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CHAPTER 1

CONSTITUTIVE OUTSIDERS

1.1 Ambivalences of *Kultur* and *Aufklärung*

In the past few decades, the German debate on immigration and integration has revolved around highly symbolic issues such as the *Kopftuchstreit*, the contested notion of *Leitkultur*, the perceived *Islamisierung des Abendlandes* or the commotion about *Parallelgesellschaften*. Yet no matter what particular issue is at stake, they all refer to a familiar but in fact oversimplifying distinction between Western secularism versus non-Western religious ‘otherness’, i.e. fundamentalism—or between the advocates of *Aufklärung* and those who resist or even seek to destroy its modern premise of autonomy and self-determination. This stark rhetorical contrast continues to fuel public debate and imbues it with a sense of urgency and unicity. It is, however, not entirely without historical precedent. The example of German Jews and their “romance with *Bildung*”¹ puts references to *Aufklärung* in recent debates in an interesting perspective. By the turn of the twentieth century, Jews in Germany had reached a turning point in a decades-long process of secularization and emancipation. During the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, they had internalized the ideal of *Bildung* and were to a large degree acculturated into German society. When from the 1880s onwards migration waves of evidently religious *Ostjuden* fueled increasingly explicit anti-Semitic sentiment, the assimilated *Westjuden* became the subject of intense public debates as well.

This chapter outlines the historical and discursive contexts of German Jews around 1900, who became “trapped by the image of a rejected self,”² and ‘new’ German citizens around 2000, who live in a reluctant country of immigration. There are considerable differences between these two historical minorities—in terms of their sociocultural position, language, and number, and especially in terms of their cultural histories and diasporic memory. Yet they seem to share a paradoxical position in identity discourses: despite the mainstream insistence on their adaptation, integration, or assimilation, their perceived incompatibility remains the subject of heated public debate. This first chapter section outlines the main elements that contribute to that position on the ‘constitutive outside’ of the nation.

Constructions of German identity

Since its birth as a ‘belated’ nation, then as an armed and aggressive nation, later as a divided and then reunified nation, Germany has a turbulent history of reimagining, reinventing, and reconfiguring national identity. These constructions have, in general, proceeded *ex negativo*, through the production of what Stuart Hall calls “frontier-effects” resulting from the creation of a “constitutive outside”—a discursively generated “excess” from which the nation differentiates itself for the purpose of homogenizing and sustaining its proper identity.³ The many historical ruptures and ideological transformations that have shaped German history have been accompanied by reconfigurations of this ‘outside’, which has been construed as the historical, the ideological, the non-German Other.⁴

This pattern can be traced back to the German nation-building process.⁵ The nineteenth-century Franco-German wars had established the image of a shared enemy, which consolidated feelings of community and Germanness among the confederated states.⁶ Around the turn of the twentieth century, German identity took shape in a multivalent discourse with nationalist-cultural, religious, and racial or *völkisch* components, which defined ‘Germanness’ in terms of membership in the *Volks-* or *Kulturnation*, in terms of a shared Christian heritage, or in terms of a biological ‘essence.’⁷ Especially German Jews were, despite their lawful citizenship and their social and cultural integration, considered as religious, racial, and national Others. Under National Socialism, these multiple discourses were violently reduced to the all-encompassing notion of an innate racial purity.

After Nazism and the destruction of the German, and European, Jewish Other, any confident sense of Germanness had become suspect, if not impossible—“As a medium for integration and stability, the nation has turned into a source of insecurity. It no longer feels at home in its homeland. [Die Nation als Medium von Integration und Stabilität hat sich verkehrt in eine Quelle von Verunsicherung. Die Heimat ist unheimlich geworden.]”⁸ The two German states articulated their postwar identities by creating a historical and ideological Other. Emphatically they dissociated themselves from the Nazi past and mutually attributed the role of ideological outsider to the other Germany. Although the—more or less—successful reconstruction of the states and the *Wirtschaftswunder* in the Federal Republic of Germany provided opportunities for positive national identification, the considerable contribution of foreign laborers to this boom became a source of negative identification. The economic crisis of the mid-1960s shook the new German self-confidence. One of its side-effects was that the initial solution of labor migration gradually turned into a ‘Turkish problem.’⁹

The relatively sudden *Wende* and reunification of 1989/1990 marked a new phase in the history of German national identity. More than forty years of separation had left both sides of the former wall uncertain as to its ‘common’ identity, which allowed an ethnic argument to enter the debates. As Liesbeth Minnaard states: “After the *Wende* the dominant (political) discourse expected (indigenous) Germans to identify with the ‘myth’ of a shared, ethnoculturally defined Germanness.”¹⁰ The obvious political and personal arguments for a common identification—democracy and economic success—failed to work, and soon an old bias of Western self-definition appeared in the initial euphoria of unification. The process of reunification, “in which East Germany was the de facto second-class partner,” was joined by anti-foreign sentiments, as it “relegated ‘foreigners’ to a third-class position in the symbolic hierarchy of this new Germany.”¹¹ The increasingly xenophobic climate, as illustrated by several acts of violence in the early 1990s (in Hoyerswerda, Rostock, Mölln, and Solingen), was, according to Andreas Huyssen, the result of “the displacement onto the non-Germans of forty years of an inner-German hostility where another kind of foreign body was identified as the source of most problems: the other Germany.”¹² Huyssen’s statement is relevant still, even if the German ‘constitutive outside’ is no longer occupied by *Gastarbeiter* offspring alone. Since the events of September 11, 2001, the presence of Muslims in Germany has been perceived increasingly as suspicious. Over the past few decades, a self-confident, positive German identification as a pluralist country has grown entangled with the notion of an ‘outside’ of ‘Islamic threat’ within society.

A comparison of German Jews around 1900 and new Germans around 2000 reveals their similar positions as ‘constitutive outsiders’, i.e. as groups constructed and perceived as such in the process of German self-definition, or at least in the wishful fantasies of German national identity. The ‘excess’ of their presence (to remain consistent with Hall’s terminology) finds different expressions at both ends of the twentieth century, although it seems to inspire a similar rhetoric. The presence of Jews was perceived as threatening, ironically due to their ‘excessive’, and therefore invisible, adaptation to ‘German’ society. Non-ethnic Germans, by contrast, embody “too much diversity,”¹³ which in political discourse is often translated in terms of the “failure of multiculturalism.”¹⁴ Despite different degrees of ‘visibility’, the discursive mechanisms are largely the same and reveal remarkable rhetorical overlap. The myth of ‘race’ that inspired early twentieth-century anti-Semitic discourse¹⁵ is not all that different from the contemporary myth of ‘culture’,¹⁶ which, as Christopher Douglas argues, suffers from an “unacknowledged turn to race,”¹⁷ and perpetuates some of its essentializing aspects.¹⁸ As Alana Lentin observes as well, the continuity between racial and cultural rhetorics of difference consists of a current “culturalization of politics” that “bears similarities to the idea that ‘race is all’ that came to dominate European politics in the nineteenth century.”¹⁹ To a similar effect as ‘race’, ‘culture’ establishes a framework that explains and justifies differences in cultural terms, even if these differences originate in inequality, exploitation, or injustice. In other words, the word ‘culture’ has become a descriptor of collectivities that proves as static as the phantasmagoric naturalization of the Other that dominated a century ago.

Kultur versus Zivilisation

The notion of *Kultur*—a common language, history, heritage and value system—had been crucial to the development of a German nation-state and national identity. The German self-definition as a *Kulturnation*—rather than a *Staatsnation*²⁰—turned out problematic for the Jewish minority, which strongly identified with German culture but was not considered a part of it, especially when, in the course of the nineteenth century, the German nation increasingly articulated itself in ethnic-racial terms, as well as the unique expression of a German *Volksgeist*.²¹ More recently, Sigrid Weigel has detected a rekindled interest in the *Kulturnation*, which—in contrast to the impersonal *Verfassungspatriotismus* of the reunified country—fosters “an emotional attachment to the nation [...] without inciting xenophobic nationalism [eine emotionale Bindung an die Nation [...], ohne einen

xenophoben Nationalismus zu schüren].”²² But the rediscovery of a ‘national’ cultural heritage still warrants caution: “When understood as property, cultural heritage still becomes an argument of cultural standards legitimized by origin—quite different from tradition, which can be understood as the inhomogeneous whole of culture [...]. [Als Besitz begriffen, gerät das kulturelle Erbe dennoch zum Argument kultureller Normen, die durch Herkunft legitimiert sind—ganz anders als die Überlieferung, die sich als das inhomogene Ganze der Kultur verstehen lässt [...]].”²³ Weigel points out that the national literary tradition is traversed by “phantoms and revenants [Phantome und Wiedergänger]” that remind the reader of the heterogeneous origins of the nation.²⁴

The potentially exclusivist nature of *Kultur* and the allure of the derivative *Kulturnation* have been analyzed in detail by Norbert Elias,²⁵ who distinguishes the German usage of (Romantic) *Kultur* from (Enlightened) *Zivilisation*. In British and French contexts, the two terms have historically evolved into near-synonyms for the opposite of ‘primitivism’, but in the German context they are quite distinct. According to Elias, *Kultur* is an exclusionary notion, produced and defined by a local community. *Zivilisation* involves a universal and cosmopolitan view of society, in which the *individual*, rather than the shared characteristics of a (national) community, becomes the reference point for inclusion. “To a certain extent,” Elias argues, “the concept of civilization plays down the national differences between peoples; it emphasizes what is common to all human beings, or—in the view of its bearers—should be.”²⁶ From this perspective, any individual can participate in society, as long as they are willing to accept values that are deemed universal. By contrast, Elias continues, “the German concept of *Kultur* places special stress on national difference and the particular identity of groups.”²⁷ Elias attributes the allure of *Kultur* to Germany’s history as a “belated nation-state [verspäteter Nationalstaat]:”²⁸ “[T]he concept of *Kultur* mirrors the self-consciousness of a nation which had constantly to seek out and constitute its boundaries anew, in a political as well as a spiritual sense, and again and again had to ask itself: ‘What really is our identity?’”²⁹ The distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* is however not always clear-cut. When the inherently dynamic process of *Zivilisation* is reduced to its result, it can become an instrument of superiority and exclusivity. When “nations consider the *process* of civilization as completed within their own societies,” Elias remarks, “they see themselves as bearers of an existing or finished civilization to others, as standard-bearers of expanding civilization.”³⁰ In such cases, the result of ‘civilization’ can become incorporated into the static ‘cultural’ heritage of a nation. Arguably, such a conflation of the notions *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* has entered the German debates

around 2000, where inclusionary and exclusionary notions of culture have been used interchangeably.³¹ The result is a paradoxical situation, where immigrants are expected to integrate—implying an inclusive notion of society—yet continue to be portrayed as ‘Others’ who do not share the Enlightened tradition that warrants the autonomy of the subject. Especially when *Aufklärung* is invoked as a ‘German’ value—a cultural achievement rather than an ongoing process to be realized by single individuals—its principles of freedom, pluralism, and tolerance can become an instrument of exclusionary rhetoric.

