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Mosque Debates in Germany Between Democratic Participation and Social Exclusion

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a rising number of German Muslim associations initiated representative mosque projects, which are highly contested in the German society. In these conflicts, provisos of local residents against Muslim prayer houses in their neighbourhoods often intermingle with prejudiced discourses about mosques as visual signs of Islam. This article critically examines mosque debates as targets of right-wing populist propaganda, but also as opportunities to question commonly held prejudices against Muslims and to deepen the systemic inclusion and democratic participation of immigrants.

Key words: mosque debates, anti-Muslim racism, populism, right-wing extremism, Germany

INTRODUCTION

Germany currently witnesses a growing number of initiatives by Muslim associations to build visible mosques. The opening of representative mosques in Duisburg (2008), Cologne (expected in winter 2012) and other cities is a clear sign that after a long period during which Muslim prayer houses were predominantly located in backyard-areas of German cities and only seldom recognisable as mosques, Muslim associations more actively claim the right to build representative prayer houses. This demand for a higher visibility is closely connected to the request for more participation. But mosques in Germany are often highly contested amongst local residents and

politicians, as well as in the media. In the debates, the Muslims' demand for recognition is often counteracted by the request of local residents for more participation in city planning processes. Moreover, mosque conflicts frequently serve as propaganda vehicles for right-wing populist parties, which draw upon commonly held prejudices against Muslims in order to promote their racist propaganda. Mosque debates therefore become a question of democratic participation in a twofold way: It is not only the right to democratic participation and public visibility of Muslim associations that is at stake, but also the wish of local residents to decide about matters of public interest in their neighbourhood.

This democratic demand is in constant danger of becoming the target of right-wing populist propaganda campaigns because conflicts about mosque projects are often influenced by prejudiced media images of Muslims and the narrative of a "war of civilisations" [Tibi 2001]. Using the example of mosque debates in Germany, this article critically examines the relation between demands for democratic participation and processes of social exclusion. Mosque debates will be analysed on the basis of a description of Muslim life in Germany and empirical findings about anti-Muslim prejudices. In a second step, it will be outlined how populist parties use campaigns against mosques as a strategy for their pseudo-democratic renewal of right-wing ideologies. Finally, it will be shown in which ways (and under which conditions) debates about mosques can improve the democratic inclusion of Muslim associations, by creating opportunities for productive dialogue and by providing occasions to question the monolithic image of a German *Leitkultur*.

MUSLIMS IN A SECULAR STATE

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of Muslims in Germany because there are no official statistics about their religious affiliation. Moreover, believers are often not listed as members of a mosque-association, even if they frequently visit a mosque. Until 2009, official statistics estimated a number of 3 to 3.5 million Muslims, referring essentially to immigrants from so-called Islamic countries [Brettfeld, Wetzels 2007]. In 2009, a survey commissioned by the *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees*)* in collaboration with the *Deutsche Islamkonferenz* (German Islam Conference*)* found that there are currently between 3.8 and 4.3 million Muslims living in Germany [Haug et al. 2009: 12f.]. They account for approximately five per cent of the population. Although Muslims are often referred to as a minority community, it is a very diverse group, comprising immigrants and non-immigrants from different countries and social backgrounds. About half of the Muslims in Germany are German citizens. Muslim immigrants in Germany originate from more than 46 different countries. The majority of them (2.5 million or 63 per cent) has a Turkish background. Other regions of origin include South-East-Europe (approx. 500,000), the Middle East (approx. 300,000) and North-Africa (approx.

260,000). The overwhelming majority of German Muslims belongs to the Sunni community (74 per cent), but there are also considerable numbers of Alevis (almost all of them of Turkish origin), whereas the percentage of Shiites (mostly from Iran and the Middle East) and Ahmadis (often from Pakistan) is comparably low.

