Migration and Religion in Germany Today

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Abstract

Migration is the most significant characteristics of Europe after World War II. In many European countries, in particular in Western Europe, it has led to multiethnic societies with special integration problems but only in more recent times its impact for multireligious pluralism was discovered in social sciences studies. It is therefore necessary to have a closer look at both: multiethnicity and religious pluralism and its respective consequences for the social peaceful living together in society, especially as concerns present-day Germany.

Keywords: migration, religion, Germany, society, religious

1. Migration and Multiethnicity

1.1 Reasons for the Change into Multiethnic Societies

Since the end of World War II many European societies have gone through a fundamental change from a more homogeneous local population towards a multiethnic society. Four reasons are mainly responsible for this development: decolonization, labour migration, political and religious persecution in other parts of the world, and tourism.

1.1.1 Decolonization

In 1949 the Indian subcontinent became independent from British rule and formed two sovereign states: the Republic of India and Pakistan which in 1972 was split into two independent states: Pakistan and Bangladesh. Other former British colonies followed in Africa south to the Sahara and in Middle and South America later on. The consequence was that many people with Indian backgrounds moved to the United Kingdom and have settled there since.

Similar developments happened with former French territories in North Africa and in Africa south to the Sahara. Therefore the non European population in France increased in considerable numbers and led to a multiethnic society of political relevance and cultural importance.

Parallel developments can be seen in the Netherlands where people from Indonesia and Surinam immigrated in large numbers as a consequence of the independence of their respective countries as well as in Belgium or Portugal with regard to their former colonies in Africa south to the Sahara.

Consequently, decolonization favoured immigration from the former colonies but led to very specific immigrant populations in each of the countries concerned.

1.1.2 Labour Migration

Another important migration factor was since the 1960s labour migration. In the case of Germany – to concentrate in the following on this example – people, so called „guest workers", immigrated from Italy, Spain, and Portugal and were soon followed by others from former Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey and Morocco, and after 1990 also from Poland, Romania and countries from the former Soviet Union. Different reasons such as keeping working experience on the spot and temporically introduced barriers for newcomers changed the „guest workers" into permanent residents and made their families join them in Germany so that more and more children with migration backgrounds entered into the German school system and made some changes in school politics inavoidable.

1.1.3 Political and Religious Persecutions in other Parts of the World

Persecution for political or religious reasons as well as increasingly climate problems made more and more people flee from their countries in search for a better and free world in Europe, in particular in Germany. It suffices to mention that masses of refugees came over the decades from North Africa, the Near East, Iran (under the Shah

regime and after the so called Islamic Revolution), Afghanistan, Vietnam, Africa south to the Sahara or from Middle and South America.

1.1.4 Tourism

A minor migration phenomenon is tourism, relevant to some countries in Southern Europe, in particular in Spain, where numerous British citizens have chosen to settle permanently and decided after the Brexit to give up their British citizenship in order to become Spaniards instead.

The result of all that is a fundamental change in the population of each of the countries concerned, from a more or less homogeneously local population towards a more multiethnic one to such an extent that right wing political parties in Europe find more and more support in their claim to defend traditional values against claims for change. Max Frisch, a famous Swiss writer, wrote already in 1965 with regard to Italian workers in Basel: „We called workers and human beings came." (Frisch 1965, p. 7)

To satisfy the demands of the immigrants a public debate on integration started in most of these countries. It implied the wish to overcome all difficulties through integration.

1.2 Integration as the Solution

If integrtion does not simply mean adaptation, then it is a wrong expectation to think that it would help to have an easy solution to all the problems. On the contrary, El-Mafaalani warns us saying that integration will increase and not reduce the problems in the negotiation process for a peaceful living together in society. His argument (El-Mafaalani 2018, pp. 77-78) is that in the first generation the newcomers are happy to be there but accept to sit at special tables aside while the residents sit together at the main table. The second generation of the immigrants who speak German and consider Germany as their homeland sit already at the main table so that somehow integration moves forward, but the table rules and the food are that of the residents. In the third generation, the process goes further ahead. Now the third generation wishes to discuss the table rules and to participate in decisions of what is being served at the table. The more integration proceeds, the more problems consequently arise because unlike in the past where state authorities decided from above (in the name of a God, or deities) what should be done and how one should behave in the community, in modern societies such a divine reference does not exist anymore but all the rules must be the results of negotiation processes in a free competition of the respective interests (Gauchet 1998. pp. 13-18). Democracy, equal rights for men and women, just to mention these, are the outcomes of such negotiations. (El-Mafaalani 2018. p. 157) And the same happens again with the different requirements of the immigrants so that it is an endless process with always new rules for which participation is the main goal if integration is successful. (El-Mafaalani 2018, p. 170)