In his essay collection *Deutschsein: Eine Aufklärungsschrift* (2011), the Turkish-German writer Zafer Şenocak pleads for a deliberate and careful engagement with *Aufklärung*.³² Reiterating Elias’ observations, he criticizes the fact that in current integration debates, Germany cultivates “a sensibility for its own body [ein Gefühl für den eigenen Körper],” and continues to support a delimiting notion of *Kultur*:

Germany’s *Leitkultur* as a democratic, pluralistic country is not about wheat beer and roast pork, but about the values of a constitutional state that guarantees its citizens freedom and human rights. These values are much better preserved universally than in a national identity program. The concept of civilization with its universal claim continues to find no emotional grounds that resonate in Germany.

[Es geht bei der Leitkultur Deutschlands als demokratischem, pluralistischem Land nicht um Hefeweizen und Schweinebraten, sondern um die Werte eines Rechtsstaates, der seinen Bürgern Freiheit und Menschenrechte garantiert. Diese Werte sind viel besser universell aufgehoben als in einem nationalen Identitätsprogramm. Der Zivilisationsbegriff mit seinem universellem Anspruch findet in Deutschland nach wie vor keinen emotionalen Resonanzboden.]³³

According to Şenocak, an intensified Enlightened focus on *individuals*, rather than cultural collectivities, could be a valuable approach in integration debates. Recalling the violent consequences of nationalism and collectivism witnessed throughout the twentieth century, he emphasizes the danger in thinking about society and culture in terms of homogenized clusters: “If not individuals but instead ethnic and cultural templates determine thought patterns, and these thought patterns inscribe a constant and unchangeable otherness, then a breach of civilization occurs. [Wenn nicht Individuen, sondern ethnische und kulturelle Schablonen die Denkmuster bestimmen und diese Denkmuster eine stetige und unveränderbare Andersartigkeit festschreiben, dann tritt ein Zivilisationsbruch

ein.]”³⁴ Şenocak attributes the country’s reluctant attitude towards *Aufklärung* to a confounded historical awareness: it reserves “a secluded space for memory [...] so as not to let them encounter the manifold voices from outside [einen abgeschlossenen Raum für die Erinnerungen [...], um sie nicht in Berührung kommen zu lassen mit den vielfältigen Stimmen von draußen].”³⁵ As a result of this blind spot, the integration debate has come to resemble a self-involved monologue:

In the integration debates we are dealing with a Germany curiously lacking history. As if this country had no experience whatsoever with migration, with immigration and emigration, with cultural debates about German identity. The emancipation and assimilation of German Jews, the expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe were accompanied by vehement identity debates, which are part of the German cultural self-image. If today we are referring to the Judeo-Christian heritage of German culture, Muslim integration can only be accomplished if this heritage is extracted from the Sunday speeches and perceived not only as part of the culture of remembrance, but also as a horizon of experience. Jewish emancipation as a consequence of the Enlightenment is one of the greatest heydays of the human experience of civilization. But to what extent is it still present today?

[So haben wir es in den Integrationsdebatten mit einem seltsam geschichtslosen Deutschland zu tun. Als hätte dieses Land keinerlei Erfahrung mit Migration, mit Ein- und Auswanderung, mit kulturellen Debatten um die deutsche Identität. Die Emanzipation und Assimilation der deutschen Juden, die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Osteuropa wurden von heftigen Identitätsdebatten begleitet, die Teil des deutschen kulturellen Selbstverständnisses sind. Wenn heute vom jüdisch-christlichen Erbe deutscher Kultur die Rede ist, kann eine muslimische Integration nur dann gestaltet werden, wenn dieses Erbe aus den Sonntagsreden ausgepackt wird und nicht nur als Teil der Erinnerungskultur, sondern auch als Erfahrungshorizont wahrgenommen wird. [...] Die jüdische Emanzipation als eine Folge der Aufklärung gehört zu den größten Blütezeiten der menschlichen Zivilisationserfahrung. Wie weit ist sie aber heute noch gegenwärtig?]”³⁶

Şenocak suggests that, in the current integration debate, the emancipation history of German Jews rarely serves as an illustration of successful *Aufklärung*, because people can only think of it “in terms of its catastrophic end [von ihrem katastrophalen Ende her].”³⁷ While it is true that German-Jewish history is one of

a confident adoption of Enlightenment principles, it was not simply a *Blütezeit*. Especially relevant to debates today is a conflict between, or conflation of, *Kultur* and *Aufklärung* that determined pre-war German-Jewish relations. Already in the decades before the German-Jewish *Beziehungsgeschichte* came to a disastrous end, it had become clear that the adoption of *Aufklärung* did not guarantee inclusion and did not deliver on its promise of countering anti-Semitic prejudice. Whereas the Jews envisioned a modern society of equal individuals, and nurtured an inclusive, cosmopolitan conception of *Bildung*, the status attached to it however “soon became a monopoly of a caste rather than accessible to anyone willing and able to participate in the process of self-cultivation.”³⁸ *Bildung* became an instrument in the construction of a compelling German identity, an identity cultivated in terms of a German *Kultur* nation.³⁹ The story of German-Jewish emancipation is, in other words, also a story of gradual disillusionment with *Aufklärung*.

The following chapter sections outline the individual historical contexts of German Jews on the one hand and new Germans on the other, as well as discuss in greater detail the impact of their position as constitutive outsiders of the German *Kultur* nation. In both periods, symptomatic of the conflation of *Kultur* and *Aufklärung* is the remarkably similar rhetoric of “liberals who [want] to assert their antiliberal opinion.”⁴⁰

1.2 “Trapped by the image of a rejected self”⁴¹ Jews in Germany, German Jews

Emancipation and acculturation (1770–1880)

A portrait of Jews in Germany between 1770 and 1933 inevitably revolves around their transforming relationship to Judaism, to modernity, and to the history and culture of non-Jewish civil society. Over more than a century, from the 1770s to the 1890s, many European Jewish communities were engaged in the *Haskalah*, the Jewish chapter of European Enlightenment. Although it was a diversified movement, more nuanced than a simple dichotomy between modernization and orthodoxy suggests,⁴² the *Haskalah* is generally considered to be the intellectual foundation of Jewish secularization and political emancipation. The Reform Movement of Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), later David Friedländer (1750–1834), and Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) strove for a synthesis of traditional and reformed worship, advocating a Jewish religion of

reason reconcilable with Enlightenment ideals, such as civic equality and the separation of church and state.⁴³ Hoping to overcome Jewish isolation and cultural arrears, which had originated in their exclusion from professional life, they found no contradiction in simultaneous Jewish ceremony and German citizenship, or even Christian practices like baptism. These first beginnings of acculturation were advanced further by Napoleonic equality laws in 1806, which allowed a certain degree of political and economic participation. These were the seeds of an “inner-Jewish turn [innerjüdische Wende].”⁴⁴ Efforts to gain equal rights unified and strengthened, and in 1871, with the foundation of the German nation-state, equality and religious freedom were constitutionalized.

As mutually dependent conditions of a social agreement, Jewish political emancipation was inextricably bound up with efforts of cultural assimilation. Their strong identification with the ethic of *Bildung*⁴⁵ was motivated by its fundamentally humanistic, ahistorical, and inclusive character. It promised to bring forth a community of equals: every individual, irrespective of religion, culture, or descent, could access the process of self-education and German cultural heritage. Perceiving the absence of common historical roots as an obstacle to integration, they believed that the ideal of *Bildung* enabled a dissociation from the ghetto past, yet also the chance of “transcending a German past,”⁴⁶ so that “Jew [could] meet German on equal terms.”⁴⁷ In their eagerness to internalize the ideal, *Bildung* came to be their “secular religion.”⁴⁸ By the 1870s, the Jews had become members of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* as passionate participants in cultural life. Their support for cultural innovation and avant-gardism could even be considered as “disproportionate”⁴⁹—an acculturative overcompensation⁵⁰ for the absence of common historical ground.⁵¹

Jewish acculturation coincided with remarkable social mobility and urbanization. Whereas the majority of Jews in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century had lived on the fringes, by the 1870s more than sixty percent had become part of the (upper) middle class, with twenty percent of them living in large cities (versus only 4.8 percent of population in general).⁵² Such rapid urbanization and *embourgeoisement* could not be observed for society as a whole, which indicates relative social seclusion. Shulamit Volkov indeed recognizes German Jewry at the end of the nineteenth century as a separate cultural system, a “third sphere”⁵³ that had developed throughout the century as a complex network of public, private, and educational institutions, and in which the internalization of dominant German values had in fact contributed to a process of “negative integration.”⁵⁴ Similarly, David Sorkin has argued that the Jewish *Bürgertum* was a subculture emerging from a “parallel associational life” after the model of the

German associations from which they were excluded.⁵⁵ Clearly, Jewish efforts to become full members of society did not simply resolve their minority status, but instead redefined its characteristics, redirecting them into a position relying on both German and Jewish cultures.