Many Muslims arrived in the aftermath of the *Anwerbeabkommen* (recruitment-agreement), signed by Turkey and Germany in 1961. Until the end of the recruitment in 1973, more than 600,000 Turkish immigrants came to Germany. But even after the end of the official recruitment, Turkish immigrants kept arriving in considerable numbers because workers, who now decided to stay in Germany permanently, were followed by their families. The number of Turks in Germany consequently increased to 1.5 million till the beginning of the 1980s and reached a peak of 2.1 million Turkish citizens living in Germany in 1998. The arrival of labour immigrants from Turkey, Italy, Spain and other countries has often been described by sociologists as the creation of a new lower class because immigrants often came from lower classes in their home countries and they usually had to accept unqualified and consequently low paid jobs, even if they had completed a formation in their country of origin [Treibel 2011: 231–234].

Even though a migrant middle class is slowly developing, immigrants in Germany (especially of Turkish origin) are still disadvantaged in respect of their income, as well as access to housing and education [Peucker 2010; Gestring 2006; Müller, Stanat 2006]. The terms *Muslim* and *Turk* are often used interchangeably in public debates, but Turkish labour migrants only account for a certain part of the Muslim population in Germany and not all of them are necessarily Muslims. Many Muslims in Germany did not arrive as labour migrants, but as refugees who left their country because of political and religious persecution (e.g. Turkish Alevis and Ahmadis from Pakistan) or as war refugees (e.g. from Yugoslavia). Haug, Müssig and Stichs (2009) show that Muslims are disadvantaged in terms of education and income. There are, however, considerable differences between Muslims from different countries. In 2008, 52 per cent of Muslims from Central Asia, 32 per cent from the Middle East and 11 per cent of Turkish Muslims had to rely on social welfare services [Haug, Müssig, Stichs 2009: 233]. At the same time, 15 per cent of Muslims had no educational qualification, a rate twice as high than amongst other groups. Some studies, e.g. [Frindte, Boehnke, Wagner 2011; Brettfeld, Wetzels 2007] suggest that the perception of (young) Muslims to belong to a discriminated group of society in some cases leads to a rejection of "Western values" and assimilatory demands. But at the same time, a majority of Turkish Muslims clearly expresses the wish to have more contact with Germans and to overcome processes of segregation in "ethnic colonies" [Ceylan 2006; Haug, Müssig, Stichs 2009: 275].

Muslims in Germany are organised in more than 2,600 local communities which are usually associated to one of the umbrella organisations on the federal level. The four biggest Muslim organisations in Germany are the *Diyanet İşleri Türk-Islam Birliği* (Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institutions for Religious Affairs, DITIB), the *Verein*

Islamischer Kulturzentren (Union of Islamic Cultural Centres, VIKZ), the *Islamrat der Bundesrepublik* (Islamic Council of the Federal Republic) and the *Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland* (Central Council of Muslims in Germany). DITIB and the VIKZ explicitly see themselves as associations for Muslims of Turkish origin, whereas the *Zentralrat* and the *Islamrat* were originally constituted as overarching unions of associations from different backgrounds.

The VIKZ is the oldest Muslim organisation in Germany. It has been founded in 1973 as *Islamisches Kulturzentrum Köln* (Islamic cultural Center Cologne) and was renamed in 1980. The VIKZ is associated to the *Süleymanci*-movement in Turkey, a movement whose doctrine is rooted in Islamic mysticism [Lemmen 2002: 49–53]. The VIKZ has no direct political affiliation, but it works towards an increased importance of Islam in both the Turkish and the German society. In 1986, the VIKZ was one of the founding members of the *Islamrat,* an overarching union of Muslim associations, but it left the organisation only two years after its constitution. The *Islamrat* was consequently threatened to be entirely marginalised. In 1990 the Islamic Community of *Milli Görüş (*National Religious View) joined the organisation and quickly became the dominant voice. The *Islamrat* currently has 30 members and represents more than 600 mosque communities. The majority of its members is in some way associated to *Milli Görüş*, an organisation with approximately 57,000 members and close connections to the islamicist movement of *Necmettin Erbakan* in Turkey [Lemmen 2002: 86f.; Salama 2010: 25; Wunn/Mohaghegh 2007: 38–54]. Because of its islamicist ideology and its allegedly anti-constitutional politics, *Milli Görüş* is currently under surveillance of the *Verfassungsschutz* (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution*)*.

