is *my* state, too [...] It's your right, damn it. These are your taxes. [...] If I was in Turkey, I would say, either the Diyanet is abolished or I sit there. Then, I want the same rights the Sunni has, the same rights a mosque has.”

Sayan, in this way, conceived of their recognition as an act of claims-making to receive what is rightfully theirs, asserting ownership in a state to which they pay taxes. He thereby drew a comparison to the situation in Turkey, where the Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs (Diyanet), although funded by all citizens of Turkey, only represents Sunni Islam, and where Alevis are similarly divided over the question whether they should seek representation in the Diyanet or call for its abolishment (see chapter 4). Furthermore, Sayan argued that their official status in Austria has increased their own power of claims-making: “Before our recognition, the state had more power over us. Now I am equal, now I shout more, now I demand more, now I want more. That is not pleasant for the state. Now I get on the ministry's nerves and say, why

did the Jews get this and we don't?" At the same time, as will be elaborated below, such claims and demands were lodged in competition to other racialised religious groups, in a state that perceived these as objects of its politics of belonging but not as equal contributors to the definition of its terms.

#### 4.1.2. Unrecognised Alevis between neglect and oppression

While recognised Islamic Alevis praised the Austrian state's fair and functioning judiciary and administrative institutions, members of the unrecognised Alevi group charged them with obscure and impenetrable motives. These participants expressed their perplexity over their continued lack of recognition, given that many of them saw themselves as the more compatible and deserving Alevi group. Furthermore, and as has already been described, the Austrian state was perceived as indifferent and neglectful of their protests. It was reported that politicians had come to visit their association during elections, but had been ignorant of and uninterested in their situation and made no effort to bring about any change. Furthermore, Federation Alevis' multiple publicly staged protests against ministry and court decisions were believed to have been disregarded. Okyar, a young member of the community, imparted: "I have the feeling that it makes no difference when we gather there, even when a thousand, ten thousand, thirty thousand people come together. It makes no difference. The state just does what it wants." His statement reflects a sense of oppression, powerlessness and of lacking political leverage.

An even more severe image was the Austrian state's conceptualisation as outrightly oppressive, abusive and arbitrary. Similar to the Turkish state, the Austrian state was, following this line of reasoning, working to force Alevis into Islam, going against their calls and protests. Some participants had the impression that, unless they submit to being categorised as Muslim, which they vehemently refused to do, recognition will be refused to them. Ismihan, for example, believed that Alevis were a special target of the state, while other religious groups did not face

similarly severe obstacles: “Everyone already has their religion. Everyone already has respect. Everyone already lives normally but we ... Only for us Austria creates problems.” Her sense of remaining disregarded, falling on deaf ears no matter how loudly they might have shouted, led her to muse that more drastic measures would be necessary to attain the state’s attention: “Maybe I’ll go to the top of a high-rise and scream that I am an Alevi and jump off. I think that is the last chance. Ok, I myself am dead then, but for the others. They can live normally then. Maybe Austria will listen to me then.”

According to members of the Alevi Federation, the Austrian state acted arbitrarily in accepting the application of one Alevi community while refusing the other. Üner disclosed that he had lost his faith in the fair functioning of the state and judiciary. While he expected no better from Turkey, it disappointed him deeply in Austria, supposedly a state under the rule of law.

“You cannot say, this application came in first, and this is why they get the right, but the others don’t. That won’t do. That goes against all kinds of laws, Austrian and European [...] There’s one civil servant who sits there and decides who is to believe in what way. That’s worse than Wahabism. That doesn’t even exist in Saudi-Arabia.”

This illegitimate use of power by representatives of the Austrian state to decide over the definition of religious groups deeply alienated members of the unrecognised Alevi community. As Alkim pronounced rather poignantly, “We have no country, we have no religion, we are not allowed to practise our religion, we are not allowed to speak our language.<sup>25</sup> What are you supposed to feel then? Even if I live in a beautiful part of the earth, in Austria, what can I feel?”

#### 4.1.3. Sunnis critiquing their restriction and surveillance

The image of the state most prominent in Sunni accounts was that of control, restriction and surveillance. Many of their statements exhibited a sense of being the object of state politics,

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<sup>25</sup> Alkim referred to the fact that integration requirements in Austria stress the use of German. As a Kurd, who had been forced to speak Turkish in Turkey, Alkim was particularly critical of the policing of language.

devoid of the chance to participate in its making. Feride, the university student, made this point very clearly: “You are always reprimanded and you are shown your place, and you are told, you are this and you have these rights so long as we allow for it.” Sabri gave the example of the discontinuance of imam recruitment from Turkey after the 2015 amendment of the Islam Law, which he interpreted in the following way:

“You have to accept what the state says. Maybe they [IGGiÖ] tried to oppose it, but it didn’t work. And you have to accept that, acknowledge it, work with it. There’s nothing you can do about it [...] I gave up, to be honest, I don’t follow up on it anymore [...] How big is the chance that I can make any difference there? But how big is the chance that I can make a difference here [in the mosque community], for the youth at least [...] We have to change ourselves and criticise ourselves.”

He reiterated his conviction that because state decisions were beyond their power to influence, they had to make changes in the only sphere open to them, namely their own neighbourhood and community. Still, he expressed his frustration over the fact that Muslims and their organisational representation, the IGGiÖ, were excluded from decision-making processes. As stated by Yücel, Islam’s status as a recognised religion alongside Christian churches was of no avail in that regard: “As recognised religion ... as religion, you are not recognised. It is a strange thing somehow. Recognised third religion, but you have no significance. It amounts to nothing. I mean, regarding political decisions, it doesn’t count.” Feride explained that this denial of an equal right to a say and to be heard, as shown in the implementation of the new Islam Law despite heavy opposition from the Muslim community, adversely impacted her ability to feel belonging to Austria.

“I believe that Muslims in Austria are aware that the Islamic Faith Community is not really recognised by the government in that sense, because, they don’t really have a say. It is claimed that they are included in these themes and questions, but I believe that the people notice that this is not really the case. And that gives you the feeling that you don’t really have a say. And when you don’t have a say, you don’t feel to belong, to be honest.”

The discrepancy between the ostensibly strong legal recognition and its insubstantial or even adverse effect in socio-political debates and participants' daily lives suggested to Feride and other Sunni participants that their belonging remained a matter in question.

#### *4.2. Empowerment of the "other" Muslims*

With their official recognition in Austria, Islamic Alevis have been given the possibility to self-confidently assert their equal standing alongside Sunni Muslims, laying claim and ownership to Islam, which had been monopolised by the Sunni community. They have been able to contest religious practices which had previously been portrayed as unanimously accepted within Islam and to reveal them as specific to one Muslim branch. Sayan, a leading member of the community who had himself accompanied the recognition process, contended:

“We told the Sunni society after hundreds of years, ‘Hello, you are not the only ones!’ [...] I learned that I can tell the Sunnis, ‘Hey, you follow the five pillars, but that’s traditional history and has nothing to do with the Qur’an.’ [...] The Sunni faith community got upset because the Austrian state said that [headscarves] are not allowed until puberty. And the Sunnis went to court and lost. Why? Because we Alevis were there and said, ‘Hey, this is not Islamic, it is not true, and it doesn’t say in the Qur’an that a child must wear a headscarf. That is not religious, it’s culturally developed and a domain of male rule to oppress these women further.’ [...] And what is wrong with being able to give them a wipe and to say, ‘Excuse me, what you do traditionally has nothing to do with theology.’ [...] And these are discussions which are enriching for us and for the European state. The problem is, when you say this as non-Muslim, you are just the non-believer. When the Christians or Jews or the state say this, that’s for sure. But if you say as Islamic society, ‘Excuse me, that’s not in the Qur’an, it has nothing to do with theology,’ what can he [a Sunni] say against that?”

Sayan stressed that their recognition resulted from their own initiative and perseverance despite the Austrian state’s initial dismissal<sup>26</sup> and the Sunni community’s rejection of their inclusion into the Islam Law. Yet, what Sayan described as Alevis’ enactment of their own emancipation from and defiance against Sunni Islam, also confirmed the Austrian state’s politics of governance of (Sunni) Islam. By positioning himself in line with European values such as

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<sup>26</sup> The ministry responsible had initially rejected the Islamic Alevi application for recognition on grounds of there already being a recognised Islamic society. The Islamic Alevis successfully appealed against this decision in court (see chapter 4).

gender equality and being opposed to Sunni practice, such as wearing headscarves (which allegedly runs counter to such values), while designating himself as a Muslim insider, Sayan coincided with the Austrian state's integration and domestication agenda with regard to Muslims. More generally, while able to assert greater power and agency, Islamic Alevi were also called to negotiate their position as non-Sunni Muslims within an imposed racial hierarchy of belonging, siding with the state on issues where Sunnis would resist, such as the proscription of headscarves or foreign financing. This, as well as the role of Sunnis' and Alevi's reversed power positions in Turkey, become particularly evident in Sayan's following account:

“There is nothing better or more gratifying than sitting there, observing it all, and to say, ‘Excuse me, we know that all you [Sunnis] do is demand, but you don't give the same to a few million people in Turkey, but here you want it for a few hundred.’ [...] We did the right thing at the right time, I believe. And looking back now, I would do it the same way again [...] because I think, they [Sunnis] have long deserved to be given a wipe.”

Yelda, a young woman who assumed an administrative role in the Islamic Alevi community and had accompanied some of its legal cases, was more ambiguous about their newly gained position:

“At the moment, the case in Austria is such that there is a government which likes the Alevi and dislikes the Sunnis. And when it comes to the Islam Law, they [Sunnis] are also partially dependent on us [...] And as I said, the current government ... I don't support them, but the fact that they like us so much [laughs] ... That always makes me laugh. I'd rather not have anything to do with them. [...] I always say that in our community, and they don't believe me, ‘Why do you think, they like us?’ We are dear and nice [*lieb und nett*], and meek and mild about everything [*sagen zu allem Ja und Amen*].”

Yelda was critical of the government's differential normative evaluation of the two recognised Muslim groups. Although Alevi enjoyed the government's favour, Yelda did not want to be “instrumentalised” against another minority, especially by a government she did not endorse. However, as she further explained, she found it difficult to deviate from the role assumed by Alevi in interreligious and state encounters, or when the community was asked to comment on issues of integration and security, such as the proposed head-scarf ban or official registry of

religious personnel working in Muslim communities. She would have wished to publicly express her rejection against these measures, but she also believed that her community needed to take advantage of their opportunity to forward their own claims and interest. Moreover, other board members did not want to side with and thereby support the IGGiÖ.

Such refusal to share a common cause with the Sunni organisation granted Alevis more weight and attention in official forums, but also needs to be seen in light of Alevis' history of oppression in Sunni-majority Turkey, as well as the fact that some Islamic Alevi participants felt that full equality with Sunni Muslims in Austria had not yet been achieved. Sunnis were still perceived as more powerful, despite their equal legal standing in Austria. According to Eraydin, who headed the Viennese association of the recognised Alevi community, the Alevi community struggled to make ends meet, still having to pay off the loans for their new prayer space, whereas Sunni communities received money from abroad through donations and Turkish state structures. Furthermore, Sunnis had, according to him, long received privileged treatment by the Austrian state. Austrian politicians had vied for the votes of the conservative Turkish electorate, while neglecting to visit Alevi communities. This is why he was glad to observe the Austrian state's changed approach, for instance no longer allowing the construction of conspicuous mosques: "In their own country, they [Sunnis] don't have any respect for people, why should they be allowed to build a mosque with minarets here after such short time? They [the state] are right [to refuse]. You come here and want everything at once. You shan't have it." Most Islamic Alevis, moreover, were thankful for the attention and support received from the Austrian state upon their recognition, as shown above.