It might be surprising but it is a fact that the public debate on integration concentrated for a long time on social integration alone, only in the 1990s religion was discoverd in social sciences as an important element in these negotiation processes because multiethnicity was then seen as religious pluralism, too. (Baumann 2016, pp. 71-72)

2. Religious Pluralism

Migration was from the beginning paralleled with the establishment of religious communities and prayer places. This holds true for Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and many other religions with less adherents.

2.1 Christians (Rat der Religionen 2016, 69-85)

When Italian workers came in large numbers to Germany the Roman-Catholic bishops in Germany created Italian missions, that is religious parish-like communities with priests from Italy for masses and religious services where the masses were said in Italian so that the churchgoers felt religiously at home being served in their own language for the masses, the confessions and all other religious services as it was required by Vatican II (1962-65). The same was true for the Spanish and Portughese missions where the vernacular language also served as the language for religious services. A participation in the German speaking local community was not expected nor practiced so that the number of such Roman-Catholic communities increased over the years and encompassed Polish and Croatian communities as well. As a consequence of more immigrants from South America and Africa the Spanish and Portughese Roman-Catholic missions turned into Spanish and Portughese speaking communities in order to satisfy the needs of all these newcomers with the result that also forms of South American and African religiosities were integrated into the former Eurocentric Spanish and Portughese parishes.

Similar developments can be observed in the Protestant communities. Consequently, we have in Hanover besides the local traditional parishes of the Landeskirchen an Arabic Evangelical Community, a Persian Evangelical Community and a Korean Evangelical Community, to mention only these. All of them are member communities

under the respective Protestant bishops of the Landeskirchen. In addition there are many free churches within German Protestantism such as the Baptists, the Methodists, the Pentecostals and so forth.

British residents in Spain introduced the Anglican Church there so that Christianity in Spain offers nowadays this branch of Christian diversity besides traditional Catholicism and Protestantism.

Greek and Serbian, guest workers" brought Orthodoxy to Germany and established their religious communities with churches and clergy of their own. Unlike the general rule that Orthodox outside their original national territories are automatically part of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, they insisted on further belonging to their Greek and Serbian religious authorities and thus became the prototype for Orthodox immigration from Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Russia after the end of the Soviet Union so that various Orthodox communities practice their rites and festivities in Germany in a variety which was unknown in the country a few decades before.

Religious persecution as a consequence of increasing Muslim intolerance in many parts of the Middle East and Egypt has led to immigration of oriental Christians such as the Chaldeans and the Copts who established religious communities of their own in Germany and thus completed the wide range of Christian existence.

To underline this, Hanover has introduced an intercultural Christmas celebration on the Saturday following the Russian Christmas of January 7th where some of the various Christian communities remember the birth of Jesus with songs and prayers in different languages and from various Christian traditions including sometimes in Germany unknown music instruments and dances.

The variety of Christian liturgies and forms of clergy has its parallels in a very wide range of political and moral positions and requirements. This is why Roman Catholic bishops alone or together with their Protestant counterparts are far from being able to speak in the name of Christianity when asked about judgments on legislation proposals of the Federal Republic of Germany, in particular in questions of gender equality, sexual premarital contacts and homosexuality. Here the positions between the different Christian denominations as well as inside of each of them are far from being homogeneous. Moreover it is noteworthy that the creed has no priority for most of the young Christians except for the Orthodox who seem to compensate their feeling of not being sufficiently accepted in society with a strong identification with their religious heritage. (Gensicke 2015, p. 252)

2.2 Muslims

Like the Christians, the Muslims, too, exist in different factions (Brunner 2016) but unlike in Christianity the reasons for schisms were not interpetations of the creed but political decisions concerning the question who is the correct caliph. A split into three branches was the result in early Islam: the Sunnites, the Shiites and the Kharidjists of which only the former two have survived until today in considerable numbers and played an important role in the history of Islam over the centuries.