With currently 900 local communities, most of them with approximately 130 to 150 families, DITIB is the most important Muslim association in Germany. It has been founded in 1984 with the aim to unite all Turkish-Islamic Associations. DITIB is a branch of the *Diyanet İşleri Baskanligi* (Office for Religious Affairs, DIB) in Turkey, a religious authority that has been founded in 1924 to support the kemalist and laicist politics of the newly founded Turkish Republic against Islamic institutions.[1] The foundation of DITIB can in this respect also be understood as a reaction of the Turkish state against anti-laicist groups such as *Milli Görüş* or the VIKZ, which quickly gained support amongst Turkish immigrants in Europe and were increasingly perceived as a threat by the Turkish state in the 1980s. Today, the DIB (and consequently also DITIB in Germany) promotes a secularised and reformed version of Turkish Islam. DITIB very actively claims the right to build representative mosques in Germany and initiated several mosque projects in recent years, amongst them the two

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[1] DITIB officials often argue that the organisation is independent from the DIB, but the fact that the president of the DIB is at the same time honorary-president of DITIB, the reality that the Imams are paid by the Turkish state and many formulations in the statutes of DITIB clearly suggest that DITIB is in fact a branch of the DIB [Lemmen 2000: 37f.; Wunn/Mohaghegh 2007: 30–32].

important mosques in Duisburg and Cologne. DITIB supports its members financially and represents them in public. But most importantly, DITIB provides the Imams for its members, who are paid by the Turkish state. The Imams are trained in Turkey and sent to Germany for a period of four years. This sometimes makes it difficult for them to get in contact with their community because they usually do not speak German sufficiently and often have little knowledge about everyday life in Germany. Although DITIB is the biggest association of Muslims in Germany, it is not representative for Muslims in general because it explicitly targets Muslims of Turkish origin.

In 1994, the *Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland* tried to fill the apparent lack of representative structures and attempted to constitute a federal association that does not target certain ethnic groups or religious confessions. However, although it unites groups from different backgrounds, the *Zentralrat* faces similar difficulties as other Muslim associations because its 19 members only represent 10 per cent of the organised Muslims in Germany. Considering the fact that only 20 per cent of Muslims in Germany are members of a Muslim organisation, the *Zentralrat* only speaks for a small minority of Muslims. Moreover, Alevis, Shiis and Ahmadis are not accepted members of any of the influential federal organisations. This lack of a federal structure that could represent the interests of all, or at least the majority of Muslims in Germany (as the *Zentralrat der Juden* does for the Jews) reflects the diversity of Muslims in Germany, but it also proves to be problematic in several respects.

The Federal Republic of Germany understands itself as a secular state and it consequently grants the freedom and undisturbed practice of religion in the fourth article of the Constitution. In contrast to laicist Constitutions (e.g. in France or Turkey), the German state does not strictly separate state and religion but it actively supports the practice of religion (including the right to mission) in private and public spaces. However, according to the general consensus, the secular state is bound to the principle of neutrality in matters of religion and *Weltanschauung* (philosophy of life). As Heiner Bielefeldt stresses, this neutrality is not an expression of ethic relativism, but a result of the moral and legal obligation of the state to grant the freedom of religion [Bielefeldt 2003: 16.]. The principle of non-identification obliges the state to treat all religious communities equally. Islamic communities therefore have the same right to public visibility as Christian churches. But the fact that they are only organised as civil associations, whereas Christian churches (as well as the *Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*) have the status of *Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts* (public corporations with tight links to the state) often creates a disparity between the rights of Christian churches and Muslim associations. In debates about the teaching of the Islamic religion at German schools, state representatives often complain about the lack of a representative structure for Muslims that could serve as an institutionalised partner in a similar way the Christian churches do. In reaction to these complaints, law experts have pointed out that the neutrality of the state includes that he does not intervene into internal affairs and organisational questions of religious communities [Rohe 2001: 77]. This applies independently from the number of members or the social