Islamic Alevis also established their deservingness as subjects of official recognition in drawing their boundaries against members of the unrecognised Alevi Federation, as the correct choice the state had made between the two groups. In this manner, Rasim, the middle-aged man who called Austria the land of Alevis, argued that the Austrian state had recognised his

community after realising their genuineness and the other Alevi group's dishonesty: "These people have pictures of Ali on their walls, but they say something else. That doesn't fit. Austria said, you're doing something wrong. Austria is a ... like in football ... a referee. Austria was a referee and saw who was right and who was wrong." This image of the state as referee or judge, who grants approval on evaluating different contenders' worthiness, once more confirms my argument that recognition processes in Vienna compelled participants to navigate racially informed hierarchies between the "good" and the "bad".

#### *4.3. Recognition's role in Islam's domestication*

Many participants from the unrecognised Alevi group, conversely, believed current recognition procedures to be a matter of politics of Islam, security and even foreign affairs, rather than of equal rights and freedoms. For them this explained why, even though Austria did not "like" Islam, as some community members phrased it, it recognised the Muslim Alevi group. While seemingly critical of the state's integration and domestication agenda in this way, Federation Alevis still asserted themselves as the more deserving of the recognition candidates, being further removed from Islam than the recognised Alevi group and, as a consequence, more compatible with European values. Instances of approval by right-wing politicians were sometimes used as proof that even those who are normally against foreigners see Federation Alevis as the more desirable group. As Arat relayed somewhat proudly, "[Strache]<sup>27</sup> said, all foreigners can go, but the Alevis stay here [...] That means, those people who don't like foreigners, the Austrians, they change their opinion when they meet Alevis, because, sometimes they come to our association and see the women without headscarf and so on." This statement can be viewed as a particularly striking instance of participants' attempts to straddle racial hierarchies of belonging in Austria, where markers of Muslim Otherness, such as headscarves,

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<sup>27</sup> Heinz-Christian Strache is a right-wing Austrian politician who was vice-chancellor until 2019, when he stepped down after accusations of embezzlement. In 2020, he ran in local Vienna elections with his own party.

already impede full belonging, in light of Alevis' current and historical racial and religious exclusion in Sunni-majority Turkey.

Hence, some members of the unrecognised Alevi community were at a loss as to why they had not been given recognition. Arat again, contended, "You saw yourself at our events, modern people, modern women [...] The Alevis integrate fast. Their life is not different from the European one, but Austria doesn't understand this." Ahsen, a woman in her fifties, even described the Austrian state's failure to acknowledge and reward their similarity to "the Austrian people" as painful to her:

"The Austrian system helps the Islamic Alevis more. Not us. But I don't understand why. After all, we are more ... Austrians and Alevis are the same. The others [Islamic Alevis] are further removed from the Austrian people, but we are the same. I don't understand why [...] We do everything voluntarily, also drink alcohol, also eat pork. [...] It pains me so that Austrian politics always helps the others. Why?"

Üner, a member of the non-recognised Alevi Federation who was actively involved in the community's attempts to gain recognition, could shed some light on the process. He reported that state officials were against creating a separate law for Alevis, recalling one state representative announcing, "There will be no Sunni or Alevi law. There will be an Islam Law." Üner concluded that while diversity was accepted in Christianity, as different denominations were recognised in their own right, it was only allowed within a single encompassing legal frame when it came to minority groups. Instead of granting minorities their rights and freedoms, the state used recognition and the subsumption of all Muslims, actual or by ethnic-national association, into one law to manage these groups. This perception was shared by Emel, a young woman who was active in the youth group of the Austrian Alevi Federation:

"It also suited the Austrian state not to recognise Alevism as an independent faith, but within the Islam Law, because that of course makes it easier to manage [*verwalten*] them all. For them it doesn't matter; for them Alevism doesn't play a big role unfortunately. It is the same to them whether you are Alevi, whether you are Sunni. That is all Islam to them; they are all Muslims."

In this way, religious recognition of groups from Muslim-majority countries, including those distancing themselves from Islam, was argued to be a matter of governance, in which little heed was paid to the faiths' uniqueness. Rather, their racialised subsumption was believed to ease state management and fulfil its integration and security agendas. As was observed by Üner, this was attempted by instituting Alevis as a “counterweight” against Sunnis, a role which he rejected:

“We don't want to constitute the counterweight to someone else. We want to express our opinion freely and not only say 'no' to everything the [Sunni] Islamic Faith Community says. We don't want to be instrumentalised in all these security-political things, but we just want live our faith in our communities.”

This response stands in distinct contrast to Sayan's statements quoted further above, in which the latter welcomed Alevis' empowerment vis-à-vis Sunnis. Üner, however, refused to be instrumentalised in Islam's governance and instead wished for the possibility to express and practise his faith without restraint.

Sunni participants agreed that religious recognition, when it comes to Islam, was a matter of state control and integration politics. The Islam Law itself, with its stipulations on German language requirements for imams or its ban on foreign financing, aims to detach the Muslim community from any foreign influence and to establish an Islam of Austrian making. When talking about the expulsion of Turkish imams based on the Islam Law's proscription of foreign financing, Sabri reflected that a recognition status such as the one existing in Austria might have even been less advantageous than having no recognition at all:

“In Germany or Switzerland, you handle it yourself, and where they [imams] come from is insignificant. I don't have these possibilities. It is dictated to me now. [...] They dictate everything now. When it's written in law, it also has a negative side, because they can dictate as they please.”

Sabri could not have known that, only a few weeks later, in the aftermath of the shooting attack which took place in early November 2020 in Vienna's city centre, such complaints would only

gain greater currency, as the Islam Law was amended once again in conjunction with an anti-terrorism policy package, stipulating more possibilities for state surveillance of communities and imams.

Further to this, existing recognition did not vitiate polemic debates about such issues as the headscarf. To the contrary, integration demands abounded despite existing recognition. This made many Sunni participants believe that recognition was not substantive, because they were still expected to make invisible any differences to the non-Muslim majority. This, for Feride, defeated the whole purpose of recognition:

“Practising my religion is important to me, because it is just a part of you, an important part, which also leads to inner peace. And when you cannot do all this, you simply aren’t yourself. [...] When you cannot even do this, I think to myself, then it must be that you want to deter Muslims from being themselves and that you want to assimilate them.”

While Sunnis, in this way, refused to be “assimilated” into an Austrian white-Christian way of life, non-recognised Alevis called out state attempts, both Turkish and Austrian, to assimilate Alevism into Islam. Recognised Alevis, conversely, saw their position as one of empowerment as they forwarded their definition of Islam and challenged Sunni hegemony. Yet, their stance coincided with Austrian integration, domestication and securitisation agendas regarding Islam. Vying for recognition by declaring their own deservingness against others, or denouncing persistent racism despite recognition, Alevi and Sunni participants in Vienna, as in the other two cities, navigated racial hierarchies of belonging but were barred from full inclusion.

## **5. Conclusion: Religious recognition and belonging in Vienna**

In Vienna, a strong polarisation between national official recognition for Sunni and Alevi Muslim communities and no recognition status at all for non-Islamic Alevis could be

observed, as well as between formal parity with established Churches and particularly heated politics and entrenched hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion which Sunnis, as well as Alevis, had to navigate. For both Sunni and Alevi participants, the question arose whether official state recognition reflected or could lead to societal recognition. Yet, the meaning of such societal recognition differed between the participant groups, and the manner in which this question was answered equally diverged. For Sunnis, persisting prejudice and discrimination were signs of lacking societal recognition, and many severely doubted the ability of a legal status to do away with their racist exclusion as Muslims and migrants. On the contrary, many identified the Islam Law itself to be part of state attempts to integrate, regulate and control them. In this way, recognition effected no change in the set divisions between majority and minority and their respective power and status. As a status granted by the national majority on its own terms, it did not widen the scope of belonging. Accordingly, true substantive recognition would only come to pass in the unlikely or even impossible event that minorities were no longer objects of integration or security discourse and politics, and the divides between national majority and “its” minorities were dissolved.

For Alevis, on the other hand, societal recognition meant being generally known and correctly perceived as different from Muslims in general or Sunni Muslims in particular. In this manner, for Alevis, recognition was a site of boundary drawing against (Sunni) Islam and of defining what Alevism should be. The discussion over its definition as an Islamic confession or an independent faith in its own right was led with significantly greater intensity in Vienna than in the other two cities. Non-recognised Alevis defied the legal subsumption of Alevism into Islam, seeing parallels to the situation in Turkey, and argued that the currently existing recognition of Alevism as a Muslim denomination formed part of state efforts to domesticate Islam by including a more moderate counterbalance. This, to them, explained their own lack of recognition despite their greater distance from Islam and, concomitantly, their closer

compatibility to Austrian values and ways of life. For members of the recognised Alevi community, conversely, recognition constituted their independence from and equal standing to Sunni Muslims, also in light of their persistent inequality in Sunni-majority Turkey. Yet, while they felt more visible and empowered with regard to Sunni Muslims, they also fell in line with the Austrian state on issues regarding the integration of Muslims and the regulation of Islam.

Claims of being less strict and more compatible Muslims, rather than not being Muslim at all, seemed to have been more successful in gaining state attention and approval. By presenting themselves and others as more or less removed from Islam, and relatedly as more or less consistent, genuine or political, many Alevis not only negotiated the definitions of true Alevism and its distance from Sunni Islam, informed by a history of oppression in Turkey, but in so doing also claimed to be (more) deserving of recognition and belonging in Austria, where the dominant terms of belonging are significantly informed by anti-Muslim racism. Meanwhile, Sunnis decried their racial exclusion from the Austrian national community. Yet, the fact that some Sunni participants perceived this as injurious and illegitimate also speaks of their sense of having rightful claims and of a discrepancy of positions which Sunnis from Turkey assumed in Europe and Turkey respectively. I view such practices and discourses of boundary drawing in participants' accounts of (lacking) official recognition as negotiations of inclusion and exclusion, the terms of which are structured by racial hierarchisation of the "good" and the "bad" which formed part of the governance of Islam in Austria. Religious state recognition compelled its Alevi and Sunni recipients to navigate such racial hierarchies of belonging, both confirming and contesting them. These attempts of negotiating racial hierarchies of belonging are, I argue, not just informed by the Austrian national context, but also by the differential status which Sunnis and Alevis have possessed in Turkey.

In a context of racialisation of Muslims and the existence of a special law for that group, positioning oneself and being cast as a nondogmatic and gender-equal Muslim aligns with

current political attempts to govern Islam under the categories of integration and security, as well as with historical governance practices of dividing the “good” Muslims from the “bad”. However, this chapter’s account adds further layers to this divide and to the image presented by the group of sculptures on the outer wall of St. Stephen’s Cathedral described at the outset of the chapter, showing the conquered “Turk”, pierced and trampled on by the Christian figure. First, Turkish Sunnis in Austria negotiated their persistent racist exclusion, as well as the entanglement of their official recognition in securitisation and integration debates, in light of their formal parity with Christian churches, a status not granted to Islam in either Germany or Switzerland. Secondly, not all migrants from Turkey perceived themselves as oppressed and downtrodden in Austria. Recognised Alevis stressed their empowerment vis-à-vis Sunnis in Austria, in contrast to their status in Turkey. While the full belonging of both Sunnis and Alevis in Austria was precluded by their governance as “Muslims” which produced and reproduced racialised differences between more or less compatible representatives, participants’ different status in Turkey and their continued power discrepancies in Austria led them to reflect on their positions in Austrian recognition constellations in different ways. Sunnis denounced the insubstantial nature of their formal equality with Christians in terms of their belonging, whereas recognised Alevis cherished their independence from Sunni Islam as well as the acknowledgement of their worth and acceptedness. It is the unrecognised Alevi group which was left devoid of any official status which could offset their exclusion in both Austria and Turkey.

## **Chapter 8: Discussion - Alevis and Sunnis between Racial Hierarchies of Belonging**

### **1. Introduction**

After the preceding empirical accounts, detailing Alevi and Sunni community members' views and reflections on official religious recognition in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna, I will, in the following paragraphs, discuss the findings presented in these chapters by drawing comparisons across the three case studies, showing the continuities and differences both within and across both communities. I will tie these overall findings to the theories outlined in the second chapter of this dissertation, discussing religious recognition's involvement in national politics of belonging, and community members' navigation of both Western European and Turkish racial hierarchies, in order to arrive at an account on the relationship between official religious recognition and the feelings of belonging of Alevi and Sunni migrants from Turkey and their descendants.