The incongruence between their rapid sociocultural advancement and their apparent relative seclusion suggests that an assessment only in terms of their degree of 'assimilation' remains inadequate. Obviously, the reality of German-Jewish relations was more ambiguous and nuanced than the bipolarity of the term accounts for.⁵⁶ The validity of the term has been a subject of controversy, and its ambivalent interpretations vary according to the historiographical and ideological perspective from which German-Jewish relations are assessed. Already from the onset of its currency around the 1870s, the term covered a range of meanings,⁵⁷ and represented both narrow and broad views on the Jewish self-positioning vis-à-vis German culture and society.⁵⁸ In a broad understanding, assimilation eventually leads to the dissolution of Jewish particularity as a precondition of political equality.⁵⁹ The narrow interpretation was the more current one, held by liberal Jews and taken up by most German-Jewish historiography.⁶⁰ The condition is articulated differently: the internalization of German cultural values would bring about social acceptance, characterized by tolerance towards the (continued) presence of a Jewish collective identity.

However, their successful acculturation did not lead to social acceptance. Due to the catastrophic culmination of anti-Semitism, and the "negative verdict" history has cast on German-Jewish relations,⁶¹ 'assimilation' as a descriptive category is subject to the "fallacy of retrospective judgment."⁶² The inherently dynamic process of assimilation is easily mistaken for a teleological development towards an inevitable outcome of (self-) destruction. Gershom Scholem has denounced the German-Jewish dialogue as a myth, arguing that the illusion that assimilation would bring acceptance "was one of the factors that retarded, disturbed, and eventually brought to a gruesome end the [dialectical] process."⁶³ However, as Paul Mendes-Flohr counters

although it may be possible for historians to explain by the wisdom of hindsight the logical consequence of events leading to the advent of the Third Reich and the crazed schemes it was to institute, it is epistemologically erroneous to assume that contemporaries could—not to say, should—have had the same knowledge that historians have at their disposal.⁶⁴

For the same reason, the opposite view—a portrayal of pre-war German-Jewish relations as a fruitful cultural ‘symbiosis’—is equally fallacious: it is “pre-eminently a post-Second World War construct [...] expressing an idealized image of a world brutally disrupted by Hitler.”⁶⁵ Both extremes give an undeserved impression of acculturating German Jews as either naive or willfully ignorant about their increasingly hostile surroundings. Perhaps more accurately, the “undeniable reality” of German Jews should be seen as defined by the problem “as how to preserve Jewish cultural memory and identity while passionately and creatively embracing another culture.”⁶⁶

Modern anti-Semitism and Jewish dissimilation (1880–1933)

Rather than participants in a history of emancipation and assimilation, German Jews should be considered as a minority,⁶⁷ a community that negotiates with and asserts itself within larger society but is characterized by a very vivid internal dialogue and a dynamic of its own. Volkov focuses on “neither the assimilatory forces in the development of the Jewish community in Germany [...] nor the repelling forces of an anti-Semitic host society,” but on “forces from within, which were drawing German Jews back together again even despite themselves.”⁶⁸ Volkov’s perspective uncovers a dialectical relation between internal and external, seemingly contradictory developments within the Jewish community—more specifically: how assimilatory efforts eventually produced the trend of Jewish dissimilation and cultural reassertion that emerged around the 1890s.

‘Race’ and modern anti-Semitism

Primary catalyst of dissimilation trends was the increasingly tangible anti-Semitic climate. From around the 1880s, a modernized and racially inspired anti-Semitism found programmatic expression in the establishment of explicitly anti-Jewish political parties.⁶⁹ The rise of political anti-Semitism is generally associated with increasing anti-modern sentiments and considered a reaction against the social advancement of secularized Jewry into the core domains of modern society, finance, politics, press, and culture. More fundamentally, the rise of racial anti-Semitism harks back to the political function of ‘race’ as a tool in the consolidation of modern state power. Rejecting the relatively common assumption that racism is a psychological, individualized “aberration of the European norm of democracy,”⁷⁰ Lentin explains how an essentialist and exclusionary notion like ‘race’ could be embraced by democratic nation-states.

The Enlightenment project itself was based on a “Janus-faced universalism”⁷¹ that allowed the racialization of difference to emerge:

Both the emancipation of the European Jews and the anti-slavery of the Enlightenment radicals brought with them a concomitant drive to uniformisation that, paradoxically, made more obvious the difference between human groups previously kept apart. The persistence of domination, this time under the guise of assimilation or the ‘mission of civilisation’, created the conditions for the racialisation of Jews or blacks that, despite initial intentions to the contrary, focused on hierarchies of progress that, due to the primacy of scientific rationalization, saw the concept of ‘race’ as the principal reason for their existence.⁷²

In reference to Étienne Balibar,⁷³ Lentin argues that ‘race’ assisted state nationalism in creating a fantasy of political and cultural homogeneity. ‘Race’ intervened as a tool to produce the “mythical ethnicity”⁷⁴ necessary to maintain the nation’s unity: it naturalized differences and inequality between populations and, in doing so, drew a demarcation line between them.

The politicization of anti-Semitism in the 1880s had a distinctive yet contradictory racial aspect to it. The Jewish assimilation project—which relied on the barter of citizenship and equality in exchange for cultural adaptation—was indeed a response to the state’s drive to uniformity. Yet the resulting relative integration of Jews into bourgeois society seems at odds with the increasingly political dimensions of anti-Jewish sentiment. Founders and advocates of modern, racial anti-Semitism—Wilhelm Marr (1819–1904), Adolf Stöcker (1835–1909), and Eugen Dühring (1833–1921)—translated the *Judenfrage*⁷⁵ from a religious question to a “question of race, morals, and culture [Racen-, Sitten- und Culturfrage],”⁷⁶ opposing the so-called *Verjudung* of society. At first sight, they reacted against the perceived ‘disproportionate’ influence of Jews in pivotal positions. Remarkable in the anti-Semitic rhetoric, however, is a sinister contradiction between a demand for assimilation and its strong conviction about the fundamental, biological otherness of Jews. The actual threat, as Dühring argues, is not Jewish acculturation per se, but an invisible Jewish ‘essence’ seeping—or being ‘injected’—into German society:⁷⁷

A Jewish question would exist [...] even if all Jews had turned their backs on their religion and joined one of our prevailing churches. [...] The baptized Jews are those who, without impediment, penetrate all the

passages of social and political life the furthest. [...] [The] interspersion of racial Jewry into the joints and crevices of our national dwellings must, the more complete it becomes, lead increasingly to backlash. It is impossible for a close encounter to gain traction without our simultaneous realization of how incompatible with our best instincts is the *inoculation* of the traits of the Jewish race into our living conditions.

[Eine Judenfrage würde [...] auch existieren, wenn alle Juden ihre Religion den Rücken gekehrt und zu einer bei uns vorherrschenden Kirchen herübergetreten wären. [...] Gerade die getauften Juden sind diejenigen, die ohne Hindernisse am weitesten in alle Canäle der Gesellschaft und des politischen Gemeinlebens eindringen. [...] [Die] Einstreuung von Racenjudenthum in die Fugen und Spalten unserer nationalen Behausungen muss, je vollständiger sie wird, umso mehr zu einer Rückwirkung führen. Es ist unmöglich, dass eine nahe Berührung platzgreife, ohne dass sich bei uns zugleich die Erkenntnis einfinde, wie unverträglich mit unseren besten Trieben die *Einimpfung* der Eigenschaften der Judenrace in unsere Zustände ist.]⁷⁸

Dürring compares ‘Jewishness’ and even complete secularization to a disease that spreads itself invisibly and therefore all the more dangerously. Still, the metaphor of inoculation does not produce the intended effect. The injection of a foreign element, a disease, eventually leads to immunity or tolerance to the once foreign element. The inoculation image thus contradicts the anti-Semitic claim that German and Jewish cultures are mutually unassimilable. In other words, even when articulated in modernized and scientific imagery, the paradox of anti-Semitic prejudice remained the same: the Jew was either too assimilated or not assimilated enough.

Rhetorical inconsistencies like these betray an incoherent fear of a Jewish menace, a fear that has been associated with social changes wrought by the modernization process.⁷⁹ Anti-modern sentiments rooted in the social and economic decline of *Modernisierungsverlierer*⁸⁰ were directed at the Jews. Ironically, their successful acculturation and secularization made them all the more visible as *Jewish* “representatives of modernity and secularism.”⁸¹ Accordingly, anti-Jewish stereotypes were no longer inspired by a religious distinction between Judaism and Christianity, but by economic and national arguments instead—“The Jew was now no longer the anti-Christ, the one condemned by God, but the profiteer, the racketeer, the bankrupt, the sworn enemy, a danger to the economic and political existence of Germany and the Germans themselves. [Der Jude war jetzt nicht mehr der Anti-Christ, der von Gott Verdammte, sondern der Wucherer, der Preistreiber, der Bankrotteur, der Todfeind, eine

Gefahr für die wirtschaftliche und politische Existenz Deutschlands und der Deutschen schlechthin.]”⁸² Before it entered political programs, anti-Semitism resembled a “cultural code,”⁸³ a symbolic language that subsumed anti-modern, anti-liberal, right-wing sympathies. ‘Anti-Semitism’ was a populist term coined in a lower-middle class milieu,⁸⁴ but it soon became *salonfähig* among middle-class intellectuals as well. The at the time reputable historian and politician Heinrich von Treitschke (1834—1896) contributed significantly to making it intellectually and politically acceptable, when he published the essay “Unsere Aussichten” in 1879.⁸⁵ The text calls for complete assimilation and the abandonment of Jewish specificity but does so in a peculiar manner:⁸⁶

What we demand from our Israelite fellow citizens is straightforward: they are to become Germans, to consider themselves quite simply to be Germans—without prejudice to their faith and their ancient sacred memory, which is venerable to us all; for we do not want the millennia of Germanic morality to be succeeded by an age of German-Jewish mixed culture.