significance of a religious community. Although the German state can therefore not take a certain organisational structure as a precondition to grant constitutional rights, the absence of a centralised union of Muslim associations still causes disadvantages compared to the public corporations of Christian churches.

In case of mosque debates, certain administrative rules have proven to be open for interpretations that certain rules need to be applied more strictly in case of mosques than in case of churches. Regulations about the uniformity of appearance of buildings in German cities as well as assumptions about personal feelings of alienation amongst local residents in noise-control regulations sometimes make it difficult for Muslim associations to claim the same rights as Christian churches [Wieshaider 2001]. The call of the *muezzin* for example has sometimes been defined by local administrations as an uncommon noise that needs to be regulated more strictly than the supposedly common noise of church bells [Stoop 2010]. Several court judgements, however, have stressed the fact that these administrative regulations do not justify deviations from the principle of state neutrality[2]. Mosques are therefore generally subjected to the same rules as Christian churches and it is widely agreed that the construction of representative mosques is an integral part of the right to religious freedom.

MOSQUE DEBATES AND ANTI-MUSLIM DISCOURSES

Mosques in Germany are a comparably recent phenomenon. Besides a prayer house for Turkish soldiers who served in the Prussian army under Friedrich Wilhelm (1688–1740), the first "real" mosque has been built in Berlin-Wilmersdorf in 1924 by the Ahmadiyya community. The mosque in Berlin was inspired by the Taj Mahal and constructed as a representative building with a dome and 32 meters high minarets. But the question of Muslim prayer houses only became an important issue of debate in the context of immigration in the aftermath of World War II, when Muslims moved to Germany in considerable numbers. As the term *guest-worker* suggests, the recruitments of foreign workers in the 1960s were initially thought to be only temporary arrangements. During this time, there were only very few mosques and the respective projects were often initiated and financially supported by foreign donors. Early representative prayer houses that have been built after the war include the *Fazl--e-Umar-Mosque* in Hamburg (1957), the *Nuur-Mosque* in Frankfurt (1959) or the *Ali-Mosque* in Hamburg (1961). The overwhelming majority of Muslim prayer houses took the form of temporary installations in private houses or rented rooms. But the rising number of Muslims soon made it necessary for Muslim communities to move into larger buildings, which were often located in industrial areas and "backyards" of German cities. After the end of the guest-worker recruitment agreement in 1973,

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[2] Cf. *Oberverwaltungsgericht Rheinland-Pfalz*, 20.11.2000 – 8A1139, NvwZ 2001, pp. 933 f. and Wieshaider 2001: 155–180.

the German state and many immigrants themselves recognised that they would stay in Germany permanently. Migrants consequently started to organise themselves in associations and mosque communities. But it was not before the beginning of the 1990s that the – now at least partially institutionalised – Muslim organisations actively started to claim the right to substitute existing prayer rooms with visible mosques.

Today, there are approximately 2,600 mosques in Germany, but only 150 of them can be classified as representative buildings. Moreover, the majority of them is still located in the suburbs and industrial areas of German cities. The dimensions of representative mosques are usually comparably small, but the rising number of mosque-initiatives shows that Muslim associations feel increasingly confident to plan visible prayer houses. Although the construction of mosques can be described as an "expression of normality that re-establishes the religious diversity of German cities after a period of violent homogenisation in the Nazi-period" [Schmitt 2007: 180], mosque projects are nevertheless heatedly debated in the German public. Often, it is not so much questioned whether a mosque should be built or not, but it is rather the nature and the location of the building that is criticised [Leggewie 2002: 815]. Even though a general rejection of mosques is seldom pronounced in mainstream debates, provisos of local residents who expect traffic problems and noise pollution often intermingle with the rejection of mosques as visible symbols of Islam. The fact that local residents often protest against infrastructural projects in their own neighbourhood (e.g. streets, shopping malls etc.) although they generally agree that the respective structure is necessary for society, is a well known phenomenon that has been described as the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) principle [Thomsett 2004]. Mosque debates however differ from comparable arguments over supermarkets and airports insofar as they often involve prejudiced assumptions about the nature of Islam as a general threat to the German society.