In particular, I will first examine recognition's differing significances for and impacts on Alevis and Sunnis with regard to their wish for true acknowledgement and for equality with different groups. This forms the basis on which, in the second step, I will explore the contrast that participants established between official recognition on the one hand and societal or "true" recognition on the other and the relationship between these two spheres of recognition. Afterwards, I will take up official recognition's place in national politics of belonging, discussing the themes that also formed the foci of the preceding three chapters, namely recognition's entanglement in integration requirements, its meanings and politics with regard to country-of-origin relations, and its facilitation of boundary-drawing and a divide between "good" and "bad". The position of Alevis and Sunnis in and between national racial hierarchies

of belonging forms the topic of the subsequent section, in which I discuss this thesis' main argument: Received recognition for Alevis was able to engender feelings of gratitude, relief, safety and happiness, thereby confirming or heightening an often already existing sense of homely belonging. While some Sunnis also positively evaluated their official recognition, many denied its ability to counteract their persistent societal exclusion. Moreover, in their accounts of received or withheld official recognition, both Alevi and Sunni participants navigated recognition's emplacement in and reproduction of European boundaries of belonging in light of racial hierarchies in Turkey. This instantiates recognisees' exclusion from the national majority and from governmental belonging in their countries of residence. Hence, when it comes to their sense of governmental belonging, religious recognition's potential for substantive inclusion is forestalled by its reiteration of pre-defined terms of belonging.

## **2. Recognition's differing significances for and impacts on Alevis and Sunnis**

### *2.1. The wish for true acknowledgement, from different positions*

For both Alevi and Sunni community members in all three cities, recognition ideally meant that they are noticed, attended to and taken seriously as individuals and communities. Recognition implied being seen and known fully and correctly, and being valued and acknowledged as such. Yet, the stakes of recognition, its evaluation, level of significance and the position from which it was claimed and wished for varied between Alevis and Sunnis. For many Sunnis who have taken part in this study, true recognition signified not being generalised, objectified and reduced to a prejudiced image of Muslims as radical, violent, backward or oppressed, but an acknowledgement of the reality of their place in and contribution to Western European society. In Vienna, none of my Sunni participants saw this realised. Their high formal recognition status there did not come with full acknowledgement, but rather co-existed with a

conception of Islam as needing monitoring and correction. In fact, the highest recognition status, namely the status of nationally recognised public corporation in Austria, coincided with what I perceived as the strongest sense of exclusion among Sunnis. In Basel, where the Sunni community has not as yet attained official recognition, some of its members hoped that a recognition status, ideally one that is higher than cantonal recognition and would create parity with the Christian Churches, would lead to or be a reflection of a state of being seen, known and understood properly, while others did not think that any legal status could achieve this. In Hamburg, responses were also divided. While some Sunni participants did regard the ratified contract with the local government as a reflection of being finally seen and acknowledged by state authorities as cooperation partners, others lamented that what is seen are the acts and statements of some individuals rather than the endeavours of the whole community. Incidents where community representatives displayed an allegedly inappropriate attachment to their country of origin could nullify years of constant work.

While Sunnis had to dispel misconceptions about themselves that stood in the way of being truly seen and known, they did not have to establish their very existence to begin with. For Alevis on the other hand, recognition, in the first instance, meant official acknowledgement of their existence as a group independent from (Sunni) Muslims by members of the European majority society and European states. Thus, recognition for Alevis signified the change from subsumption and obscurity to official attention and respect, as reflected in both the legal status itself, but also in visits and receptions by politicians or participation in dialogue with the state or other religious communities. Alevis attached great significance to receiving the same official status as, or even higher than, the Sunnis, as a religious community in its own right, as this marked a contrast to their history of subsumption and oppression in Turkey as well as decades of continued obscurity and vulnerability in Europe. As was described in the previous chapters, received recognition for Alevis was able to engender feelings of profound relief, safety and

happiness. This was especially so in Basel, where Alevi attained a recognition status which the local Sunni community did not possess. Members of the nationally recognised Alevi community in Vienna felt empowered, some expressing ownership of their country of residence. Conversely, members of the unrecognised Alevi community in Vienna felt alienated, oppressed and disregarded due to being submitted to what they perceived as the forceful Islamisation of their identity. In this way, the attainment or lack of recognition had a profound impact on Alevi's feelings, able to confirm, increase or detract from a sense of homely belonging.

However, this was less the case for younger Alevi participants, born and raised in their respective countries of residence, who, although carrying the collective memory of Alevi's troubled history, have no personal experience of life in Turkey as a persecuted minority. While young Alevi's encounters with Sunni peers often constituted instances of voicelessness, prejudice and conflict, they also shared with them concerns about being a descendant of migrants. Furthermore, while state and society were growingly aware of the existence of Alevi, they might not know them in a desirable way or with sufficient profoundness. Alevi's perceived relationship to majority Islam was of particular concern to them in this regard. Conflation with Muslims and subsumption under (Sunni) Islam still occurred, both in daily encounters and by state representatives, on discursive, institutional and even legal levels. Conversely, as was the concern of recognised Islamic Alevi in Vienna, their distinctness from Sunni Islam was taken to mean that they were not Muslims and lacked any orthodoxy.

Further to this, some Alevi stated that their neglect by state authorities still persisted. This was not the case only for the non-recognised Alevi community in Vienna, because such feelings existed also despite granted recognition. In all cities, yet less so in Basel, Alevi participants bemoaned the fact that (Sunni) Muslims still received privileged treatment or more attention by state and politics due to their greater influence, power, foreign state-backing or

status as “trouble-makers”. Furthermore, seeing that their warnings to European state representatives against too generous an accommodation of Sunni and Turkish organisations have not been sufficiently heeded, some Alevi felt that their own identity as allies to and defenders of European states and democracy was not duly acknowledged. In Basel, due to the fact that the Sunni community remained without cantonal recognition, Alevi felt less overlooked or disregarded as compared to the Muslim community.

Being seen, known and valued, for both Sunnis and Alevi, also entailed a position at eye level with the state as well as with other religious communities. The former signified a relation of mutual trust and respect, the latter connoted their parity with already recognised communities. Recognition was supposed to be a matter of equal relations, but again, the extent to which this materialised remained in question, as will now be shown.

## *2.2. The wish for equal standing between and among recogniser and recognisees*

Regarding their parity with other religious communities, Alevi were primarily concerned with their equal standing beside (Sunni) Muslims. In this way, Alevi’ recognition in Basel granted them a sense of security, relief and contentment, lacking the anxiety that could be found in Hamburg, where Alevi needed to assert their place beside (Sunni) Muslims despite their formally equal recognition status. Islamic Alevi in Vienna stressed their equal standing next to Sunni Muslims and their ability to assert their stance against them, while their legal parity with Christian churches was of secondary importance to them. Non-recognised Alevi in Vienna strove for parity with their Alevi rivals as well as the Islamic religious society. In their struggle with the state, some have, however, come to question the whole concept and process of state recognition. As the Austrian state illegitimately reserved the power to decide over the religious location of minority communities, all of them remained the objects of state governance.

Sunni participants, in turn, tended to compare their status to that given to Christian churches. This is also why in Basel, Sunnis thought less about the legally inferior cantonal recognition than about public-legal recognition. However, not only did the latter seem unattainable given its requirement of a constitutional change and popular referendum, which in the past have been disfavourable on questions of Islam's public presence, but it would also mean greater state control, which Sunnis in Basel saw take place in Vienna. Nevertheless, many argued that as long as a system of state-church cooperation and recognition existed in Switzerland, it was important and desirable to receive the same treatment as other religious communities. Sunnis in Hamburg noted that their status was far removed from the one enjoyed by Christian churches, which made itself felt on a very practical basis. Not only did the implementation of the religious rights contract lag in matters such as halal food in hospitals, religious classes at school or the availability of burial spaces, but more generally, their organisational structures were still founded on voluntary work which had to run alongside job and family duties. While some Sunni participants in Hamburg regarded the contract as a reflection of cooperation at eyelevel, others noted that it cannot be an equal partnership after it has repeatedly been called into question as a means to show displeasure of or even to discipline Muslim communities.

Hence, recognition ideally connoted an equal standing not only among recognisees but also between recogniser and recognisees, reminiscent of a Hegelian understanding of the recognition relationship. Yet, it became evident to participants that this relationship was in fact one of power inequality. Not only was recognition given or withheld by the state, but the latter distributed recognition unequally and retained its power over recognised communities. Related to this was the impression of ultimately residing in a Christian country, which was in charge of the content and terms of recognition's bestowal and withdrawal, able to decide to whom and under what circumstances recognition can and should be given. In this manner, official state

recognition, although demanded by religious communities themselves, remained a matter of local or national states' discretion with few grounds for further claims or critique over their content and terms. Participants either felt grateful for this transferral of acknowledgement or rejected being cast thus as objects of governance, both reactions being the result of the same unequal power relations implied in state-conferral of recognition (Coulthard 2014), while also reflecting the disparate power positions between Alevis and Sunnis.

This remained true even in the case of formal parity among the recognised religious communities. Sunnis in Vienna experienced the circumstance that formal legal parity and equal state treatment do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. The IGGiÖ enjoys public corporation status like the Christian churches, but Sunni participants lamented the fact that it nonetheless was decided over, reprimanded, controlled and restricted in a way not observed in the treatment of other communities by the Austrian state. In this manner, as was often remarked upon by participants, legal status, be it their individual citizenship or their community's recognition status, was not synonymous with "societal" recognition and changed little about the fact that they remained objects of integration demands and external to the national majority as racialised subjects, as will now be shown.

### **3. Discrepancies between official and "societal" recognition**

#### *3.1. Official recognition's potential to make Alevis societally known*

Both Alevi and Sunni participants across all three cities distinguished between formal state recognition and so-called societal recognition. Members of both communities engaged in the question if at all and to what extent the two are related, as state action may not necessarily reflect general opinion and societal relations. Both Sunnis and Alevis differentiated recognition "on paper" by the state from the one by society at large. However, this discursive trope assumed

different meanings and implications for both groups. For Sunnis, a recognition that merely remained on paper without seeping into society had little meaning. This came to the fore especially in Vienna, where the contrast between existing legal recognition and simultaneous sociopolitical exclusion was often explained by stating that recognition only existed on paper. Sunnis from Hamburg did concede some merit to legally fixed recognition for its potential to serve as a preliminary step to further legal and societal processes or as backing in acts of claims-making. While Alevi participants similarly suggested that recognition should not just remain on paper but be matched by general awareness, correct categorisation and concomitant acknowledgement of Alevis in society, a recognition “on paper” did not have the implication of lack and deficiency for them. In fact, it signified nothing less than their officially acknowledged existence as a community in their own right.

For Alevis, the question was less whether European society could abandon its prejudices against them and finally come to fully accept them. It seemed to have been generally assumed that they would be accepted and respected once they were fully and widely known. Rather, it was of utmost importance to Alevis what they were known as. They earnestly wanted state and society to understand their distinction from either Sunni Islam or Islam in general, from people who also migrated from Turkey or were the descendants of such migrants and therefore classed by the white majority into the same category of Muslim foreigner. In many ways, Alevis wished to be perceived as unlike Sunni Muslims, under whom they have been historically oppressed and alongside whom Alevis received state recognition in Europe, where Muslims conjure a negative image among the general consensus. Accordingly, Alevis described themselves as similar to and compatible with the German, Swiss or Austrian white majority, democratic, gender-equal, peaceful and non-threatening. In this manner, societal recognition for Alevis signified general knowledge about their existence within a group undifferentiatedly glossed as Turkish migrants, their distinction from (Sunni) Muslims and the grounds for this distinction,

which are at the same time the grounds for their similarity to the non-Muslim white majority. Therefore, the question was raised whether official recognition also signified an awareness of Alevi in society. The state was aware of Alevi's existence, as it has granted its recognition after all, but what about the non-Muslim white majority of the country?