[Was wir von unseren Israelitischen Mitbürgern zu fordern haben, ist einfach: sie sollen Deutsche werden, sich schlicht und recht als Deutsche fühlen—unbeschadet ihres Glaubens und ihrer alten heiligen Erinnerungen, die uns alle ehrwürdig sind; denn wir wollen nicht, daß auf die Jahrtausende germanischer Gesittung ein Zeitalter deutsch-jüdischer Mischkultur folge.]⁸⁷

Initially, Treitschke articulates his demand for assimilation in terms of Jewish self-perception as Germans or as a matter of citizenship—in any case regardless of religious affiliation, and apparently assuming that it is *possible* to become German. This would correspond to the liberal barter of emancipation in exchange for assimilation. But then he suggests that it is a matter of culture, religion, and memory after all: ‘feeling German’ cannot be reconciled with an inalienable Jewish identity and will result in an unwanted mixed culture. In a contradictory rhetoric resembling Dühring’s, Treitschke’s ‘liberal’ proposal that Jews become Germans is paired with the conviction of Jewish unassimilability. Treitschke’s piece garnered attention especially because of his ambivalent political stance. As a leading German liberal who now expressed sympathy for anti-Semitic attempts to revoke Jewish emancipation, he now remarkably took a stand against one of the pillars of the liberal program. Such ambivalence, as Marcel Stoetzler observes, is characteristic of racialized state nationalism:

In the period of the consolidation of the German nation-state, most National Liberals tended to subordinate a rather diffuse feeling of antipathy toward Jews to the larger objective, national unity. [...] [What] prompted him to transform his latent, as it were acceptable, dislike of Jews—the ‘normal’ antisemitism that has been described as a ‘cultural code’—into a virulent and ‘political’ endorsement of antisemitism?⁸⁸

Even if Treitschke does not explicitly invoke the notion of ‘race’, he is convinced of an immutable Jewish difference threatening the precarious unity of the new state, its society, and its national culture.⁸⁹

Treitschke’s statements elicited a vigorous press debate among politicians and leading academics that lasted until 1881. The *Berliner Antisemitismustreit* concerned “the ways in which national culture was understood to mediate between state, society, and individual in the modern context.”⁹⁰ Because it addressed the conditions of Jewish (non-) belonging to the German nation as well, however, the debate became a platform for anti-Semitism to acquire a politically mainstream position. Yet the historical significance of this sinister debate is not primarily related to its content. Rather, the various argumentations on the *Judenfrage* all relied on an implicit consensus on the suitability of the nation-state as a form of government for liberal society, based on national culture as a necessary means of consolidation.⁹¹ The dispute, in other words, reveals the contradictory conflation of liberal and nationalist tendencies in the ‘nation-form’:⁹² when liberal society takes the shape of a national state, it requires conformity with a static national culture and loses the idea of liberty.⁹³ It is due to this ambivalence that Treitschke’s antiliberal liberalism could thrive—and becomes relevant to the situation around 2000 as well.⁹⁴ As I will illustrate in the section on Germany as a reluctant country of immigration, a similar discordance between liberal state and national culture is evident there as well.

Jewish dissimulation & the *Ostjude* as a mirror image

Surely, the persistent negative portrayal of German Jews drew them together as a community, but a sense of *Trotzjudentum* alone was not the only factor to set a dissimulation process in motion. Volkov illustrates how a community of successful and educated Jews provided a counter-image for positive Jewish identification.⁹⁵ Paradoxically, their success at internalizing modern and secular values made full assimilation more difficult, since such “social attraction among the likes”⁹⁶ shifted the focus of identification back to within the Jewish community itself.⁹⁷

From the 1880s onwards, a wave of orthodox Jews from Eastern Europe dispersed westward in the wake of pogroms and poverty. Their immigration into Germany and Austria not only irked anti-Semites like Treitschke, it also enhanced the already heightened self-awareness of westernized Jews. As it forced German Jews to reassess their position, the immigration wave initiated a deliberate dissimulatory course.⁹⁸ By 1910, these *Ostjuden* constituted up to eleven percent of Jewry, but they remained largely isolated.⁹⁹ German Jews received the *Ostjuden* with an “uneasy alliance” of “protective and dissociative modes.”¹⁰⁰ Their response is especially revealing with regard to their self-perception as *both* Germans and Jews. On the one hand, they were concerned that the arrival of a destitute Jewry would jeopardize their hard-won status in German society, especially at a moment when they already found themselves in a tight spot. On the other, their presence elicited a sense of inherited responsibility. It appealed to their liberal, humanist, and philanthropic ideals, but at the same time their philanthropy contained an element of superiority, which confirmed the distance between them and their Eastern ‘brothers.’¹⁰¹

Their ambivalence towards the sudden reality of Eastern Jewish immigration was related to the mythologized status that the *Ostjude* had achieved in the minds of modernized Jews. Steven Aschheim demonstrates in great detail how the Eastern Jew functioned as an “inverted image”¹⁰² of transforming German Jews. During the acculturation process, re-creations and recontextualizations of the caricature of the ghetto Jew portrayed the exact antithesis of what modern Jews aspired: “[L]ocked in narrow Talmudic worlds, unproductive itinerants, boorish and dirty, still speaking the despised *Jargon*, they were identical with *Unbildung*, the incarnation of the Jewish past which German Jews had rejected and transcended.”¹⁰³ Even so, as a mirror image, it continued to register their self-perception. With the first signs of dissimulation, the inverted ideal of the *Ostjude* underwent ideological reevaluation. From an object of dissociation, it transformed into one of identification. Gradually, for some, it became the glorifying image of “Jewish authenticity” and of “the unfragmented self” of the Jewish people.¹⁰⁴ As such, the *Ostjude* reflected a fundamental revision of the relation between Eastern and Western Jews: no longer one of patronizing philanthropy but one between equals in a Jewish nation.

Zionism & Cultural Zionism

The image of the *Ostjude* “reflected the complex and contradictory face of German Jewry itself”¹⁰⁵ and, consequently, not the reality of Eastern Jewish immigrants. Although a positive view on Eastern Jewry was indispensable to the

formation of a national self-understanding, the idealizing symbol of the *Ostjude* was primarily a matter of rhetoric and pragmatism in the service of political goals. The recruitment of immigrants for the Zionist cause was qualified as a liberation from ghetto misery and actually resembled the patronizing stance that they criticized in assimilationists.¹⁰⁶ In their rejection of the ghetto, the ideology of Zionist pioneers Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) and Max Nordau (1849–1923) bore the impress of the assimilated environments where they had grown up.¹⁰⁷ That liberal continuity in political Zionism was one of the causes for the emergence of Cultural Zionism, which advocated the Jewish nation in terms of reviving the Jewish spirit, language, and cultural history.

As a worldwide movement that aspired to represent the entire Jewish people, Zionism was from its onset a “tapestry of powers,”¹⁰⁸ comprising various political, religious, and cultural positions that envisioned the Jewish nation or state differently. Herzl’s Zionism was established as a political movement in 1897, at the first Zionist congress in Basel, one year after the publication of his pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* (1896).¹⁰⁹ The solution to the *Judenfrage*, according to Herzl, was the restoration of a Jewish state. His view is conventionally considered the Western-civic strain of Zionism, in contrast to the Eastern-ethnic movement that developed in the 1880s in the wake of pogroms against Russian Jews.¹¹⁰ Eastern Jews who adopted Zionism did so to distance themselves from their ghetto past, though they favored the continuity of the Jewish spirit. Because of their close affinity with Jewish cultural roots, they resisted the Western Zionist strain, which, they believed, was moving towards a loss of Jewishness, rather than towards its positive assertion.

Achad Ha’am (1856–1927), for instance, founder of Cultural Zionism, fiercely denounced the continuation of liberalism in Herzl’s utopia *Altneuland* (1902),¹¹¹ calling it an instance of “mechanical mimicry, devoid of any national character, pervaded by the scent of that ‘serfdom in the midst of freedom,’ which is a hallmark of the occidental *Golus* [mechanisches Nachäffen, ohne jegliche nationale Eigenheit, von dem Duft jener ‘Knechtschaft mitten in der Freiheit’ durchweht, die ein Kennzeichen des abendländischen Golus bildet].”¹¹² Instead, he advocated the awakening of Jewish consciousness and a common cultural tradition. This, too, required an “intellectual national center [geistiges nationales Zentrum],” which however was not to be regarded as a “refuge for Jewry, but for Judaism [Zufluchtsstätte für die Judenheit, sondern für das Judentum]”¹¹³—a spiritual rather than a geographical refuge. Ha’am’s ideas influenced the Austrian-Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965), who laid the groundwork for a “Jüdische Renaissance.”¹¹⁴ Mysticism and the Hasidic tradition were his sources

of inspiration for a Jewish revival. The Jewish “resurrection from half to to full life [Auferstehung aus halbem Leben zu ganzem]”¹¹⁵ should complement the Zionist political project towards an all-encompassing national consciousness. The short-lived but innovative *jungjüdische Bewegung* in turn-of-the-century Vienna and Berlin heeded Buber’s call. The movement gave expression to his idea in new forms of physical and youth culture,¹¹⁶ while acquiring a distinctive graphic character thanks to the incorporation of *Jugendstil* imagery in the visual arts and in literature.

What set Cultural Zionism apart from other Jewish-national expressions was its rejection of liberal views,¹¹⁷ in addition to its particularly racialist foundation. Racial thought was not exclusive to anti-Semitism alone. It was an element of a more general neo-Romantic mood in Germany, which in rejecting positivism, rationalism, and capitalist impersonality emphasized the importance of community and a regeneration of *Volksgeist*.¹¹⁸ Yet the more prevalent *racism* that inspired for instance Cultural Zionism should be distinguished from the *racism* that was characteristic of the German *völkisch* ideology. Whereas the first aimed at invigorating national consciousness within a frame of racial difference and equality, a claim of racial superiority was intrinsic to the latter.¹¹⁹ Cultural Zionism was permeated with racialist perspectives, although there was little consensus on the concept of a Jewish race.¹²⁰ Even if it served to arouse a national consciousness, Jewish racialist rhetoric functioned equally as a defense mechanism against the prevalence of anti-Semitic racism.