Since the events of 9/11, the hostility against Muslims in Europe and Germany has grown considerably. According to a study conducted by the *European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia* in 2006, 70 per cent of Germans expected "conflicts between life as a Muslim and life in a modern society" [EUMC 2006: 42]. A similar study conducted by the *Ebert Foundation* in 2008 found that a majority of Germans agreed to the statements that "Muslims demand too much in Germany", that "Islam is a religion of intolerance" and that "the views of Muslims about women are not compatible with our values" [Zick et al. 2011: 70]. In the German public, Muslims are often conflated with (Turkish) immigrants. The image of Muslims therefore develops in close relation to discourses about immigrants in general. The German media often portray immigrants as a possible threat to German resources or as a criminal risk to society [Jäger et al. 1998; Ruhrmann 2006]. Moreover, the integration of immigrants is commonly depicted as a problematic process and it is discussed with frequent references to water and war metaphors (e.g. waves or a flood of immigrants) [Böke 1997]. A study about the media coverage of Islam in the public TV channels ARD and ZDF that has been conducted by Hafez and Richter in 2007 found that 81 per

cent of reports about Islam discussed the topic in negative contexts such as terrorism, international conflicts, religious intolerance or islamisation [Hafez, Richter 2007: 40f]. In many cases, these prejudiced discourses about Muslims serve as a "mirror" for Western societies because the portrayal of Islam as backward, violent, sexist and anti-emancipatory directly legitimises the narrative of the progressive, non-violent, democratic and emancipated West.

These images about Muslims have a considerable influence on mosque debates. Despite regional differences (especially between cities and smaller villages) certain argumentations play a role in almost every mosque debate in Germany. The most common topics discussed in relation to mosques are:

1. Minarets, dome and other architectural features of the respective mosque
2. Parking lots, traffic problems and other administrative questions
3. The general question whether a mosque "fits into a neighbourhood"
4. The call of an eventual *muezzin*
5. The question how the building is financed
6. The language of the services in the mosque
7. The question whether a mosque could lead to the creation of "Muslim ghettos" and "parallel-societies"
8. Fundamentalism, violence and terrorism.

Many of these topics reflect provisos of local residents, but they are often discussed in a way that is likely to reproduce commonly held prejudices against Muslims. Minarets and domes as well as the call of a muezzin are then interpreted as visual (or acoustic) signs of Islam and its alleged claim to power. Financial questions often involve accusations that Muslim associations are controlled by foreign powers (if they receive donations from foreign countries) or that they exploit the German welfare system (if they receive state funding). In a similar way, the question, which language will be spoken in a mosque, often aims to uncover the alleged anti-integration policy of Muslim associations, or is connected to the argument that it will be more difficult for German authorities to control the respective Muslim community.

In many cases, Muslim associations have responded to these accusations by referring to the fact that the mosque is a legitimate expression of religious freedom. The lack of public visibility and systemic integration of Muslim communities often prevents them from implementing a more active strategy of open debates. In some cases (e.g. in Duisburg), mosque communities were able to act at least partly as agenda-setters and successfully abandoned the passive role of someone who constantly has to justify against accusations. This is, however, only possible if the respective community is supported by the local administration and politicians. In most cases, the Muslim associations themselves simply lack the proficiency, resources and public credibility that is needed to successfully mediate a conflict. It is therefore crucial for Muslim communities to find local cooperation partners helping them to respond to the accusations of mosque opponents.