Here, Alevi's responses varied, some reporting that they no longer needed to explain who they were, as conversation partners already heard or read about Alevi. Alternatively, some Alevi felt better able to explain themselves towards both white citizens and Sunnis, no longer having to rely solely on a contrasting manner of self-portrayal, in which they would have to cast themselves as modern Muslims for others to at least have a vague idea of where to place them, but using their distinct official status as reference points. Others, however, interjected that Alevi were not yet widely known and many may not even have heard about them, especially in rural areas, which rendered their official recognition rather meaningless. Furthermore, based on their names and appearance, they were still taken for (Sunnite) Muslims. Even if people were familiar with Alevi, often their ideas about this group were not what participants wanted to be had about them, because they were either assumed to be moderate Muslims, thereby subsumed under a category from which most Alevi wanted to be dissociated, or not to follow any rules of conduct regarding such things as modest dress or alcohol and meat consumption, which Alevi who considered themselves part of Islam found offensive.

### *3.2. Official recognition's disconnectedness from Sunnis' societal recognition*

Sunni participants often argued that official state recognition did not derive from, has not and will not lead to societal recognition, by which respect and acceptance as equal members of society by the non-Muslim white majority is generally meant. It was, for instance, pointed out that racism, prejudice and exclusion not only obstructed the attainment of recognition but persisted also despite it. In their accounts of the barriers they faced to full belonging which even birth or citizenship in and of the country could not overcome, Sunnis seriously doubted or

outrightly denied the effect that legal recognition or indeed any legal status could have on their status as equal members of society. Accordingly, many believed that a lot more was necessary, including the lapse of time, the passing of generations, education and dialogue, to achieve a change in their position in society.

In Vienna, where recognition had already been in place for several decades and where Sunni participants saw the sociopolitical situation with regard to Muslims and migrants deteriorate rather than improve, leading them to the conclusion that there existed a wide discrepancy between their legal status and “real” substantive recognition, optimism regarding the former’s ability to affect their general societal was accordingly low. Sunni participants in Basel regarded societal recognition as a prerequisite for legal recognition. In order to achieve state recognition as a religious community in Switzerland, in particular public corporation status, a popular vote is required. Although the electorate in Basel has proven to be more liberal in such questions regarding Islam and migration, having voted against the bans of minarets and full-face veils, such a vote would remain highly contested. Even the parliamentary majority required for cantonal recognition was believed by Sunnis in Basel to be far from secure, not least because of the high representation of Kurdish-Alevi politicians. At the same time, precisely because legal recognition would already require societal recognition, some Sunnis from Basel imagined that once the former is finally achieved, the latter would be in place, as well. For these individuals, recognition would come close to a panacea for many of the existing problems. Sunnis in Hamburg argued that official recognition could only be a first step in attaining a substantive and above all, secure and unquestioned place as equal members of society, as their current contractual agreement with the city government was still prone to the vicissitudes of a wider politics of belonging on Muslims and migrants from Turkey.

Being seen, known and attended to, standing on an equal level with other religious groups, having one’s legal status translated into societal awareness, acceptance and

acknowledgement are conceptualisations of recognition that speak of its connection to issues of belonging. However, ideas of what recognition should ideally achieve often did not match reality. In this way, rather than recognition status and stipulations themselves, their embeddedness in wider politics of belonging, in particular sociopolitical practice and discourse on Islam and also on the so-called integration of migrants in Europe, affected participants' negotiation of governmental belonging to their resident societies, as will now be discussed.

#### **4. Recognition's place in national politics of belonging**

##### *4.1. Recognition's embeddedness in predefined terms of belonging*

Many Sunni participants saw official religious recognition in conjunction with other state policies on issues of migrant integration and security. The granting or prolongation of official recognition was believed to be conditional on the community's fulfilment of dominant terms of belonging, or its stipulations were amended in line with state integration and security concerns regarding Muslims in Europe. Meanwhile, in light of their persistent lack of recognition and exclusion from equal belonging in Turkey, many Alevis felt happy, relieved and grateful to European governments for having granted them their official recognition. Local government felt more accessible to Alevis through their contacts with its representatives who, they thought, were favourably inclined towards them. Furthermore, as a nationally recognised religious community, Alevis in Vienna were consulted on proposed laws, such as on the ban of veils in schools. They could voice their criticism of the Sunni counterpart, even put a damp on the latter's allegedly excessive or inappropriate demands, and claim the same rights as them.

However, while recognised Alevis in Vienna could make themselves heard in debates on issues such as the headscarf, the terms of the debate had been dictated in advance and predefined according to hegemonic ideas on the prerequisites of national belonging. Moreover,

they were expected and felt disposed to position themselves in a certain way, ideally as a moderate counter voice to Sunni Islam. Additionally, the entities granting recognition, namely national or local state authorities, were often seen as arbiter or judge who has reached the verdict that Alevis are sufficiently alike majority society and genuine in their self-portrayal to be conferred its approval, unlike others, be it Sunnis or, in the case of Vienna, the rival Alevi group. In general, Alevis continued to experience unequal power relations between themselves and Sunnis, while all of them remained minorities vying for the attention and support of the majority society and its political representation. Hence, while Alevi participants expressed positive feelings towards European state authorities granting their recognition, the latter did at the same time not reflect an expanded definition of belonging or a softening of boundaries between a migrant minority and a European national majority who decides whom it acknowledges as worthy of recognition. Alevis often felt in possession of greater political access, a louder voice and the state's attention and goodwill, but they also had to negotiate European politics of belonging in which official religious recognition processes remained firmly embedded, as I will argue in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### *4.2. Recognition as a matter of integration*

The concept of integration was either explicitly or implicitly entangled in the granting and meaning-making of recognition. Especially in Basel, both state representatives and Alevi community members conceived of recognition as a reward for, or at least as a reflection of, Alevis' compatibility with the white Swiss majority (and differentiation from Sunni Muslims) and their integration achievements. While some young Alevis challenged European integration demands, this was more common among Sunni interviewees, who either claimed to be already integrated, arguing the illegitimacy of contestations of their recognition status or its rendering as a matter of national security, or who wondered what so-called integration actually entailed, thereby deconstructing its very premises. Given that Sunni Muslims were the explicit target of

exclusionary public and political discourse in Europe, but also given Sunnis' majority status in Turkey, their negotiation of European integration demands was more defiant. In this vein, some rejected the need for recognition altogether, arguing that their religion or their personal selves did not require European states' confirmation, or they framed recognition not as a state reward but as a due right. At the same time, even a number of young Sunni community members, themselves born and raised in their countries of residence or citizenship, as well as members of preceding generations reiterated an alleged need to adapt to a different way of life, to behave well and to prove themselves worthy of recognition.

The framing of official recognition as an instrument of integration and as a reward for compatibility reflected pre-defined terms of belonging that conditioned the inclusion of non-white religious minority residents. Recognisees' "cultural,' if not political emancipation is framed as the reward for those who undergo a process of acceptance and internalisation of Western values" (Farris 2014: 296). However, the promise of emancipation, rights, citizenship and recognition is undermined by racial imposition and subjection, thereby "progressively postponed to a future never quite (to be) achieved" (Goldberg 2002: 96). Critical authors point to the racial premise of integration demands, as they are based on the idea of an evolutionary trajectory from deficiency and backwardness to enlightenment and civilisation (Hernandez Aguilar 2017, 2018), and constitute a neo-colonial project of moral monitoring (Schinkel 2017, 2018). However, while based on the idea of progress and development, the final stage of integration remains unattainable. The state of being an object of integration is, due to its racial premise, perpetually sustained. This goes hand in hand with a differentiation and ranking of individuals or groups in terms of their greater or lesser aptitude for or resistance to integration, as will be elaborated further below. Alevi and Sunni participants, while navigating hierarchies of the well-integrated and the less-integrated as recipients or aspirants of official religious

recognition, remained excluded from equal belonging in their position as objects of a politics of belonging marked by integration demands.

#### *4.3. Meanings and politics of recognition shaped by country-of-origin relations*

Acts, processes and platforms of official religious recognition, in this way, work within larger societal contexts that uphold the premise that “Muslim” denotes foreign. This is in line with the argument forwarded by a number of authors who analyse the racialised conceptualisation of Islam and Muslims in the West, based on the one hand on an idea of innate and immutable religious, cultural and ideological differences (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991), and on the other hand on the conflation of religious, physical and geographical markers of alleged Otherness (Meer 2013, Love 2017, Said 2003 [1978], Thomas 2010). This entails the subsumption of groups such as Arab Jews (Arviv 2018) or Sikhs (Jhutti-Johal & Sing 2020), and, as I can now add, Alevis into the Western racial category of Muslims.

In this manner, Muslims are defined as originating from a specific group of origin countries in the Near and Middle East and North Africa (Bayoumi 2006). Their “migration background” is perpetual even upon birth in the country and is identified on the basis of their names and the country in which their parents or grandparents were born. Muslimness is conflated with this “migration background” and is thus hereditary. Both a perpetual connection to the country of origin is attested and needed in order to define them as Muslim, subjects of integration and always ‘Other’ to the white population, while at the same time a disconnection from countries of origin such as Turkey is required in order to be granted European state recognition. Religious recognition processes are, in this way, meant to cut ties to countries of origin and induce as well as test singular belonging (Laurence 2012).

Sunnis’ persistent exclusion from the national community became obvious to Sunni participants whenever debates revolved around state relations to and events in Turkey. National

election times and increased political campaigning, the focus of which is often the country's Muslim and immigrant population, were periods during which Sunni participants felt their belonging as especially under attack. Their official religious recognition was swooped up in these debates, either directly through the proscription of foreign financing and imam recruitment in recognition legislation in Vienna, or more indirectly in debates to suspend recognition agreements with the Sunni community after pro-Turkey comments by community representatives in Hamburg or accusations against Sunni political candidates in Basel of supporting the Turkish government, thereby delegitimising them and barring their representation in the very parliament deciding on recognition. Length of stay, birth, citizenship, social or economic contributions, or official religious recognition, changed little about the fact that Sunnis felt probed and tested on their loyalties and attachments to either polity.

In this way, Sunni participants felt like pawns of national and international politics. Nationally, Islam is believed to be used as an issue of politics, to gain voters. Internationally, Muslims find themselves caught between nation-states structured by different racial hierarchies of belonging, staking their claims over them but refusing to fully accept them as their own. Despite the fact that especially young Sunni participants reported to have little concern with or interest for Turkish politics, having never regularly lived in any country other than Germany, Switzerland or Austria, they are included in these politics of belonging against their will and biography. At the same time, some participants also claimed the right as European citizens to have dual belonging and to entertain political feelings which European states may not agree with. In this way, while Sunnis often lamented the imposed need to position themselves vis-à-vis and stand in for the wrongdoings of the Turkish political leadership, they also demanded that their real or attributed ties to Turkey constitute no hindrance to their recognition in Europe.

Meanwhile, Alevis navigated the same societal and political context in which national origin and "foreign" appearance were conflated with religious affiliation and country of origin

relations were problematised, especially when the country in question was generally defined as Muslim and its leadership as autocratic. Yet, Alevis often spoke of their recognition in Europe in terms of their struggle against Sunni and Turkish state oppression. Their lack of recognition in Turkey formed the main frame of reference and comparison to their gained official status in Europe. Their oppositional political stance in Turkey and their difference to Turkish majority Islam served them to argue for their compatibility with European values and ways of life, and hence for their worthiness of European state recognition. These dynamics, as will now be shown, led to Alevis' differential negotiation of recognition by European governments vis-à-vis Sunnis in Europe and Turkey.