The Sunnites themselves have then split into different law schools. Four of them named after their founders have suvived until now: the Hanbalites, the Malikites, the Hanafites, and the Shafiites so that some like the Hanbalites stick to very conservative interpretations in moral and legal prescriptions while others like the Shafiites are more liberal in these.

The Shiites, too, could not avoid splits as well. Debates over the succession of their spiritual and political leader: the imam led to different groups of which some as the Zaidites recognized five imams only while others like the Ismailites insisted on having seven and the Imamites even on twelve as their legitimate representatives, followed by times of absences until the coming of the awaited mahdi.

Islamic mystics (sufis) and mystical practices can be found among both Sunnite and Shiite Muslims. Their concrete number depends on what is the basis for the counting: if it is a real religious order like living in specific circles, the number is relatively small, i.e. less than 2% of all Muslims; if, however, some specific meetings in special groups once a week are counted, then the number is much larger, certainly over 80 % of all Muslims. What is chracteristic of this form of religiosity is that it emphasises the emotional inner side of the religion while the strict observance of religious law (sharia) is seen as the outside of Islam which does not count as soon as people move forward in their religiosity.

In addition to these historically determined affiliations, there are also politically orientated groups and associations. Its members come from all traditional groups. They range from extremists, some of them are ready to use violence, through conservatives and moderates to liberals and ex-Muslims. Although the consevatives dominate in the public debate, their number as a whole is less than 15 % of the Muslim population. The large majority of Muslims is politically unorganized and a certain number of them have already left Islam without declaring it (Blume 2017).

It is important to see that many heteredox groups have survived in some areas of the Middle East under the umbrella of Shiism: Arabic speaking groups like the Nusairi (Alawites) and the Druzes or in the Persian-Turkish contexts like the Shabak, Kaka'i, and the Ahl-e Haqq (Yaresan). (Langer 2022, pp. 253-267)

Here the Turkish Alevites need to be mentioned (Engin 2014). They also are traditionally labelled as Muslims among the heteredox groups but being established in Germany some of them have declared that their religion is much older than Islam and had, only for reasons of political survival, accepted to be labelled as a heteredox group of Turkish Shiism while in reality it should be seen as a religion of its own. Consequently, a split is going on in the Alevite communities in Germany between those who still wish to continue their Muslim existence and those who refuse to be further called Muslims

While in the case of the Alevites the adherents of the religion partly deny their affiliation to Islam whereas Turkish Muslims still see them as Muslims, another group of believers is in the opposite situation: the Ahmadis (Hübsch 2014), followers of Ghulam Ahmad as their prophet. They see themselves as devoted Muslims while the Muslim League in Mecca had excommunicated them in 1974 from Islam. although the Ahmadi mission was for a long time the most successful in winning converts for Islam. The oldest mosque in Berlin is an Ahmadi foundation, and Ahmadi groups are very active and effective in correcting the negative image of Islam in many German cities.

The negative image of Islam is in the German context not only the result of reports on terrorist activities in many parts of the world. It is also the consequence of fears that young Muslims with a migration background as well as German youngsters feel attracted by salafist propaganda and are ready to join the fighters of jihadists in the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and might also be ready to actively participate in terrorist attacks in Germany and all over Europe. It is noteworthy that some youngsters with migration backgrounds discover Islam as their main identity to compensate their feelings of not being sufficiently accepted in the German society. (Gensicke 2015, p. 252)

Finally a note on terminololgy is needed to underline the effects of labels because it is significantly different whether we talk about Islamic Extremism or Extremist Islam. In the first case extremism is the main reference and its islamic version is part of it while in the second case the emphasis is on Islam of which extremism is a part. Whatever terminology is used, it has consequences for the concept which is the basic reference point and changes the perspectives in the discussion. (Zemmin 2020, p. 119)