In order to analyse different dimensions of mosque debates, Schmitt [2002: 342f.] suggests to differentiate between ethnic-cultural, city-space-related and religious argumentations, whereby all levels can be addressed both in favour and against a mosque project. Arguments related to the city space include administrative questions such as a supposed lack of parking lots caused by a mosque in the neighbourhood, but also the argument that a mosque enhances the general appearance of the skyline. Worries that a mosque could contribute to build a Muslim ghetto also belong to this category. Ethnic-cultural arguments on the other hand are described by Schmitt as symbolic conflicts in which "the acceptance of a marginalised group of the population is symptomatically expressed" [Schmitt 2007: 182], whereas religious arguments relate to the tension between the accusation that mosques are an expression of the power of Islam and references to religious freedom in Germany. In mosque conflicts, administrative questions are often used strategically in order to support arguments on the religious or ethnic-cultural level.

This symbolic over-determination of mosque conflicts leads in some cases to a situation where the actual conflicts about concrete questions such as parking lots or traffic problems appear to be unsolvable because the conflict is transferred into a conflict about "the control over a territory and its symbolic determination" [Allievi 2003: 7]. In an analysis influenced by Henri Lefebvres' theory of space, Brunn [2006: 168] argues, that the problem of symbolic conflicts is not limited to mere surrogate conflicts about administrative questions but that it also refers to conflicts about the *meaning* of symbols themselves. It should be kept in mind however, that debates about mosques are not limited to cultural, religious and administrative questions but that social and economic arguments (e.g. that a mosque could attract tourists, or the fear that it might lead to a decline of house-prices) can also play an important role.

Case studies have shown that the decision whether a mosque should be built or not strongly depends on the attitudes of local actors [Kapphan 2004; Schmitt 2007; Leggewie 2009: 125–180]. Especially the behaviour of local administrations, political representatives and the major of a city have proven to be decisive. But the positive attitude of political parties and the local administration does not grant that the mosque will be accepted by the majority of the population. Concerning the question of how administrations and politicians deal with the communication problem, Leggewie identifies three strategies: 1. the paternalist approach to fully take the position of the mosque community and to guide them through the process, 2. an unorganised politics that is often purely oriented at administrative rules without implementing a political agenda, and finally 3. a strategy of public debate and discussion [Leggewie 2002: 819]. The strategy of open debate clearly proved to be the most successful one in accomplishing the aim to gain support for a mosque project, but it also brings the danger to provide a platform for populist propaganda, especially if the discussion highly draws upon stereotypical images of the Muslim instead of trying to solve concrete problems in a local context.

THE POPULIST THREAT

In recent years, far right groups in Germany such as the network of *Pro*-parties or *Die Freiheit* (Freedom-Party) tried to renew far right ideologies with populist programmes. These parties often developed out of more traditional ethnic-nationalist parties, but they try to distance themselves from other groups of the far right by implementing seemingly democratic aims into their programmes. The group *Pro Köln* provides a good example of how populists in Germany try to present themselves as a regional movement from below that serves as an alternative to the establishment. In contrast to the common use of the term *populism* as an accusation against political opponents, *Pro Köln* explicitly describes itself as a "right-wing populist success model" [Pro Köln 2007: 3]. Instead of building a uniform party on the federal level, *Pro* decided to form a network of seemingly local organisations (even though other local groups highly depend on the activists from Cologne). The reference to hard--working people allows them to distance themselves from the allegedly corrupt elites on the one hand and foreigners, homeless people and other "welfare scroungers" on the other hand. The propaganda of the *Pro*-movement often aims at uncovering the corruption of mainstream parties, at condemning the supposed waste of money for social welfare and at criticising the foreign infiltration of Germany.