#### *4.4. Recognition compelling boundary-drawing and a divide between "good" and "bad"*

Recognition for Alevis was thus, first and foremost, a matter of boundary drawing to Sunni Muslims in Europe as well as to their situation in Sunni-majority Turkey. In Basel, Alevis' drafting of a statute to apply for cantonal recognition necessitated an internal debate on Alevism's definition. A struggle against an already recognised Sunni Muslim community or against a Sunni contender for official recognition did not, however, take place. Instead, boundary drawing in Basel most strikingly happened through a discourse on state-given reward, explaining why their own recognition was successful, while the Sunni community remains without one. In Hamburg, where negotiations with the senate and the signing of contracts with both the Alevi and the Muslim<sup>28</sup> communities proceeded simultaneously, the distinct recognition of these two communities was regarded by Alevi participants as proof and confirmation of their inherent difference. Further to this, the process was seen as a struggle to assert and uphold this boundary against proposals to pass a single agreement by state and Sunni representatives, Alevis' previous invisibility and subsumption under the label of Islam as well as Sunnis' precedence in the attention of the state. Concerning the latter, some Alevi

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<sup>28</sup> Schura Hamburg is cross-confessional and not only Sunni.

participants argued that European governments have still not fully realised that Alevi were their natural allies, lamenting that the generous government support of Sunni communities had only recently been stalled, despite the fact that Alevi have long warned against Turkish-Sunni organisations.

In Austria, where Alevism was recognised as a Muslim denomination within the existing Islam Law, unrecognised Alevi expressed perplexity and disappointment over the refusal of their application, given that they are the group more removed from Islam than the recognised Alevi community and therefore more compatible with the Austrian way of life, and denounced an assimilation of Alevism into Islam as can be observed in Turkey. Conversely, recognition of the Islam Alevi community was interpreted by its members as their emancipation from former subsumption under the Sunni-majority Islamic faith community and their establishment as equal to but different from Sunni Islam. They asserted their designation as Muslims after a history of being called heretics and denied acknowledgement as proper Muslims in the Ottoman Empire and its Turkish successor state. In this way, Islamic Alevi, on the one hand, stressed their distinction from Sunni Islam, pointing out their democratic inclination and peacefulness as well as their practice of gender equality, and on the other hand termed themselves the more genuine and deserving of the two Alevi groups.

I argue that acts and processes of official religious recognition of Alevi and Sunni communities in Western Europe reiterate, and compel members of these communities to negotiate, a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, the “good” and the “bad”, the deserving and the undeserving. First, oppositional discourses of worthiness are encouraged when official state approval is granted to some, but not all, minority religious communities, such as in Basel and Vienna. Yet secondly, even when the same recognition status is given to Alevi and Sunni communities, such as in Hamburg and again in Vienna, Sunnis defy their characterisation as deficient, dangerous and unintegrated, while Alevi stress their compatibility and adaptedness.

As observed by Topolksi (2018), the regulation of a moderate European Islam leads to tensions and schisms, as well as struggles for resources and recognition within a diverse Muslim community, also including Alevis who, through their racial categorisation, are deemed to belong to the field of Islam, even though they themselves often stress their distinction from it. This stands in continuity with practices within and outside of Europe to divide and rule non-Christian and colonised populations by drawing a divide between moderate cooperative and radical deviant representatives (Ayata 2020b, Mamdani 2012, Topolski 2018).

Some Alevi participants exhibited a keen awareness of their role as “good” Muslims or migrants in the eyes of Austrian, German or Swiss state authorities. They critically observed that the state deems them the more desirable Other, not posing problems or making trouble, and can therefore use them as a model against which to measure other “Muslim” groups or as insider critics who, although themselves already integrated, can rein in their non-integrated compatriots. Aware of the racial hierarchies at play, Alevis simultaneously confirmed that points of contention for the state, such as the headscarf or religious extremism, did not indeed apply to them. Elements of their identity and practice which they forwarded in arguing their compatibility with European values, such as gender equality and secularism, were at the same time grounds for their discrimination in Turkey. Some Alevis I interviewed faced this dilemma by refusing to define themselves in opposition to Sunnis, instead trying to define Alevism in its own terms. This, however, remained challenging when faced with the task of explaining oneself to a member of the white majority looking for simple categories. Some Alevi participants in Vienna similarly did not want to be played off against one another or to be instrumentalised by the state as counterbalance and tool of Islam’s domestication.

Sunnis called out their own persistent debarment from full belonging in Europe based on their religious and racial difference. Sometimes, Sunni participants would lament the fact that recently arrived migrants from Arab or African countries cast the established Muslim

community in a bad light and that, although they themselves have lived there all their lives, recent migration and concomitant anti-Islam sentiment also negatively affect them. A discourse of worthiness of and entitlement to acceptance and respect, deriving from participants' life-long sacrifice and labour-force and their resulting contribution to society, was particularly prevalent in Vienna, and the fact that societal acknowledgement was absent was seen as failure to grant them their due. Hence, Sunni Muslims perceived themselves as the explicit target of racial exclusion in Europe, but were also confident to make claims and to call out European anti-Muslim racism, in which they were backed by their more powerful position in Turkey where Alevis have, in contrast, historically lacked state recognition.

Both Sunni and Alevi participants in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna were forced to contend with definitions of European national belonging based in large parts on racial terms and on the exclusion of Islam. In their negotiations of these definitions, Alevis mostly confirmed their adherence to European values while Sunnis called out their persistent exclusion, which mapped onto their hierarchical positioning as “good” or “bad” migrants or Muslims. In addition, Alevis and Sunnis negotiated European recognition in view of their racial and religious exclusion and inclusion, respectively, in Turkey. What both Alevi and Sunni participants perceived as a reversal of their status between Turkey, where the terms of belonging are defined around Sunni-Muslim Turkishness, and Western Europe, where the terms of belonging are largely based on the racialisation and exclusion of Muslims, greatly influenced their perception of received or withheld recognition in Europe, as will be discussed in the next section.

## **5. Alevis and Sunnis between racial hierarchies of belonging**

### *5.1. Recognition's emplacement in and reproduction of European hierarchies of belonging*

That official recognition and its entanglement in European politics of belonging was more than a matter of religious affiliation was obvious to participants. They noted that their name, the colour of their hair and skin, as well as a headscarf or a longer beard already excluded them from membership in the national majority or led to their generalised grouping with other migrants from whom they wanted to distinguish themselves. The fact that race and religion have historically been conflated, and indeed coconstitute one another is observed by a number of authors critically interrogating the continuance of Europe's treatment of minorities, especially the similarities between the current situation of Muslims in Europe and the so-called Jewish Question of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Farris 2014, Jansen & Meer 2020, Meer 2013, Topolski 2018 and 2020). Their concepts of a race-religion nexus or a race-religion constellation aim to make evident that isolation of religion from race is not only unreflective of the manner in which labels such as Muslim and Jewish are really applied, but also dangerous in that it serves to legitimise forms of oppression as mere secular critique of religion, obscuring their racist premises. These racist premises come to the fore when geographical origin and religious affiliation are essentially conflated, and Islam is accused of being intrinsically incapable of accommodating secularism, or when Muslims are deemed fully determined by their religion and therefore incompatible with European values.

Sunni participants in all three cities included in this study often took a critical and sceptical stance towards the various status, either already granted or available, in their places of residence. They viewed such acts of official recognition in relation to their overall standing in European society vis-à-vis its non-Muslim white majority, both as adherents of Islam and as "migrants", who are perpetually perceived as national "foreigners" and racial Others, despite their birth and upbringing in their countries of residence. Their accounts on recognition were, in this manner, also discussions on wider experiences of exclusion, discrimination and racism in Western Europe, against which acts of official recognition were weighed. Hence, a widely

held belief among Sunni participants from all three cities was that official religious recognition cannot solve the issue of anti-Muslim racism, either at all or at least not on its own. Prejudice and exclusion were believed to be far too deeply ingrained for the sphere of law, or the written word issued from the top by state authorities, to dispel and that a wider and more profound change, reaching into the very grounds and ends of society, rather than just superficially imposed on it, was necessary. With anti-Muslim and anti-Turkey sentiment persisting alongside state recognition, the latter could only have minor worth for many Sunni participants.

Many Sunni participants not only questioned the reach of recognition and its ability to effect the societal change necessary to allow them to feel equally belonging rather than excluded on the basis of religion, race and national origin, but the very form that recognition itself took and the terms and conditions it came with were often problematic for them. In this manner, not only could recognition not amend existing inequalities and exclusions, but it itself contributed to cementing these boundaries of belonging. In this way, the ability of recognition to change or substantiate their feelings of political belonging was denied by many Sunni participants, as recognition reiterated instead of dissolved the boundaries and hierarchies of belonging. This led Sunnis across the three cities to wonder whether and how their full belonging may ever be achieved, and there was a sense among them that full belonging remained unattainable. It was, for instance, stated that even citizenship does not change the fact that one continues to be perceived and cast as foreign or Other. Assertions that one would always remain a “Turk” or a “foreigner” were common in this respect. It was observed that this permanent exclusion is based on a number of factors beyond one’s religious affiliation, including one’s name, hair and skin colour. Such experiences pertain to the racially informed definition of Western nation-states (Goldberg 2002, Mamdani 2020, Sharma 2020). These are characterised by the existence of a national majority who see themselves as the natural inheritors and definers of the state and its

territory, and minorities who are at most tolerated to reside, vote and practise their religion, the latter as a consequence of being granted official religious recognition.

Young Alevi participants especially shared concerns over their racial exclusion from European majority societies as descendants of migrants from Turkey, either denouncing structural exclusion and racism towards migrants more generally, or specifically lamenting the fact that the European white population does not differentiate between different groups within the category of “Turks”, “Muslims” or “foreigners”, despite the fact that they differ greatly in their outlook and practices. Conversely, some Alevi participants appreciated those instances in which white Europeans did realise their difference from Sunni Muslims after having grouped them as Muslim, basing their judgement on external appearance. They welcomed forthcoming treatment and approval by white Europeans, such as colleagues, employers or politicians, for constituting a compatible non-Muslim migrant group from Turkey or a less different group of migrants or “Muslims”. Such navigations of racial hierarchies in Europe took place in conjunction with the fact that, for Alevis across the three cases, official recognition received its significance through comparison of their current and historical situation in Turkey and as a means of boundary drawing to Sunni Islam or Islam in general, as will now be shown.

## *5.2. European recognition in light of racial hierarchies in Turkey*

Within a global system imposing Western racial categories and hierarchies, the newly forming nation-state of Turkey applied European racial concepts in its own attempts of constructing and regulating white (Sunni) Turkishness, excluding Alevis and other minority groups, which had already been cast as Others in the preceding Ottoman Empire, from the definition of citizenship (Ergin 2016, Gökay 2016, Maksudyan 2005, Ünlü 2016, Zeydanlioglu 2008). The inclusion of Alevis in this study as a group who, through their experience of discrimination and assimilation under the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, regard recognition in Europe as a means to their independence and empowerment, reveals the

importance, dilemma as well as the transnational implications of being granted recognition as a multiply racialised and minoritized group. European state recognition for Alevis was a testimony to their official existence as a distinct community, something denied to them in Turkey and a confirmation that Sunni Muslims in Europe, by contrast, did not need.

In their navigation of racial hierarchies in Europe, Alevis asserted their deservingness of European recognition by drawing on the very characteristics that they believe distinguish them from Sunni Muslims and for which they have been Othered in Turkey. Alevi participants argued for their similarity to European values, habits and ways of life, in opposition to Sunni Muslims, such as by stating that most Alevi women do not wear headscarves, that they do not follow Sunni habits of prayer or consumption, that they are democratic, peaceful and gender-equal. Recognition for many Alevis was, in this way, a testimony that this has been acknowledged by European governments and to their worthiness of official approval in Europe.

By contrast, Alevis often refuted (Sunni) Muslims' deservingness of this recognition, whom they termed incapable of adapting to European society and whose claims for recognition, moreover, Alevis regarded as illegitimate, because of Sunnis' continued organisational and personal attachment to an autocratic Turkish government and an inconsistency between standards they expect in Europe and those that they tacitly accept in Turkey, where minorities are refused equal treatment. In this manner, while young Alevi participants especially did not want to be given preferred treatment over Muslim communities by European governments, other Alevi participants approved of the latter's strict stance against Islam, such as bans on conspicuous Muslim dress or architecture, arguing not only that (Sunni) Islam should not be given too much power and leeway in Europe but also that what Sunnis deny to others in Turkey should not be given to them in Europe, either.