The First World War: the illusion of a ‘community of the trenches’

The Dreyfus Affair in France (1894–1906) is often mentioned as an eye-opening moment for Herzl. The political scandal surrounding the Jewish artillery officer Alfred Dreyfus, who was falsely indicted for treason, convinced Herzl that Zionist political action was necessary. The scandal made it clear to him that assimilation would not secure the acceptance of Jews in society.¹²¹ For the majority of German Jews, however, a more decisive period of disillusionment would arrive with the First World War and its aftermath. The war exposed the incongruence between patriotic and ethnic-national identification by Jews and gentile Germans. According to a “well-trodden historiographical narrative,”¹²² the war led to the complete separation of Jews from other Germans. Even so, some nuance to the idea that the Jews had only been guests in a very separate “German war experience”¹²³ is in order. The isolation of Jewish soldiers was indeed rooted in increasing wartime anti-Semitism. Still, judging from the prominent Jewish involvement in commemoration and veterans’ organizations that were not

specifically Jewish, it could be argued that “German Jews [...] emerged from the First World War still firmly rooted in wider German society.”¹²⁴

Nevertheless, as “the testing ground for the validity of the various prewar German images of the *Ostjude*,” the First World War became a “strange encounter”¹²⁵ in several respects: of politics meeting compassion, of myth meeting reality, of comrades-in-arms becoming Jews and Germans again. When war was declared in 1914, most German Jews entered into a nation-wide enthusiasm, “with high hopes of gaining recognition as integral parts of the German *Volksgemeinschaft*.”¹²⁶ Because the war was directed against anti-Semitic Russian absolutism, it was moreover considered as “an identity of interests.”¹²⁷ On the battlefield, the notion of shared sacrifice and military experience affected all German soldiers alike, which would also become a key element in the Weimar Republic’s memory culture and public remembrance.¹²⁸ However, the encounter with Jews on the Eastern Front confronted German-Jewish soldiers with their own precarious position. As German patriots, they approached *Ostjuden* from a political perspective, but they had to act as cultural mediators between the Jews and the German authorities at the same time. While they had to emphasize their distance from Eastern Jewry, they also had to soften the negative impression on German soldiers, by reminding them that the poor conditions in the ghetto were historical and not the result of Jewish character.¹²⁹

Adding to their self-awareness, the Jewish contribution to the war became the new target of intensifying anti-Semitism. Already in 1914, newspapers accused the Jews of spying and unpatriotic behavior. As the war progressed, accusations of lacking national responsibility, shirking (*Drückebergerei*), and even profiteering from the wartime struggle led to the infamous *Judenenzählung* in October 1916.¹³⁰ The official census subjected German-Jewish soldiers to an official count, so as to determine the level of wartime participation.¹³¹ Rather than confirming the Jews’ loyalty, however, the census especially demonstrated how their ‘Germanness’ was being questioned, and—perhaps because the results were kept a secret—simply intensified the existing allegations. To German Jews, it must have become increasingly clear that “[e]ven the toll of twelve thousand Jewish lives in the battlefield [...] was not sufficient to create the ‘community of the trenches.’”¹³²

In the aftermath of war and defeat, anti-Semitism surfaced even more vehemently as a response to the economic crisis. Once more, Jews were forced to reassess and redefine their commitment to Jewishness, even for those Jews who did not participate in Jewish community and religious life.¹³³ Strategies to do so still varied along existing ideological strains, but under the pressure of an increasingly polarizing environment they acquired a more urgent and anxious character.¹³⁴ The

Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens continued to consider German Jews as a *Stamm* of the German people and to harmonize both identities. Many Jews defined their Jewishness in terms of its similarity with Germanness but visibly struggled with their (perceived) incompatibility. Others still propagated complete assimilation, which sometimes resulted in radical manifestations of Jewish self-hatred and self-denial. Ironically, Zionists ‘agreed’ with anti-Semites on the necessity of Jewish difference and self-assertion. They would become the only ones “equipped with an ideological and explanatory framework that took seriously the radical nature of anti-Semitism.”¹³⁵

The ambivalence of assimilation

The First World War exposed the confrontation between Jewish confidence in inclusion and a society that increasingly rejected their efforts. It remains a question whether or not “das jüdische Projekt der Moderne”¹³⁶ ever had a fair chance at success. No matter how divergent assimilationist and Zionist objectives were, they were different answers to the same unease with the Jewish position, and sprouted from common ground: a longing to overcome the ghetto past, and to carve out a space in modern society. Their assimilatory drive seems logically paired with the drive for emancipation. But, as Zygmunt Bauman argues, German-Jewish relations are in fact exemplary of how the concept of assimilation itself produces its own failure.¹³⁷ It proposes the vision of a culturally unified body, and implies a social hierarchy in which the majority’s ‘invitation’ to become part of it lends them the power to both “set the exams and mark the performance.”¹³⁸

The standing invitation was represented as a sign of tolerance. In fact, however, the assimilatory offer derived its sense from the stiffness of discriminatory norms, from the finality of the verdict of inferiority passed or [sic] nonconformist values. The tolerance, understood as the encouragement of ‘progressive attitudes’ expressed in the search of individual ‘self-improvement’, was meaningful only as long as the measures of progress were not negotiable. Within the policy of assimilation, tolerance aimed at individuals was inextricably linked with intolerance aimed at collectivities, their values and above all their value-legitimizing powers.¹³⁹

In other words, assimilation is a responsibility of the self-improving, Enlightened individual. But that individual and his 'progress' are not the yardstick in assessments of successful integration. It is the quality of the weakest section that determines political evaluations of emancipation, which always apply to the acculturating community as a *whole*. Indeed, Volkov observes a discrepancy between the successful integration of individual Jews, while Jewry as a collective was still regarded as socially distinctive.¹⁴⁰ Assimilants thus can only be perceived as inauthentic: as "suspect[s] of duplicity"¹⁴¹ they are never fully accepted by a dominant majority. To call this a "birth defect [Geburtsfehler]"¹⁴² of the process sheds an unjustified light of doom on early acculturative efforts. Still, the Jewish endeavor had from the outset suffered from a fundamental asynchronicity:¹⁴³ the Jews were pursuing the ideals of the Enlightenment as it was already losing its authority to a German majority. The Jewish attraction to *Bildung*, to the humanistic promise of self-improvement and inclusion into a 'neutral' society of equals became "drawn into the complex [...] process of constructing a compelling collective identity,"¹⁴⁴ cultivated in terms of a German *Volksnation* and an innate sense of *Kultur* and ethnic genealogy.¹⁴⁵ German Jews thus painfully encountered the fundamental tension that shapes European modernity to this day, between Romantic *Kultur* and Enlightened optimism.

In this light, Şenocak's plea for a careful consideration of *Aufklärung*, and especially his reference to German Jews in that context, is interesting. For Jewish 'assimilation' has proven more problematic and complex than a cultural 'symbiosis'; in fact, their history reveals the utterly vulnerable position of minorities in the context of Enlightened acculturation. As I will illustrate in the following chapter section, a similar conflation of *Aufklärung* and *Kultur* marks the contemporary debate as well. Though not immediately visible as a historical process where *Bildung* is instrumentalized in the development of a *Kulturnation*, the tension becomes evident in the debate itself. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and after the turn of the century still, Germany struggled with the effects of labor migration and its status as *Einwanderungsland*. Evidence of that struggle are vehement public debates that—just like a century before—paradoxically combine a demand for assimilatory integration of minorities with the clear demarcation of cultures, again enabling liberals to voice anti-liberal concerns about the perceived menace to 'German' culture.

1.3 A reluctant country of immigration

German history is marked deeply by the consequences of people moving across borders but also of borders moving across people.¹⁴⁶ A history of migration from, into, and within Germany is a story of the dislocation of *die Fremde*, of how migration blurs and challenges seemingly clear-cut distinctions between German and non-German, between native and foreign, self and other. Today, about twenty-one percent of the overall German population has a migration background, a number that increases every year.¹⁴⁷ These numbers—as well as the evolution from a country of emigration, of labor import, of immigration, into a country of transit characterized by high transnational mobility¹⁴⁸—would suggest that Germany has long asserted itself as a country of immigration. Indeed in 2015, with the historical words ‘We can do this [Wir schaffen das]’, Chancellor Merkel showed remarkable confidence when faced with the humanitarian refugee crisis. Yet the self-perception of the country regarding its status as *Einwanderungsland* has traveled historically and legally complex paths and remains troublesome still.

From emigration to immigration

Since its foundation in 1871, the German state has evolved in phases from a country of primarily emigration into one of immigration.¹⁴⁹ Until the 1890s, employment was the primary reason for German emigration to the United States. As industrial growth stimulated the economy, emigration decreased, and was complemented by an inflow of foreign workers from Russia, Italy, and Galicia. By the beginning of the First World War, over a million foreigners were employed in Germany.¹⁵⁰ Some of them became German citizens, others forced laborers under the Nazi regime. The construction and maintenance of the Third Reich depended on a workforce of 7.5 million laborers of non-German origin—about a quarter of the total.¹⁵¹ After the Second World War, about 12 million people from Eastern Germany and from German settlement zones in Eastern Europe were expected to ‘integrate’ into the new *Bundesrepublik*—with mixed results. But the reconstruction of Germany suffered from a shortage of labor force, which could only partially be covered by *Übersiedler* and *Aussiedler*. The German *Wirtschaftswunder* challenged a labor market that was already strained by limited birth surplus, expedited retirement age, prolonged education, and the introduction of military service. In 1955, Germany entered into the first of several recruitment agreements abroad; first with Italy, later with Spain and Greece

(1960), Turkey (1961), Tunisia (1963), Portugal (1964), Morocco (1965), and Yugoslavia (1968).¹⁵²