As conflicts of mostly local importance, mosque debates provide an ideal battleground for right-wing populist attempts to draw upon existing provisos of local residents against a mosque to promote their ideology. During the debate about the mosque in Cologne, that will be opened in Summer 2013, *Pro Köln* argued: "The great mosque will develop into a centre of Islamic life in the region. For the Friday--prayers, there will also be visitors from outside Cologne. The parking situation is already a catastrophe. None of the irresponsible politicians has thought about that. Besides the lack of parking lots, there will be heavy noise emissions, mass congregations and oriental speaker announcements that will be repeated over and over again, as well as material for social explosions"[3] [Pro Cologne 2006: 1].

With these arguments, *Pro Köln* draws upon worries of local residents concerning the traffic situation in their neighbourhood. But the conclusive forecast of social explosions already leads away from administrative questions over to a critique of the mosque as a sign of power around which a future ghetto will form: "In Germany, the Constitution is applied, not the Islamic sharia laws. We do not want that people cannot dare to enter the district anymore. Islam disregards human rights. That is why

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[3] Translations by me. Original quote: "Argumente gegen die Kölner Moschee: »Die Groß-Moschee würde sich zu einem Kristallisationspunkt des islamischen Lebens in der Region entwickeln. Zum Freitagsgebet werden auch auswärtige Besucher erwartet. Schon jetzt ist die örtliche Parkplatzsituation katastrophal. Darüber hat offenbar keiner der (un)verantwortlichen Politiker nachgedacht. Es drohen neben Parkplatzproblemen gravierende Lärmbelästigungen, Massenaufmärsche und lautstarke, sich ständig wiederholende orientalische Lautsprecherdurchsagen sowie eine Menge sozialer Sprengstoff«".

the islamisation has to be stopped"[4] [flyer of Pro-NRW 2010]. *Pro Köln* argues with a clear distinction between Islam and Judeo-Christian or Occidental German society. In this opposition, Islam is portrayed as a sexist, violent and backward religion that disregards basic human rights, whereas the German society is depicted as enlightened and peaceful. In the supposed fight between Western society and Islam, the mosque does not only play the role of a symbol of power, but it is also accused to have concrete effects on the social sphere by attracting more Muslims into the district and creating a Muslim ghetto. According to them, *Pro Köln* is the only party that is not corrupted by multiculturalist ideas and therefore the only voice that can articulate the interest of the "silent majority" [flyer of Pro-NWR 2010] not to be overrun by masses of violent Muslims. Instead of referring to the freedom of religion that grants Muslim minorities the right to build representative prayer houses, *Pro Köln* presents its own racist propaganda as a minority position that needs to be protected: "According to Beisicht [the head of *Pro Köln*, DS], the resistance against political correctness, opinion terror and prohibition of thinking is an obligation for every citizen"[5] [Pro Köln 2008: 2].

In their campaign against a mosque in Cologne, *Pro Köln* heavily drew upon democratic forms of participation. In 2006, the group collected 23,000 signatures against the mosque in order to initiate a referendum. Although it had no chance to be successful because administrative questions, such as the allowance to build a certain type of building, cannot become the target of a referendum in Germany, the petition nevertheless had to be formally reviewed and officially rejected by the administration. By implementing methods of direct democracy, populists try to strengthen the opposition of the will of the people in contrast to official politics. Concerning *Pro Köln*, this aim could not be achieved because many signatures were faked and the party was consequently itself accused of dubious practices. But *Pro Köln* nevertheless established the mosque as a subject of democratic decision making and positioned itself as the only party in opposition to the mosque. The conflict over a mosque in Cologne therefore provides a good example how public polls and populist interventions turn the question of whether a mosque should be built or not into a democratic decision. This pseudo-democratic demand for participation is incompatible with the liberal democratic right to freedom of religion that grants every religious community the right to build appropriate prayer houses. Instead, populist parties such as *Pro Köln* opt for a concept of majority rule, where even fundamental human rights are not granted without fail anymore but can be revoked by the majority at any time.