While some Sunni participants themselves, especially in Basel, deemed a conspicuous Muslim presence in public unnecessary or even unwarranted in a Christian country, most Sunni

participants called out their exclusion from European national belonging. Alevis, by contrast, were more adamant in drawing attention to their exclusion in Turkey under Sunni hegemony. Yet, Sunnis' stance towards recognition in Europe, their expectations and disappointments, are also informed, I argue, by racial hierarchies in Turkey. Some Sunni participants pointed out the fact that in Turkey they would not have to contend with a devaluation of their religious identity, or argued that in contrast to Europe's discrimination of its Muslim population, Turkey was accommodating to Christians. A strong sense of their Turkish identity granted some Sunni participants the confidence to defy European integration demands or to dismiss the need for European states' validation. Their membership of a world religion with state representation informed their wish to gain parity with Christian and Jewish communities in their countries of residence and citizenship. At the same time, many Sunni women's more conspicuous difference in the European public sphere exposed them more frequently to experiences of anti-Muslim racism, against which many asserted their right to equal belonging. Furthermore, a number of Sunni participants stated that they were neither accepted in their resident countries in Western Europe, where they would be cast as foreigners, nor in Turkey, where they might be referred to as "Almanci" (Rottman 2019). Yet, as Turkish Sunnism defines the Turkish nation and is represented by Turkish state structures, Sunnis arguably retain a more powerful position than Alevis, in both Turkey and Europe.

Framing Sunnis' and Alevis' meaning-making of official religious recognition in Europe as embedded in national politics of belonging, and more specifically as poised between European and Turkish racial hierarchies of belonging, is not to pass over Alevi participants' assertions that their official recognition derived from their own struggle against subsumption, oppression and invisibility, or Sunni participants' claims that it came to pass due to their own demands for equal treatment. Yet, this struggle for emancipation, parity and acknowledgement takes place in a European sociopolitical context where the imaginary of the nation excludes

race-religious Others and where states attempt to incorporate non-white and non-Christian groups. The national majority can tolerate Alevis and Sunnis, and European states can recognise them as minorities within its realm, but they are not an equal and defining constituent of who “we” are. In this manner, speaking about processes of recognition, both Sunni and Alevi participants in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna negotiated European hierarchies of belonging informed by race. Moreover, as is evident from, on the one hand, the way in which Alevis drew boundaries to Sunnis from Turkey and contrasted their treatment by European governments with that which they have historically received in Turkey, and on the other hand, from Sunnis’ demand that their affective or institutional ties to Turkey be no hindrance to their equal treatment with Christians in Europe, community members simultaneously negotiated racial hierarchies of Turkish national belonging.

### *5.3. Racial exclusion from the national majority despite official recognition*

Participants in this research still named their places of residence and citizenship their home. Yet, it was shown that such homely belonging is not altogether wholesome and unproblematic, but steeped in experiences of daily and structural exclusion. In fact, the concept of home itself always already bears a darker side to its ostensibly positive appearance (Blickle 2002). The term itself carries a colonial history and is nowadays used regularly not only by right-wing groups to express nationalist sentiment but also in mainstream politics as counter-discourse to anti-racist demands or to legitimise the fortification of European outer borders against refugees (Ayata 2019a, 2020a, 2021a, 2021b). In participants’ accounts, feelings of attachment to and familiarity with a place ran alongside the realisation that they remain barred from substantive and equal belonging in the political community, perpetually assumed to be people out of place whose true “home” lies elsewhere, whose belonging always remains additional, conditional, questioned and even undesired, despite official status such as citizenship or the recognition of their religious community, as described above.

As it currently stands, Germany, Switzerland or Austria may be the home of Sunnis and Alevis from Turkey and their descendants, but these countries are denied to them as their national home, as Mamdani (2020) writes. They remain a permanent minority in the terms of Mamdani (2020), or permanent migrants according to Sharma (2020), unable to cross the racialised boundary to full belonging. This coincides with the distinction between homely and governmental belonging established by Hage (2000), which I have traced in my own interviews. As argued by him, white nationals see themselves as managers of “their” minorities, who themselves are the object but not the subject of such management. Only “National-Natives” have the right to home rule, where home is understood as people’s own and proper eternal and essential national territory (Sharma 2020). From the point of view of the national majority, maintaining their national home implies the exclusion of those not deemed part of it, while from the point of view of the minority, homely belonging remains subsidiary to governmental belonging.

The possession of official religious recognition does not make someone a member of the nation. Instead, in the context of increasing legal-administrative parity, where migrants and their descendants become citizens and their religions are institutionally incorporated, a discourse of autochthony, home-making and integration surges. Migrants’ affective disposition is increasingly tested and undivided loyalty required (Ayata 2019b). Integration demands abound and are internalised even by subsequent generations of former migrants. They are asked to position and justify themselves in relation to their assumed real home, while at the same time, any connection to their supposedly true homeland is taken as proof of failed integration.

Meanwhile, as migrants from Turkey and their descendants in Europe are racialised on the basis of their attributed national origin and concomitant religious affiliation, Alevis’ meaning-making of European recognition revolves around their lack of such recognition and indeed their history of persecution, violence and assimilation in Turkey, as well as the ongoing

imbalance of power and visibility between Alevi and Sunni in Europe. The contrast between withheld recognition in Turkey and received recognition in Western Europe created or confirmed feelings of attachment, gratitude, relief, trust and safety. Ultimately, however, Alevi remain external to both Turkish and European definitions of belonging, the former due to their deviance from Sunni Islam, and in some cases their Kurdish identity, the latter due to their subsumption under the racial category of Muslims and migrants.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I compared and discussed Alevi and Sunni participants' negotiations of received and withheld religious recognition in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna. I traced their ideal definitions and expectations of recognition as true acknowledgement and equality, as well as the discrepancies that participants observed between official and so-called societal recognition. This formed the basis on which I proceeded to discuss official recognition's emplacement in national politics of belonging structured by race. Especially Alevi participants developed feelings of gratitude, pride, trust, relief and a sense of security upon being given official religious recognition. Conversely, the withholding of recognition to Alevi engendered disappointment and alienation. Recognition deeply affected many Alevi participants. In contrast, Sunnis felt excluded across the three cases, even and especially when granted national public-legal recognition. As their recognition status continued to be subjected to political contestation and as they continued to experience general prejudice, official recognition for Sunnis did not reflect or lead to societal acceptedness and hence could overall not bring about a sense of substantive belonging. However, both Alevi and Sunnis have reportedly entertained feelings of homely belonging to their neighbourhoods and cities of residence already before the bestowal of official recognition.

Moreover, the accounts of Alevi and Sunni participants led me to the conclusion that processes of official religious recognition in Europe granted to their communities are both set in and between as well as reproduce Western European and Turkish racial boundaries of belonging. In Europe, they reflect and cement the divide between white majority and non-white minority, as well as a hierarchisation within the latter in terms of claimed and attributed compatibility and adaptedness. Such navigations of European hierarchies of belonging are, at the same time, informed by past and present hierarchies in Turkey, where Turkish-Sunni identity has provided the definition of national belonging at the exclusion of Alevis and other minorities. In this way, official religious recognition does not lead to a sense of having an equal say in the terms of belonging applied to both Alevis and Sunnis during recognition processes, due to recognition's embeddedness and reiteration of larger exclusionary politics of belonging about the place of Islam in Europe and the integration of migrants from Turkey.

In this way, accounts of feelings of governmental belonging exceed the realm of official religious recognition and revolve around participants' place in society as "Muslims" and migrants. Alevis, as well as Sunnis, remain the objects of a politics of belonging in Europe that places Islam as external to its definition. They can negotiate or contest these imposed racial hierarchies, but are unable to dispel them. Meanwhile, Alevis' racialised exclusion in Europe takes place while they themselves affirm their emancipation from and assert themselves against past and present oppression by Sunnism and the Turkish state, both in Turkey and in Europe.

The following and final chapter of this dissertation draws wider conclusions from these findings by discussing their broader implications regarding the issue of nation-building as well as the history of European treatment of its internal Others. It also offers an outlook, both with respect to the possibilities of recognition and belonging of racialised subjects in and between nation-state settings, and with view to further research on these issues.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion - Recognition and Belonging in and across Racial States**

### **1. Introduction**

With this thesis, I examined the relationship between different forms and constellations of official religious recognition, and the feelings of belonging of Alevi and Sunni community members. I did so on the basis of semi-structured ethnographically embedded interviews with ordinary members of Sunni and Alevi associations in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna. In this way, I provided the first microsociological examination of officially granted religious recognition in Western Europe. Furthermore, although this recognition takes place in a context in which migrants' and Muslims' belonging is continually contested, this study is the first to analyse the feelings of belonging of members of racialised religious minority groups who have sought or received state recognition. Moreover, I departed from an undifferentiated treatment of "Muslims" by including members of Alevi and Sunni communities, whose recognition processes in Europe run alongside each other and who, in their common country of origin, namely Turkey, inhabit opposing societal positions. All these considerations have contributed to producing a rich and complex account on official religious recognition and the politics and feelings of belonging in German-speaking Western Europe, conveying critical insight both on the meanings of recognition and on the possibilities of belonging for racially and religiously Othered individuals.

In this final chapter, I will first sum up this thesis' main findings. Secondly, while in the previous chapter I already offered a critical discussion of participants' accounts and reflections on recognition and belonging, with regard to recognition's emplacement in national politics of belonging as well as participants' navigation of transnationally informed racial hierarchies that

impede their attainment of full belonging, I will attempt to go one step further in expanding on the implications of this insight. In particular, I relate it to the issue of nation-building and to the history of European treatment of its internal Others. Thirdly, I will ask the question of where this leaves us, through which I offer my reflections on the possibilities of full belonging for migrants and their descendants in Europe as well as on the role which recognition can assume in this. Lastly, I will point out this study's contributions and limitations in order to make suggestions for future research.

## **2. Summary of findings**

I showed that most members of the Alevi and Sunni communities in Basel, Hamburg and Vienna felt attachment and familiarity to their locales of residence. Such feelings of homely belonging (Hage 2000) were expressed by members of communities which were officially recognised, as well as by those whose organisational representation did not receive recognition, such as Sunnis in Basel. In general, feelings of homely belonging, themselves characterised by a tension between attachment and alienation, already existed prior to official recognition. At the same time, however, recognition for Alevis was able to confirm and even heighten feelings of homely belonging by producing positive feelings towards their resident states and societies. Moreover, Alevis especially bestowed religious recognition with a wider significance, namely the official acknowledgement of their very existence as an independent group and the valuation of their practices and identities which historically have and still are denied in Turkey. Given their past and present discrimination by the Turkish state and majority Sunnism in Turkey and Europe, official recognition in their countries of residence led many Alevi participants to feel grateful, relieved and safe, while the withholding of such recognition gave rise to a sense of oppression and alienation. Sunni participants, on the other hand, overall did not feel more included upon recognition, nor did its lack make them feel significantly less excluded than in

the other cases. In fact, the strongest sense of exclusion coincided with the highest level of official religious recognition.

I propose in this thesis that official religious recognition in the three contexts studied here was embedded in and itself reproduced dominant European terms of belonging structured by the differential exclusion of race-religious Others, specifically Muslims. It was poised between different national politics of belonging marked by racial hierarchisation, which affected Alevi and Sunni communities in opposite ways. Members of Alevi and Sunni communities who either migrated from Turkey themselves or are descendants of such migrants are racialised in Europe based on their national origin and their real or attributed closeness to Islam. In their reflections and assessments of state-given or withheld religious recognition in Europe, they navigated racial hierarchies of belonging, either drawing boundaries to the other group in confirming their own compatibility, or denying recognition's ability to change their persistent exclusion. These dominant terms of belonging were negotiated by both Alevi and Sunni participants not just in themselves but also in light of Turkish national terms of inclusion and exclusion.