From the beginning, the agreements were considered to be a European project—the agreement text between Germany and Italy invokes the “spirit of European solidarity [Geist europäischer Solidarität].”¹⁵³ Indeed, they did not only serve German economic interests but also allowed for a controlled ‘export of unemployment’ from the sending countries that benefited from the transfers.¹⁵⁴ Between 1955 and 1973, about 14 million foreigners were employed in Germany, about 11 million of whom returned to their native countries.¹⁵⁵ When in 1973, against the backdrop of the oil crisis, the number of foreign workers peaked at 2.5 million, the German government announced a recruitment ban, which had unexpected long-term effects on society. The recruitment agreements had been aimed specifically at short-term relief of market needs, as implied by the unofficial but widespread term *Gastarbeiter*. But the *Anwerbestopp* overreached itself and accelerated that which it intended to prevent. Laborers who had worked in Germany and returned home—most of them Turkish—were not allowed to return to Germany afterwards. For many, this was a reason not to leave Germany at all, despite increasing unemployment.¹⁵⁶ By the end of the 1970s, most of the mass accommodations for guest workers had turned into more or less separated ‘settler colonies’, which served both as a refuge from and a stepping stone into a new environment. Rather than the result of (intentional) isolation, such communities were the indicators of a new societal transition. Bade concludes: “Guests had become permanent, resulting in a solid minority of foreigners in a genuine immigration situation. [Aus Gästen waren Dauergäste geworden und daraus eine feste Ausländerminorität in einer echten Einwanderungssituation.]”¹⁵⁷

A belated country of immigration

For a long time, German legislation lagged behind the reality of that situation. The realization that a short-term economic approach to labor migration could not sufficiently deal with the long-term effects on society took more than ten years to find articulation in legal terms.¹⁵⁸ In 1979, the contested “Kühn-Memorandum”¹⁵⁹ warned against the harm that a continued neglect of the sociocultural and political urgency of the *Einwanderungssituation* would cause. The memorandum demanded immediate political acknowledgement of the reality of immigration, calling on the social responsibilities of the employing country. Its recommendations on education policy, suffrage, and a general revision of the naturalization law were however met with what Bade vehemently criticizes as a

“defensive refusal of recognition [defensive Erkenntnisverweigerung]”¹⁶⁰ on federal level. For over ten years—he speaks of the 1980s as a “lost decade”¹⁶¹—foreigner policy only revolved around the restriction of new non-EEC immigration and the futile promotion of guest workers’ return, in accordance with the prevalent motto ‘Deutschland ist kein Einwanderungsland’. This resulted in a twofold failure, one that recognized neither the reality of a *de facto* country of immigration without a corresponding policy nor the presence of factual immigrants without a corresponding disposition.¹⁶²

Policy change gained momentum around 2000 with the reformed Citizenship Act and Immigration Act. The 1999 reform of the *Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz*¹⁶³ entailed a liberalization of the *ius sanguinis* by introducing *ius soli* elements into naturalization law. Previously, German citizenship was granted on ancestral grounds only. The new law included birth place as a constitutive factor, granting the offspring of immigrants, in addition to their parents’ nationality, immediate German citizenship as well.¹⁶⁴ In 2001, an independent commission on immigration, under the guidance of CDU-politician Rita Süßmuth, published its advice¹⁶⁵ on integration as a demographic, economic, and labor market issue, acknowledging that “Germany is *de facto* an immigration country. [Deutschland ist faktisch ein Einwanderungsland.]”¹⁶⁶ Its recommendations served as the foundation for the 2005 *Zuwanderungsgesetz*,¹⁶⁷ which for the first time addressed issues of immigration and integration from a legal perspective.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, since 2006, a number of sociopolitically oriented initiatives like the annual *Integrationsgipfel* and *Islamkonferenz* have gathered representatives from the political sphere and from religious or immigrants’ associations for extensive dialogue on the long-term approach to integration. These initiatives, as well as the gradual legal adaptation to social reality, indicate that migration and integration have entered political consciousness as primary sociopolitical issues—albeit with a delay of more than 25 years.¹⁶⁹

Kultur in the aftermath of non-policy: MultiKulti—Leitkultur—‘Deutschland schafft sich ab’

In 2010, on the twentieth anniversary of German reunification, Federal President Christian Wulff caused a stir with his celebratory speech. He elaborated on the contemporary meaning of “Deutschland, einig Vaterland”—a line from the GDR’s national hymn, which at the time of the *Wende* also expressed the East-German desire for *Wiedervereinigung*. In his speech, Wulff calls for the same solidarity and courage that once united two separate countries into one. Translating the memory

of a shared past to a contemporary social context, Wulff presents a remarkably liberal and inclusive reinterpretation of the German *Vaterland*:

[We need] an understanding of Germany that does not limit belonging to a passport, a family history, or a faith but is broader in scope. Christianity undoubtedly belongs to Germany. Judaism undoubtedly belongs to Germany. That is our Christian-Jewish heritage. But Islam now also belongs to Germany. Nearly 200 years ago Johann Wolfgang von Goethe expressed it in his *West-östlichen Divan*: ‘Whoever knows himself and others will also recognize that Orient and Occident can no longer be separated.’

[[Wir brauchen] ein Verständnis von Deutschland, das Zugehörigkeit nicht auf einen Pass, eine Familiengeschichte oder einen Glauben verengt, sondern breiter angelegt ist. Das Christentum gehört zweifelsfrei zu Deutschland. Das Judentum gehört zweifelsfrei zu Deutschland. Das ist unsere christlich-jüdische Geschichte. Aber der Islam gehört inzwischen auch zu Deutschland. Vor fast 200 Jahren hat es Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in seinem *West-östlichen Divan* zum Ausdruck gebracht: “Wer sich selbst und andere kennt, wird auch hier erkennen: Orient und Okzident sind nicht mehr zu trennen.”¹⁷⁰

Wulff’s speech represents only one voice in a proliferation of statements and opinions that have constituted a decades-long debate, which around 2000 revolved primarily around the notion of *Leitkultur*. His careful rhetoric indeed conveys his awareness of the German audience’s sensitivity to the subject. While a repeated “We are the people [Wir sind das Volk]” appeals to a sense of national unity, his speech also introduces a notion of unity in diversity: Judeo-Christian history should be a self-evident aspect of German identity, and, gradually, Islam has become one as well. It is no coincidence that Wulff inserts a Goethe quote here to highlight the heterogeneity of German culture. The indispensable image of German *Kultur* apparently undermines any notion of a single *Leitkultur*, thus salvaging the notion of unity from culturalistic claims that often dominate the public debate. Much like the *Berliner Antisemitismusstreit* more than a century before, the *Leitkultur* debate became a platform for the definition of national identity—“What the nation is at any given moment for any given individual depends on the narrative accounts and arguments they bring to bear on the subject.”¹⁷¹ The Berlin Antisemitism Dispute illustrates the contradictory conflation of liberal and nationalist considerations in the formation of the German state. The *Leitkultur* debate, too, reveals a remarkable adultery of culturalist and

Enlightened-liberal views, in which the latter become instrumentalized in the defense of *Leitkultur*.

The apparent interchangeability of both perspectives is due to their embeddedness within the same post-racial paradigm—a logic that allows and justifies the culturalization of difference and its translation into political terms.¹⁷² Post-racialism, as Lentin argues, has become the dominant framework in which suspicion of diversity is articulated “in cultural-civilizational terms that attempt to avoid the charge of racism.”¹⁷³ In the post-racial mode, she argues, “the language of race and racism has been abandoned for that of ‘different but equal culture.’”¹⁷⁴ This semantic shift, which denies the significance of racism through a mobilization of the language of culture, has been recognized as the ‘culturalization of politics’. It occurs when “differences conditioned by political inequality or economic exploitation are naturalized and neutralized into ‘cultural’ differences, that is into different ‘ways of life’ which are something given, something that cannot be overcome.”¹⁷⁵ Culture as an explanatory framework for difference thus becomes an equally essentializing mechanism that reduces individuals to their belonging to purportedly homogeneous cultural groups, and in doing so, excludes all other modes of explanation. As such, Lentin concludes, “the post-racial is [...] the dominant mode in which racism finds expression today across a variety of contexts.”¹⁷⁶ In what follows, I will illustrate how the notion of *Kultur*, both in terms of culturalism and of culturalization, has dominated several contemporary debates. The disputes on multiculturalism, its proclaimed failure, on integration, on parallel societies, on the headscarf issue, and on German *Leitkultur* all convey the primacy of the notion of culture as static and innate.

The introduction of ‘multiculturalism’ into public awareness, and with it a reintroduction of *Kultur*, kindled a first debate in the 1980s.¹⁷⁷ The realization that guest workers’ residence in Germany had lost its temporary character shifted the focus from their economic to their cultural context. Previously, the perception of labor migrants had been informed primarily in terms of their economic plight.¹⁷⁸ A counterpoint to that one-sided focus would be a more comprehensive view on the ‘cultural enrichment’ they had brought. An ecumenical announcement on the occasion of the “Tag des ausländischen Mitbürgers” (1980)¹⁷⁹ for instance stated that multicultural reality requires acquaintance with ‘foreign’ cultures. Greater valorization of cultural specificities would lead to understanding and tolerance. The success of multicultural society, according to the announcement, depended on mutual efforts at integration, defined not in terms of assimilation but of respect for the minority’s aspirations and traditions. However, in the elevation of multicultural coexistence as “a new opportunity for the future of the

Federal Republic [eine neue Chance für die Zukunft der Bundesrepublik],” the benevolence of the announcement is overshadowed by a Eurocentric approach of difference: “Achieving creative communication with other cultures is an important contribution to the realization of the common culture of a European Community. [Wenn es gelingt, zu einer schöpferischen Kommunikation mit anderen Kulturen zu kommen, ist dies ein wichtiger Beitrag für die Verwirklichung der gemeinsamen Kultur einer Europäischen Gemeinschaft.]”¹⁸⁰ The phrasing of the statement suggests that multiculturalism requires considerable effort to overcome the distance between cultures as sphere-like, incompatible entities. Despite its good intentions, the attempt at redirecting the perception of immigrants’ misery amounted to a problematic shift from a socioeconomic to a culturalized approach of inequality and difference.