2.3 Buddhists

The first Buddhist immigrants who came to Germany were refugees from Vietnam during the 1960s. They came as „boat people" to Lower Saxony where Ernst Albrecht was Prime Minister of the Land and welcomed them. These Buddhists were Mahayanis who venerated different deities and practiced devotional forms of Buddhism which were very different from the local German Buddhist Theravadis who converted to Buddhism in the late 19th century and founded the first Buddhist comunities on the basis of their readings of Theravada Buddhist texts without having ever met any Buddhist in person. (Baumann 1993)

Thanks to the newcomers from Vietnam a new form of Buddhism was introduced in Germany and soon paralleled with other forms of Buddhism such as the Japanese Zen Buddhism or the Tibetan Buddhism led by the Dalai Lama.

The Buddhists from Vietnam constructed the first Pagoda in Hanover, the largest in Europe. They used it as an Ecumenical meeting place for all kinds of Buddhists. Over the years it has served as a central meeting place for inter-Buddhist encounters and as a priviledged place for interreligious dialogue.

A pecularity of Buddhism here is that its meditations are practiced also by Christians so that this kind of religiosity is a specific form of multiple religious identity where more than one religion can be practiced at the same time without any need for exclusive adherence as it is normally the case for Jews, Christians or Muslims. (Bernhardt and Schmidt-Leukel 2008)

2.4 Other Religions

While Hindus, Sikhs and Bahais are also a consequence of migration with their respective religious communities (Rat der Religionen 2016), the Jews have had a long local history in Germany but were enlarged after the Shoa by immigrants from other European countries, the Americas and Israel and then after the end of the Soviet Union by immigrants from East European countries so that also in the case of Judaism a certain plurality of Jewish practices and *Weltanschauungen* was significant for the Jewish communities with liberal and orthodox forms as their main characteristics.

Religious persecution in the Middle East has led to the arrival of Yezidis (Savucu 2016), Mandeans (Hutter 2017), and Zoroastrians (Hutter 2019).

Moreover immigrants from Brazil brought Umbanda and Candomblé cults to Germany as well as immigrants from African countries south to the Sahara introduced Voodoo and Rastafari cults in German cities.

All these religions and cults show that at present there are more religious traditions in Germany's big cities than in any of the countries where the immigrants come from. The variety of religious communities and cults in big German cities such as Berlin (Yonan 1998), Cologne (Harbecke 2017). Frankfurt (Amt für multikulturelle Angelegenheiten 1977) or Hanover (Rat der Religionen 2016) including smaler towns such as Marburg (Ruttmann 1995) goes considerably beyond all what can be found in Asia or Africa so that the student of religions finds more on the spot than even specialists of religion had traditionally known about the subject.

3. The Consequences

The multiethnic and multireligious situation led to three consequences that deserve more consideration:

First, there is growing need for interreligious dialogue in order to guarantee a peaceful living together between people from different religious backgrounds. Therefore interreligious meetings have been organized and houses of religions (Rötting 2021) were established for common interfaith actions and political representation in the public sphere to guarantee tolerance and avoid clashes of civilizations.

Second, these interreligious meetings are needed to help in the negotiation process with other social groups to define, and eventually change, the rules for a peaceful living together because no religious group alone is any more able to speak in the name of all members of the respective religion as far as the requirements for integration are concerned.

And third, religiously founded concepts of illness and health must be taken into account if society as a whole wishes to satisfy the needs of all its members. (Sullivan 1989 and Utsch 2020)

4. Conclusion

Migration has led to a change in society from a traditionally rather homogeneous to a multiethnic society. Since people have not only social interests but are often strongly influenced by their religious and cultural ways of thinking, migration has also an impact on religion by introducing new forms of religious thinking and behaviour so that negotiation processes start and may change the rules for peaceful living together. If participation is the goal of integration into society, efforts are urgently necessary to take the various requirements into account and ask to what an extent one can positively respond to them so that all human beings feel accepted and integrated in the society and are thus constructive partners in the nation building process. And since not only religious people live in our society, ethics are more important than only the interreligious agreement for a peaceful living together. (Der Appell des Dalai Lama 2016).

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