As a consequence, recognition could not contribute to a sense of equal, substantive and full belonging of Alevi and Sunni in Western Europe, despite their increasingly equal formal-legal standing with the majority population. In showing how differently participants negotiated and navigated racial hierarchies of belonging, I established that the relationship between state recognition and belonging is structured by race-based terms of inclusion and exclusion. Rather than the stipulations of religious recognition themselves, its embeddedness and perpetuation of wider politics of belonging on the place of Islam and migrants from Turkey affected participants' feelings and negotiations of their governmental belonging in Europe.

At the same time, the manner in which this circumstance was instantiated in the different locales examined as well as the positionalities and attitudes of members of the different

participant groups varied. Regarding the latter, Alevis and Sunnis, while both subjected to racialisation and contestation of their rightful belonging in Europe, assumed different attitudes towards received or withheld recognition in Europe and attributed it with varying significance, which follows from their different power positions in Turkey, where white Sunni Turkishness remains the implicit definition of national belonging (Ergin 2017, Gökay 2016, Ünlü 2016, Zeydanlioglu 2008). In Turkey, Alevis have historically been discriminated or assimilated into Turkish Islam (Dressler 2013). As a consequence, they often conceived of European recognition as a means to assert their independence from and gain empowerment vis-à-vis Sunni Islam. For many Sunnis, by contrast, recognition was a matter of their equal treatment with and acknowledgement by white-Christian European majority society, which many, however, did not see fulfilled. Many Sunnis openly criticised their enduring exclusion despite the existence of forms of official recognition of Islam, while many Alevis confirmed their deservingness of recognition by stressing their compatibility with European terms of belonging, drawing on characteristics of their faith and practice for which they have been persecuted and discriminated in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. Thus, in reflecting on being officially recognised by local and national Swiss, German and Austrian governments, Alevis and Sunnis navigated and negotiated both Western European and Turkish hierarchies of belonging based on racial terms of inclusion and exclusion.

The three empirical chapters served to illustrate what forms this could take. First, the integration paradigm featured strongly in the language of religious recognition. The applicants for recognition in this study were at the same time objects of integration, and participants either confirmed their own integratedness or rejected the concept's assumptions. Official recognition, especially in Basel, was regarded as a reward for successful integration. Secondly, in the course of Muslims' racialisation more generally and in religious recognition processes specifically, both a perpetual connection to the country of origin was attested and problematised, while at

the same time a disconnection was required in order to be granted European state recognition. Alevis' critical stance towards the Turkish state served their argument for compatibility with European values, but their official recognition in Europe did not grant them the platform to address their past and present grievances deriving from their oppression in Turkey, as was demonstrated for the Hamburg case study. Finally, recognition was also perceived by participants as a field of domesticating governance and it produced and reproduced hierarchies between "good" and "bad" representatives of the racial-legal category of Muslim, and even within the Alevi community, as shown in Vienna. While issues of integration, country-of-origin relations and domesticating governance were exemplified with one case study each, they were, to a certain extent, present in all three locales.

### **3. Implications: Recognition, nation-building and the European Question**

The relationship between Western liberal states and minority groups is often framed through the paradigm of recognition, in academic literature and by both states and communities themselves. Women, LGBTQ, indigenous, migrant or religious groups have, over the course of history, sought and variously been granted the recognition of the state in which they live. Official recognition, often following community struggles for its achievement, can contribute, it is proposed, to the equality of all citizens in the liberal nation-state (Taylor 1992, Fraser 2000, Lamont 2018). Yet, as was shown, official recognition is closely entangled in exclusionary politics of belonging. The problem of the persistent unequal position of religious minorities in Western European nation-states is not primarily one of lacking, insufficient or mis-recognition, as is forwarded by Meer et al. (2012), Gianni (2016) or Lamont (2018). In current processes of state recognition of migrant religious communities in Western liberal states, unequal belonging already lies embedded in the terms and constellations of official recognition.

Like the “emancipation” of Jews in the nineteenth century, the recognition of Muslims in Europe in the twenty-first century coincides with endeavours to integrate groups deemed Other, not only in terms of religion, but also of culture, values, loyalty and affective attachment, all of which are racially imbued, meaning based on the idea of enduring innate inferiority. Otherness can be gradually lessened and made acceptable, but must always be sustained to a certain degree in order to be regulated, managed and controlled so as not to disturb present hegemonic constellations (Brown 2004). The nation-state can tolerate religious-racial Others within its borders. Yet, the dominant status-quo is maintained as racial Others are subsumed, contained and ranked according to their recognition-worthiness. As religion-making in the context of Orientalism and colonialism has been a civilising project, imposing hierarchical categories but forever deferring equality with the West (Mandair & Dressler 2011), so is the incorporation of religious Others and their recognition as an officially recognised group in the state a balancing act between imposing the terms of “civilisation” and maintaining the status as perpetually Other. As subjects of religious recognition in Europe negotiate their legal and societal status there with a view to their comparatively higher or lower placement in the Turkish racial hierarchy of belonging, the nation-state order, where national belonging is racially defined, is ultimately reproduced.

The nation-state historically and by definition excludes its Others even when granting formal means of inclusion (Goldberg 2002). Frustration and resignation, indignation and defiance, but also gratitude and desire for approval, which could all be traced in participants’ responses, form part of the structure of feeling of the nation-state, as perpetual inequality is integral to it (Sharma 2020). The promises of citizenship and integration (Ayata 2020b, 2019b) or of sacrifice (Chaudhary 2019) to attain full belonging and equal participation have remained unfulfilled, and so has the promise of recognition to gain acknowledgement as equal members of society (Coulthard 2014). This explains why participants talked of being in a Christian

country and recounted their experiences of exclusion, but also why they are thankful for the rights given, stress their deservingness to have received such a status as opposed to others or claim the need to integrate and adapt despite being born in the country or possessing its citizenship. Their status as a permanent minority in a state seeking to maintain the character of its national majority (Mamdani 2020) means that they are subjected to discrimination, prejudice, security and integration policies despite their birth, long residence, citizenship and formal recognition as religious community. While Alevis have gained empowerment towards Sunnis in Europe, where their placements along the racial hierarchy are reversed, they remain unequal to the national majority in both Turkey and Europe.

Religious recognition is, thus, an act of exclusion through inclusion, the internalisation of exclusions. Terms of national belonging are reiterated and perpetual foreignness and need for integration based on racial-religious Otherness, which is conflated with real or attributed migration, is confirmed rather than overturned. Racialised religious Others are barred from the echelons of governmental belonging reserved for the white majority (Hage 2000). As argued by Goldberg (2002: 254):

“[T]he pressing question accordingly is not some version of the currently popular one in liberal circles, namely, whether a modern constitutional state can ‘recognise and accommodate cultural diversity’ [...]. That question presupposes as more or less given the very set of suppositions and structured ordering of the state marked so deeply by the histories of racial conception and formation.”

Recognition by Western European states and on condition of their national terms of inclusion reiterates their own historically limiting schemas. Like previous state attempts to integrate allegedly unruly parts of the population, “the integration of Muslims has become a nation-building challenge of historical significance” (Laurence 2012: 2). Europe has historically defined itself through its consecutive “questions”, and concomitant “solutions”, such as the Woman Question, the Jewish Question and now the Muslim Question. “Europe has all along

sought its own integrity, its unity or identity, but [...] it has done so through different, at times exclusive, at times inclusive, technologies, the institutionalisation of others as ‘problems’” (Anidjar 2013: 40). Rather than treating these as one European problem, Europe has distinguished between its many problems, “producing hierarchies, and geographies, of alterity among and between distinct groups and collectives or populations” (ibid.). Recognition’s conceptualisation as a reward for integration, as a policing of country-of-origin ties and conflicts, and as a means to domesticate Islam, in official discourse as well as community members’ own reflections and statements, shows that its Alevi and Sunni recipients are deemed essentially and enduringly foreign to Europe and reveals its role as a tool for nation-building.

At the same time, among the people contributing to this study, there have been calls to acknowledge the reality of diversity in their resident societies and to overcome the idea of a homogenic national community. Some questioned and challenged the dominant terms of belonging, asserting their own rightful belonging against hegemonic conceptualisations. The ability to do so, however, is structured by power, which is unequally distributed not only between white and non-white inhabitants of Western Europe, but also between groups who, in their common country of origin, assume majority and minority positions. For Alevis, moreover, achieving an equal status in Turkey is an equally, if not more important concern. Both Sunni and Alevi organisations actively seek their resident states’ official recognition and Alevis often frame their gained recognition status in Europe as a vital achievement and positive contrast to their enduring discrimination in Turkey. In their own reflections on recognition in Europe, Alevis and Sunnis, in this way, reckon with their positions within and between national hierarchies of belonging structured by racial terms of inclusion and exclusion.

#### **4. Where does this leave us? Possibilities for recognition and belonging in nation-states**

In his profound autoethnography, modelled on the writings of Frantz Fanon, Morsi (2017) reflects on the options open to Muslims in the West who are trapped in the culture talk of the War on Terror. He concludes that colonialism and Orientalism seal Muslims discursively, compelling them to either embody or deny the stereotypes against them. In this way, speaking the language of liberalism, equality, rights, tolerance and, I would add, recognition, in order to gain acknowledgement, means the acceptance and perpetuation of its racial conditions and structures and the subsumption “into the hierarchies of racism’s range of colours” (ibid.: 10). In talking back to affirm their belonging, to emphasise their non-Otherness, to deny their incompatibility, or to point out the real radicals, racialised subjects inevitably ratify the frame and the vocabulary of the discourse.

“Performing the moderate comes with a cost, as Fanon warned us, [...] it comes as a Trojan horse. It fails to deliver its promise of gaining white cultural or national recognition that supposedly provides an avenue of escape from racism. It simply keeps us sealed in within its web of language and gaze” (ibid.: 131).

The promise of recognition is one that reveals itself to be limited or even false, as already pointed out by postcolonial authors on recognition who observe its use in the management of racialised alterity (Balaton-Chrimes & Stead 2017, Coulthard 2014, Povinelli 1998).

Taking into account the overwhelming likelihood that the nation-state and its racialised definition will remain the dominant mode of geopolitical and ontological structuring for the foreseeable future, how, if at all, can recognition be redeemed and what are communities cast as minorities to do other than to seek their resident state’s recognition? Should they just turn their backs to it, focussing instead on internal valuation, as Coulthard (2014) suggests and which also some Sunni participants in this study proposed who eschewed seeking external approval? This is indeed problematic advice to give, considering that in the countries studied here a system of religious recognition by the state is already in place and granted to established religious communities. As was pointed out by some participants, as long as such constellations exist,

they want the same rights already available to others. Moreover, for Alevis, in light of their history of discrimination and assimilation in Turkey, as well as their ongoing power inequalities vis-à-vis majority Islam in Turkey and Europe, recognition in Europe assumes an existential and liberatory meaning. The ideal of recognition as forwarded by Honneth (1992), a moral imperative vital for a sense of self-worth and acknowledgement, also features in participants' responses. It is something they wish for, an ideal that reality, however, in many instances cannot live up to. The dilemma of recognition is that it contributes to subjectification and racialisation, functions within and reiterates a racial nation-state paradigm, but remains compelling and even vital to pursue (Hernandez-Aguilar 2017).