Opponents of multiculturalism brought forward a number of anti-pluralist and ethnocultural arguments that insisted on ‘insurmountable’ differences. Exemplary is the “Heidelberger Manifest,”¹⁸¹ signed and published by fifteen university professors in 1982, who criticize “euphoric-optimistic economic policy [euphorisch-optimistische Wirtschaftspolitik]” as a menace to German *Kultur*: The rhetoric of the manifesto is reminiscent of Treitschke’s contradictory *Einimpfung* imagery. Its core argument is that peoples are mutually exclusive—they are “(biological and cybernetic) organisms [...] with different system properties, passed on genetically and by tradition [(biologisch und kybernetisch) lebende Systeme [...] mit voneinander verschiedenen Systemeigenschaften, die genetisch und durch Traditionen weitergegeben werden].”¹⁸² As such, they naturally resist cultural pluralism on the same territory. However, this does not mean that acculturation is impossible—in fact, the real menace to the *Volk* is a potential *Einschmelzung*. The contradiction in the notion of (in)compatible cultures is shrouded in a constitutional argument: “The constitution of the Federal Republic does not proceed from the concept of the ‘nation’ as the sum of all peoples within a state. Rather, it is based on the concept of ‘people’, that is, the German people. [Das Grundgesetz der Bundesrepublik geht nicht aus vom Begriff der ‘Nation’ als der Summe aller Völker innerhalb eines Staates. Es geht vielmehr aus vom Begriff ‘Volk,’ und zwar vom deutschen Volk.]”¹⁸³ Thus adapting a biological-nationalist stance usually associated with racist propaganda, the Heidelberger manifesto functioned as a “discursive bridge”¹⁸⁴ between overt racism and the ethnopluralism of New Right that was gaining ground in the 1980s. It acknowledged the heterogeneous makeup of society yet insisted on the necessary preservation of ethnic and cultural difference. This stance, as Dirke observes, “managed to make larger and larger inroads into public opinion” because

it “replaces the concept of race with the seemingly less controversial concept of the *Kulturkreis*.”¹⁸⁵ Indeed, opponents of multiculturalism used the notion of *Kultur* to invert an initial ideal of dialogue and mutual tolerance into its exclusionary opposite. Even so, the fact that ‘multiculturalism’ is susceptible to such an easy inversion illustrates that the argument between defenders and opponents in fact agrees on the very same idea: that of internal cultural homogeneity and mutual incompatibility, which both positions remarkably articulate in terms of ‘respect’ — “respect for other peoples [die Achtung vor anderen Völkern]” in the *Heidelberger Manifest*; in the ecumenical announcement the claim that “in the coexistence of cultures [...] the majority [should] respect the claims of minorities [im Miteinander der Kulturen [...] die Mehrheit die Ansprüche der Minderheiten respektieren [soll]].”¹⁸⁶

Since its introduction into public debates, the notion of multiculturalism has suffered from a lack of agreement on its definition. “[O]ver the years the term ‘multiculturalism’ has come to reference a diffuse, indeed maddeningly spongy and imprecise, discursive field: a train of false trails and misleading universals. Its references are a wild variety of political strategies.”¹⁸⁷ The arguments brought forward often entangle prescriptive and descriptive multiculturalism, i.e. multicultural policies and the lived multicultural situation of people from diverse origins coexisting in one society.¹⁸⁸ That vagueness partially explains how “Multikulti” could experience “a symptomatic conversion from a term of endearment to a swear word [eine symptomatische Konversion [...] vom Schmusewort zum Schimpfwort],”¹⁸⁹ eventually culminating in the proclaimed crisis of multiculturalism.¹⁹⁰ Purported evidence of its ‘failure’ are the so-called *Parallelgesellschaften*. The image of parallel societies as sociotopes, of ethnically homogeneous population segments, separated socially and culturally from society, has more discursive than referential relevance. The arguments in the dispute all agree on the idea that *Parallelgesellschaften* are symbols of incomplete integration: either as its failure or as a transitory stop in the process.¹⁹¹ As such, the debate on these urban areas conveys a societal unease with the supposed “excessive tolerance and benevolence towards disloyal, unassimilable, culturally different others” supported by multiculturalism.¹⁹² However, the perceived excess of cultural diversity is really the result of long-term non-policy.

The erosion of the term ‘multiculturalism’ accelerated with the emergence of the notion *Leitkultur*, which in 2000 and 2001 dominated a controversy about the future of German society. Following a proposal by the center-left government to remove the notion of descent from new laws on immigration and citizenship, conservative opponents accused the government of jeopardizing German cultural

identity. They set up an immigration commission in order to influence discourse in favor of a definition and protection of that identity.¹⁹³ German *Leitkultur*, introduced in the public debate in 2000 by CDU chairman in the Federal Parliament Friedrich Merz, would become the key concept in that attempt. Its resonance relies on its dual connotative power: “Whilst its first lexeme *Leit-* hints at a hierarchical relationship between cultures with the German one taking a lead, the second lexeme *-kultur* denotes the social glue that is traditionally meant to bind Germans together.”¹⁹⁴ The term thus reintroduced an assimilatory understanding of integration. But more significantly, it illustrates the pattern of how a universalist notion is mobilized in a discourse of *Kultur*.

Originally, the term *Leitkultur*, formulated by political scientist Bassam Tibi,¹⁹⁵ was indebted to a universalist *Verfassungspatriotismus*. Resisting the idea of a *Kulturnation*, Tibi proposes that Germany should reposition itself by acknowledging a democratic, Enlightened ‘European *Leitkultur*’ as a set of guiding values: secular democracy, civil rights, the primacy of reason over religion, and civil society. Although Tibi points out that such values are fundamentally incompatible with an ethnocultural understanding of the nation,¹⁹⁶ Friedrich Merz reappropriated the term in a national and cultural context. What he calls the “liberal German guiding culture [freiheitliche deutsche Leitkultur]” carries the constitution and European Enlightenment at its core:

The constitution is [...] the most important expression of our value system and thus part of the German cultural identity that enables the inner cohesion of our society in the first place. [...] Immigration and integration of foreigners [...] needs orientation to generally applicable value standards.

[Das Grundgesetz ist [...] wichtigster Ausdruck unserer Werteordnung und so Teil der deutschen kulturellen Identität, die den inneren Zusammenhalt unserer Gesellschaft erst möglich macht. [...] Einwanderung und Integration von Ausländern [...] braucht Orientierung an allgemein gültigen Wertmaßstäben.]¹⁹⁷

Paradoxically, by referring to the constitution as an expression of culture, rather than a means of guaranteeing equality, ‘generally applicable values’ are employed here as a standard for cultural assimilation. The quote is exemplary of a pattern that characterized the course of the debate—as Stefan Manz concludes: “What was conceived as a purely political concept [...] was easily appropriated by the right through an ethnocultural interpretation.”¹⁹⁸ Merz’s assimilatory notion

of *Leitkultur* met with opposition from the political left and representatives of minority groups, who denounced it as “a meaningless slogan [eine inhaltsleere Parole]”¹⁹⁹ prone to misinterpretation by xenophobic groups. Indeed, right-wing press and political parties continued to functionalize it in a strong assertion of Germanness. Evolving from a potentially universalist concept into its (ethno)cultural, exclusionary opposite, “[t]he term *Leitkultur* [...] offered the opportunity to express instinctive fears of the Other in a politically acceptable way.” Much like the notion of *Kultur* as a discursive bridge in the *Heidelberger Manifest*, the term *Leitkultur* allowed “[a] taboo in German public discourse [to be] circumvented by reverting to an apparently unsuspecting word.”²⁰⁰

The antithesis of *Leitkultur* was constructed in the course of several so-called ‘headscarf debates’. In 1998, Fereshta Ludin, an Afghani-born German citizen, was prohibited from teaching in Baden-Württemberg’s public schools because she chose to wear a headscarf. Her choice was considered as a statement of “resistance against integration or assimilation goals.”²⁰¹ Yet the central issue in the Ludin case, as opposed to earlier cases, was her emergence as a ‘Muslim woman’ in the German public domain, and everything it was meant to symbolize: the state, the constitution, and Western democracy. At stake was the symbolic power of the headscarf, which in the course of the trial was transformed from a religious into a cultural symbol. First, Ludin was refused a teaching position on grounds of her inability to represent the state’s Christian values.²⁰² Remarkably, later court decisions against Ludin invoked principles of state neutrality—a justification now based on Ludin’s non-secular rather than non-Christian appearance. In the court’s inconsistent decisions, the headscarf was set up as ‘religious’ and therefore in contradiction with state neutrality, whereas Christian values were considered ‘cultural’ and ‘neutral.’²⁰³ As a result, the headscarf became a battleground for a conflict of cultures. Ironically, however, the obsession with ‘culture’ overshadowed the fact that Ludin herself embodied the opposite of what the scarf was believed to represent: gendered oppression within Islam, and the inability of Muslims to act according to democratic principles. Weber illustrates how Ludin’s subjectivity was denied, as she was construed as a non-agent: the acting subject was replaced by the cultural object of the ‘Muslim woman’. The actual but implicit symbolic power of the headscarf, then, was its disturbance of the public field: its undeniable visibility “force[d] an acknowledgement of the deceptions necessary to maintain the unity of the German subject and [...] by which the false assumption of unity is created—the German subject, it seems, is not only Christian; its Muslim Other not only silent, backwards, invisible.”²⁰⁴

The course of the *Kopftuchstreit* is symptomatic of the increasing polarization in Western discourses after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Since then, a number of key incidents and public statements have reignited controversy about multiculturalism, immigrants, and Muslims in particular.²⁰⁵ The tension between ‘civilized West’ and an external threat soon equated with ‘Islam’ in general has been fought out over symbolic content—the construction of a mosque in Köln-Ehrenfeld, or the Swiss ban on minarets. While ‘*MultiKulti*’ and ‘*Leitkultur*’ have gradually lost their discursive power, a rediscovered *Fremd- und Feindbild* of Islam now dominates debates on integration.²⁰⁶ German Jews a century before were considered suspicious due to their increasing embodiment of modernity and secularism, which irked both conservatives and ‘liberals’ like Treitschke. Around 2000, it is a ‘secularized’ *Abendland* that distinguishes itself from the ‘religious’ other, i.e. Orient. The “Islamisierung” or “Muslimisierung”²⁰⁷ of difference, sustained by media coverage and reports on immigration,²⁰⁸ now accompanies—at times replaces—the culturalization of difference. The “diffuse blending of the term ‘terrorism’ with a religion, as generated in politics and in the media [politisch und medial geschaffene diffuse Verschmelzung des Begriffs Terrorismus mit einer Religion]” has resulted in a tendency whereby Muslims are codified as a collective threat within society.²⁰⁹