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[4] Original quote: "In Deutschland hat das Grundgesetz zu gelten und nicht die islamische Scharia. Wir wollen nicht, dass man sich in manche Viertel nicht mehr hineintraut. Der Islam missachtet Menschenrechte. Deshalb muss die Islamisierung gestoppt werden".

[5] Original quote: "Nach Beisicht ist nunmehr in Köln der Widerstand gegen politische Korrektheit, Meinungsterror und Denkverbote absolute Bürgerpflicht".

CONCLUSION

During the last few years, Germany has witnessed several campaigns of "angry citizens" who feel that their interests are ignored by local administrations [Göttinger Institut für Demokratieforschung 2011: 13]. In this context, mosque debates have been interpreted as conflicts about democratic participation processes at a local level. Public hearings, however, often show that the rejection of mosques is not only motivated by a lack of democratic openness on the side of local administrations, but the conflicts often turn into surrogate debates in which the integration of Muslims and immigrants in general is discussed. The opposition of parking lots and mosques as well as the fear of ghettoisation and social explosions show that stereotypes about Muslims and immigrants often intermingle with class conflicts and a general fear of social instability. Conflicts about mosques can therefore also be understood as an expression of the defence of the *status quo* in a society whose wealth has been based on the availability of cheap labour by (Muslim) immigrants.

Despite the problem that the debates partly serve as surrogate conflicts and even though right-wing populist parties try to use mosque debates as a tool for their racist propaganda, they can nevertheless have positive effects for the democratic culture on a local level. Debates about representative mosques often provide the first occasion for politicians of different parties, members of the local administration and representatives of mosque communities to enter a political discourse. By doing so, mosque debates offer the opportunity for Muslim associations to establish personal contacts and to integrate into the systemic processes of local politics. Moreover, the debates often constitute the first chance for a Muslim community to enter the political sphere and to be acknowledged as a political actor. In some cases, mosque debates even led to institutionalised contacts between Muslim associations, Christian churches and (local) politicians. Mosque conflicts therefore not only risk to become the target of racist campaigns by right-wing populist parties, but also provide the chance to enhance democratic-participation processes by establishing democratic rules of debates and by bringing representatives of different political actors together with local citizens and Muslim associations. The conflicts in Cologne and Duisburg have shown that integration processes that follow a mosque debate are partly driven by economic considerations. The planned inclusion of the mosque in Cologne into commercial tourist tours (together with the famous cathedral and the synagogue) and the self-image of the city as a vibrant multicultural metropolis are designed to attract tourists and investors from all over the world. The acceptance of the mosque is in this respect also the outcome of an economic inclusion that takes the form of an appropriation and commodification of *the Other* and his cultural and economic value [Ha 2005].

These examples show the complexity of conflicts about mosques in European societies and the manifold connection to the question of democratic inclusion. Mosques are commonly discussed with references to prejudiced discourses about Muslims

and they often serve as vehicles for populist propaganda. But at the same time, the very fact that an increasing number of Muslim associations feels confident to build representative prayer houses is an expression of the will to participate equally in the German society. Moreover, conflicts about mosques have the potential to contribute to the inclusion of Muslim associations into the local political field. Although mosques are highly contested in the German public, debates about them can therefore have positive effects for Muslims if the debates focus on solutions for concrete problems and if they are debated in a way that does not draw upon the unjustified distinction between German citizens and Muslim immigrants. It should however be kept in mind that debates about mosques do neither solve the truly political problems of socio-economic, legal and political discrimination of immigrants (or those who are identified as such) in Germany, nor are they suited to overcome the deficits of opportunities for democratic participation. The ambiguous outcomes of mosque debates in Germany therefore point to the fact that the struggle of Muslim associations to realise their right to freedom of religion cannot substitute the political tasks to address the apparent demand for new forms of basis-democratic participation and to overcome existing socio-economic and political inequalities.

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