## **5. Contribution, limitation and outlook**

With this study, I have contributed important insight into different regimes of recognition, their interpretation and negotiation within the communities as well as the nature of their impact on recipients' feelings of belonging. Through a microsociological analysis, I have shown how recognition is debated and conceptualised by members of both racially and religiously Othered groups who, while discursively, institutionally and even legally subsumed under the category of Islam and treated under the larger question of Islam's place in Europe, hold diverging views on and position themselves differently in official recognition processes based on their unequal power positions in both Turkey and Europe. I outlined and discussed the meanings recognition assumes for members of different minority communities, tracing and attempting to account for the tensions and complexities inherent in recognition, both as a source of acknowledgement and safety, and its disciplining, discriminatory and oppressive powers, or at least its inability to form a counterforce to these. In order to make sense of this tension between the ideal of recognition and its empowerment on the one hand, and its structuredness by and reproduction of boundaries of belonging on the other, I considered such negotiations in

a context of race, its coconstitutive link to religion and its foundational role in the making of Europe and in the definition of its nation-states' terms of belonging. In this, I also took into account the different positionalities which the recognisees assume in their common country of origin, in which different definitions and racial hierarchies of nation-state belonging are applied.

I conclude by pointing to this study's shortcomings and, consequently, by suggesting questions for future research. The focus of my analysis of official religious recognition processes of Alevi and Sunni has been the European context of migrant integration and anti-Muslim racism. It is a context of which I have long been aware and highly critical and which I believe significantly structures the recognition processes and their negotiation by both Alevi and Sunni from Turkey. Meanwhile, I only came to learn about the existence, positionality and history of Alevi in the course of this research project. Understanding their concerns required the acquisition of entirely new knowledge as well as the critical reflection on my existing convictions. It is a process which I cannot claim to have completed with this thesis. Moreover, while anti-Muslim racism has become a topic of critical scholarship, which greatly informed my own analysis, racism against Alevi has not received the same theoretical academic treatment. Although I have taken into account the literature on the racial definition of the Turkish Republic based on Turkish Sunnism, as well as Alevi's position as objects of persecution, assimilation and annihilation in Turkey, I concede that the present thesis was not entirely able to escape this imbalance.

Furthermore, I realise that asking migrants and their descendants the question of belonging runs the risk of falling in line with the dominant idea that their belonging is questionable. Their feelings of belonging should be no more an object of scientific study than the feelings of belonging of white co-citizens. Hopefully, this will someday be commonly acknowledged. However, the fact that participants often had to assert their belonging against experiences and discourses of exclusion, as well as my use of official religious recognition

processes of Alevi and Sunni communities as a lens through which to study feelings of belonging, arguably justify my focus on them for the time being. In the future however, studies on belonging should include members of the white national majority. Still pursuing the topic of state recognition of religious communities, one could ask how white citizens make sense of current recognition processes and established recognition structures. How does it affect the manner in which they conceive of society and belonging, including their own? What do members of racialised minorities propose should happen to install them as full members of society beyond their legal parity as citizens and recognised religious communities? How can we frame such processes as instances of societal transformation that affect the lives of all its members, in an attempt to understand how a sense of governmental belonging can be reached for all?

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## Appendices

### 1. List of interviews

*1.1. Basel: October and November 2019*

<b>Community</b>	<b>Interview partners: pseudonym, role, gender, approx. age</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Length (min)</b>
Sunni (BMK, ITDV)	“Cenk”: board, male, 70s	15.10.2019	72
	“Sinan”: board, male, 30s	23.10.2019	86
	“Mesut”: youth group, male, 30s	28.10.2019	49
	“Esin”: student group, female, 20s	28.10.2019	65
	“Sezer”: youth group chair, male, 20s	31.10.2019	59
	“Sabiha”: board, female, 20s	04.11.2019	68
	“Filiz”: youth group, female, 20s	06.11.2019	62
	“Kayra”: women’s group, female, 30s	11.11.2019	64
	“Mehtap”: women’s group, female, 40s	19.11.2019	86
	“Hülya”: women’s group, female, 40s	20.11.2019	79
Alevi 1	“Metin”: board chair, male, 50s	15.10.2019	59
	“Lisa”: youth group, female, 20s	22.10.2019	79
	“Mert”: general member, male, 20s	24.10.2019	50
	“Halil”: youth group, male, 20s	27.10.2019	134
	“Murat”: board, male, 50s	30.10.2019	80
	“Arzu”: general member, female, 50s	01.11.2019	52
Alevi 2	“Özlem” board, female, 20s	10.10.2019	75
	“Adile”: student group, female, 20s	21.10.2019	70
	“Mercan”: board, female, 50s	22.10.2019	66
	“Lütfiye”: general member, female, 40s	08.11.2019	58
	“Öymen”: general member, male, 40s	18.11.2019	78

1.2. Hamburg: December 2019 till February 2020

Community	Interview partners: pseudonym, role, gender, approx. age	Date	Length (min)
Sunni 1 (DITIB)	“Esma”: women’s group chair, female, 40s	13.12.2019	58
	“Selma”: board, female, 50s	19.12.2019	72
	“Songül”: board, female, 40s	03.01.2020	80
	“Bahar”: youth group, female, 20s	07.01.2020	64
	“Melike”: general member, female, 30s	11.01.2020	56
	“Selahattin”: youth group chair, male, 20s	12.01.2020	73
	“Ferhat”: board chair, male, 40s	22.01.2020	58
Sunni 2 (BIG/IGMG)	“Alper”: board member, male, 40s	24.01.2020	76
	“Kemal”: youth group, male, 20s	01.02.2020	70
	“Sedef”: young women’s group, female, 20s	04.02.2020	64
	“Yasin”: board member, male, 20s	18.02.2020	78
	“Tarik”: board member, male, 20s	20.02.2020	41
	“Tuğçe”: young women’s chair, female, 30s	25.02.2020	98
Alevi (AABF)	“Sema”: board, female, 50s	12.12.2019	66
	“Derya”: youth group chair, female, 19	15.12.2019	57
	“Deren”: youth group, male, 20s	21.12.2019	71
	“Damla”: youth group, female, 19	08.01.2020	63
	“Akin”: board member, male, 30s	09.01.2020	79
	“Celal”: board chair, male, 50s	20.01.2020	63
	“Zeren”: board, female, 30s	23.01.2020	53
	“Aslı”: board, female, 50s	29.01.2020	74
	“Irfan”: board, male, 60s	30.01.2020	81
“Mustafa”: general member, male, 40s	31.01.2020	61	

1.3. Vienna: September till November 2020 + March 2021 (online)

Community	Interview partners: pseudonym, role, gender, approx. age	Date	Length (min)
Sunni 1 (ATIB)	“Sabri”: board chair, male, 40s	24.09.2020	91
	“Sevtap”: board, female, 50s	29.09.2020	84
	“Mazlum”: general member, male, 40s	19.10.2020	110
	“Yücel”: board chair, male, 50s	02.11.2020	113
	“Kerime”: general member, female, 60s	04.11.2020	52
	“Meliha”: general member, female, 18	10.11.2020	73 (online)
	“Feyza”: general member, female, 50s	18.11.2020	36 (online)
Sunni 2 (IFW student organisation)	“Feride”: general member, female, 20s	05.11.2020	88 (online)
	“Ezgi”: general member, female, 20s	09.11.2020	83 (online)
Islamic-Alevi (ALEVI)	“Sayan”: board, male, 50s	15.09.2020	185
	“Hilmi”: board, male, 40s	07.10.2020	83
	“Rasim”: board, male, 50s	13.10.2020	127
	“Defne”: general member, female, 20s	13.10.2020	127
	“Emre”: youth group chair, male, 20s	14.10.2020	52
	“Macide”: general member, female, 20s	20.10.2020	168
	“Eraydin”: board chair, male, 60s	24.10.2020	82
	“Yelda”: board, female, 30s	04.03.2021	82 (online)
	“Mihriban”: general member, female, 50s	08.03.2021	66 (online)
Alevi (AABF)	“Arat”: general member, male, 60s	22.09.2020	75
	“Ahsen”: board, female, 50s	25.09.2020	120
	“Oguz”: youth group, male, 20s	02.10.2020	93
	“Okyar”: youth chair, male, 20s	08.10.2020	81
	“Ismihan”: board, female, 50s	12.10.2020	105
	“Coskun”: general member, male, 60s	16.10.2020	107
	“Üner”: board, male, 30s	21.10.2020	113
	“Alkim”: general member, male, 40s	28.10.2020	116
	“Emel”: youth group, female, 20s	03.03.2021	88 (online)

#### 1.4. Expert interviews

Place	Interview partner	Date	Length (min)	Researchers present
Basel	Yavuz Taşoğlu, BMK	24.07.2019	80	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
	Atilla Toptaş, parliament	25.06.2020	127	Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
	Mustafa Atici, parliament	06.07.2020	110	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
	Hulusi Yildiz, Kulturvereinigung Aleviten & Bekatschi	07.08.2020	172	Bilgin Ayata, Serdar Kandil
	David Atwood, Runder Tisch	19.06.2019	Not recorded	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
	Lilo Roost Vischer, Runder Tisch	30.07.2019	108	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
	Prof. Felix Hafner, Uni Basel	30.07.2019	93	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
	Kaspar Sutter, Präsidialdepartement	04.08.2020	125	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
	Hans Georg Signer, constitutional commission religion/education	08.09.2020	68	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
Hamburg	Ismail Kaplan, AABF	14.01.2020	100	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
	Baykal Arslanbuğa, AABF	16.01.2020	70	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
	Norbert Müller, Schura	15.01.2020	133	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg, Serdar Kandil
	Ahmet Yazici, formerly Schura/BIG	14.01.2020	164	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg
	Fatih Yildiz, Schura/BIG	16.01.2020	68	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg
	Filiz Demirel, Green party	17.01.2020	69	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg
Vienna	Deniz Karabulut, AABF	09.10.2020	151	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg
	Özgür Turak, AABF	09.10.2020	130	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg
	Ertürk Maral, ALEVI	10.10.2020	193	Bilgin Ayata, Vivien Nürnberg

## 2. List of coding categories

Group identity: Perception of own community as a distinct social group defined by formal and informal criteria of membership, sharing a feeling of unity and bound together in relatively stable patterns of interaction (Tajfel & Turner 1979).

- Definition, proper perception, existence
- Sense of belonging to religious community
- Generational differences

National belonging: A personal sense of belonging (feelings of comfort, attachment, familiarity, security, Antonsich 2010) to the nation-state, irrespective of structural exclusion.

- Belonging to Germany/ Switzerland/ Austria
- Use of term “Heimat”/ “Zuhause”
- Use of possessive pronouns when talking about countries
- Dual/ multiple belongings
- Relationship recognition belonging

Local belonging: A personal sense of belonging (feelings of comfort, attachment, familiarity, security, *ibid.*) to the city, quarter/neighbourhood, irrespective of structural exclusion.

- City/district
- Use of term “Heimat”/ “Zuhause”
- Neighbourhood relations, local political ties
- Familiarity
- “Multiculti”

Perceived societal position: sense of one’s standing in the social hierarchy in comparison with others, especially the majority, informed by one’s social locations (class, race, gender, religion etc.) and the way these are judged and valued in society (Yuval-Davis 2011a, 2011b).

- (Lack of) formal equality, equal treatment
- (Lack of) ownership, demands, claims-making
- Political participation and representation
- (Lacking) security, protection, stability
- Significance of citizenship
- Discourse of gratitude, reward, deservingness
- Integration discourse (affirming, critiquing)
- Fate of future generations

Sense of exclusion: A sense of being marginalised and discriminated, denied full access to membership in the national community, equal opportunities and participation, i.e. social and normative societal isolation, marginalisation, barred access to social rights (Silver 1994).

- Experiences of prejudice, racism
- Experiences of structural exclusion
- Discrepancy legal/socio-political status
- Politicisation of recognition

State-community relations: Perceived nature and quality of relationship between own religious community and state authorities, based on own dealings/ encounters with state policy or state personnel/representatives.

- State control, restriction, power
- State attention, support, trust, respect

Intercommunal relations: Perceived nature and quality of relationship between local Alevi and Sunni Muslim communities, in Vienna also between both Alevi communities.

- Relationship to Islam
- Relationship to Alevism

Sense of belonging to country of origin: A personal sense of belonging (feelings of comfort, attachment, familiarity, security) to Turkey, both the country as a whole and particular locales

- Comparison to/ situation in Turkey