A century before, Treitschke’s anti-liberal liberalism was a symptom of the conflation of national culture and liberal considerations in the early nation-state. Similarly, around 2000 values of *Aufklärung* appear to be instrumentalized in narratives of *Kultur*, allowing yet another anti-liberal liberal to express his concern about an impending loss of *Kultur*. In 2010, Thilo Sarrazin published the highly contentious book *Deutschland schafft sich ab*,²¹⁰ which reached bestseller status and acquired a taboo-breaking aura, as if Sarrazin were speaking for a silent majority. In advance of publication, Sarrazin had already courted controversy with statements about the purported cultural and intellectual disintegration of the country.²¹¹ His claims about *Überfremdung* and the foreign menace to German *Kultur* are reminiscent of anti-Semitic rhetoric a century before. Sarrazin’s primary concern pertains to a decreasing number of ethnic Germans combined with an increase of lower-class citizens from a migration background,²¹² culminating in a doomsday scenario in which “Germany [...] is becoming more ignorant on average as a result of the skewed birth distribution [...]. Intelligence and social class correlate very strongly [Deutschland [...] durchschnittlich dümmer [wird], weil die Geburtenverteilung [...] schief ist. Intelligenz und Schichtzugehörigkeit korrelieren stark positiv].”²¹³ While repeatedly covering himself against indictments of racism, Sarrazin added fuel to the fire with

statements about the existence of a specific Jewish gene²¹⁴ and about the “cultural peculiarity of peoples,” which he considers the defining constituent of European reality.²¹⁵

Especially controversial about the publication was Sarrazin’s political affiliation as a social democrat. His social-Darwinist reasoning²¹⁶—a potent mix of culturalism, economism, and genetics²¹⁷—strongly contradicts any notion of social advancement through education and support. His rhetoric treads on dangerous ground by proposing to inhibit “a dysgenic birth pattern [eine dysgenisch wirkende Geburtenstruktur]” with drastic measures that should be effective first of all and constitutional only secondarily.²¹⁸ An extreme example of the culturalist reduction of what is in fact a socio-economic inequality, Sarrazin represents a return of explicit racialism within a post-racial environment. The familiar paradox of demanding assimilation while claiming the unassimilability of the Other shapes his entire argument. As Hofmann concludes, he expresses a “chauvinism that amounts to a separation of population groups and does not strive for integration, yet laments ghettoization while perpetuating it through culturalism at the same time [ein Chauvinismus [...], der auf eine Trennung der Bevölkerungsgruppen hinausläuft und nicht Integration anstrebt, sondern Ghettoisierung beklagt, aber gleichzeitig durch Kulturalismus fortschreibt].”²¹⁹

Assessing the impact of the “Sarrazin phenomenon [Phänomen Sarrazin],”²²⁰ Bade criticizes the *Desintegrationspublizistik* for reinforcing and legitimating ethno- and sociobiological thought patterns, for harming integration optimism among Muslim *Einwanderer*, and most importantly for its failure to establish a transparent discussion on integration.²²¹ Bade interprets the Sarrazin controversy, and by extension the entire integration debate, as a “surrogate debate [Ersatzdebatte]”²²² for a highly urgent—yet ignored through decades of political amnesia²²³—discussion of Germany’s status as an immigration country. The real challenge, he argues, lies in tailoring a comprehensible self-image for *all* Germans—a “tangible new encompassing identity [...] that is already being lived in day-to-day life, but has no name as yet [einer beschreibbaren neuen gruppenübergreifenden Identität [...], die im Alltag schon gelebt wird, aber noch keinen Namen hat].”²²⁴

1.4 Literature, identity, and singularity

To imagine and to describe such an unnamed inclusive identity is hardly the territory of political debate alone; it is in fact a very productive *literary* matter. Over the years, countless authors have intervened in public debates, considering it their duty to counter the discursive primacy of *Kultur*. Şenocak's *Deutschsein* and Kermani's *Wer ist wir. Deutschland und seine Muslime* (2009),²²⁵ for instance, are Enlightened critiques of the German self-definition as a *Kulturnation*. *Das Manifest der Vielen* (2011), edited by Hilal Sezgin,²²⁶ constructs a counter-identity that defies the notion of *Leitkultur*, weaving together the voices of about thirty authors of diverse origins and confessions who defend their “right to live one’s life [Eigenrecht gelebten Lebens]”²²⁷—their desire to seek refuge from the imperative of identity, and to live their *singular* lives instead. The essays articulate an already existing ‘new Germanness’, articulating hope for an inclusive, pluralistic, and future-oriented *Wir*: “Even if their past and individual narratives distinguish people from one another, the idea of a sustainable, common German identity could unite them. [Auch wenn die Vergangenheit und die einzelnen Narrative die Menschen voneinander unterscheiden—die Vorstellung von einer tragbaren, gemeinsamen deutschen Identität könnte sie einigen.]”²²⁸

The optimism and Enlightened overtones of such essays and identity constructions are obvious. However, as the history of German Jews around 1900 illustrates, the optimism in embracing Enlightenment principles may expire in the confrontation with the *Kulturnation*. In this light, Feridun Zaimoglu’s contribution to the *Manifest* is worth mentioning explicitly.²²⁹ Hesitant to refer to the public debate as a ‘clash of cultures’—it is rather a “battle which we have good reasons to avoid calling *Kulturkampf* [Kampf, den wir aus guten Gründen Kulturkampf zu nennen vermeiden]”²³⁰—Zaimoglu accurately observes that it is deeply affected by the conflation of *Kultur* and *Aufklärung*. Unduly claimed by “would-be Voltaires [Westentaschen-Voltaires],”²³¹ Enlightenment principles have been perverted in the declaration of “hostility as the primary duty of occidentally inspired humanism [Feindschaft zur ersten Pflicht des abendländisch inspirierten Humanismus [...]].”²³² Zaimoglu calls instead for a return to a humanism inspired by vulnerability, and by an awareness of the singularity of lived experience:

It is indecent to see only heaps and hordes, when it is people who perceive this land as their own. They and I feel connected to a humanism to which it is more urgent to relate today than yesterday. This humanism implies standing on the side of the vulnerable.

[Unanständig ist es, nur Haufen und Horden zu sehen, wo es doch Menschen sind, die dieses Land als ihr eigenes Land betrachten. Sie und ich fühlen sich einem Humanismus verbunden, auf den sich zu beziehen heute dringlicher ist als gestern. Dieser Humanismus bedeutet, dass man auf der Seite der Schwachen steht.]²³³

An author's deliberate embrace of the 'weaker' position implicitly draws the attention to the position of literature within the polarized debate. While that debate at both ends of the twentieth century revolves around the conflation of *Kultur* and *Aufklärung*, many literary texts dealing with the vexed issue of identity move away from clear-cut argumentative and ideological stances, outlining the significance of a humanism of vulnerability, especially in a context of Enlightened optimism.

Of course, literary texts have shown themselves susceptible to ideological instrumentalization or deployment in constructions of national identities—if they are not themselves already explicit in their programmatic nature. In fact, at both ends of the century, a majority of definitions of literature are closely entwined with ideological programs. Exemplary in the case of German-Jewish literary history is the *Kunstwart* debate. In 1912, Moritz Goldstein sparked a controversy among Jewish intellectuals with an article that was “[a]rguably the sharpest invective ever launched against German-Jewish assimilation.”²³⁴ The essay “Deutsch-jüdischer Parnaß,”²³⁵ published in the conservative magazine *Der Kunstwart*, was remarkable for its “head-on [attack of] what Jews of previous generations had so passionately been aspiring to achieve.”²³⁶ Goldstein posits that a genuine relationship between Jewish and German culture is improbable and interprets the precarious position of German-Jewish authors as exemplary of society at large: “We Jews administer the spiritual heritage of a people that denies us the right and ability to do so. [Wir Juden verwalten den geistigen Besitz eines Volkes, das uns die Berechtigung und die Fähigkeit dazu abspricht].”²³⁷ Goldstein's anger with the dilemma faced by German-Jewish authors “is merely a window into the larger Jewish Question.”²³⁸ His call for Jewish self-assertion and for the establishment of a stronger Jewish cultural sphere in Germany²³⁹ is really a demand for a literature in the service of a national program.

Comparable instances of the functionalization of literature can be found along the ideological spectrum. In his interpretation of the *Kunstwart* debate and its aftermath, Kilcher observes that the definition of German-Jewish literature varies according to “the prevalent cultural-political positions of Jewish modernity: assimilation, Zionism, and diaspora theories each implied their own conceptions of literature and culture [den dominanten kulturpolitischen Positionen der jüdischen Moderne: Assimilations-, Zionismus- und Diasporatheorien implizierten alle je eigene Konzeptionen von Literatur und Kultur].”²⁴⁰ From a liberal perspective, advocated by the historian Ludwig Geiger, German-Jewish literature is both the result and the instrument of acculturation. It should therefore only be considered as ‘German’ literature, which is intrinsically heterogeneous: “Whoever looks at German literature and art [...] will have to admit that an exclusively German art has hardly ever existed. [Wer die deutsche Literatur und Kunst [...] betrachtet, der wird geradezu sagen müssen, daß es eine ausschließlich deutsche Kunst fast niemals gegeben hat.]”²⁴¹ The diasporic model rejects both dissimilatory and acculturative notions of literature and formulates a simultaneously political and aesthetic alternative that elevates (German-) Jewish literature “to a cosmopolitical paradigm of Jewish modernity [zu einem kosmopolitischen Paradigma jüdischer Moderne].”²⁴² Alfred Wolfenstein’s literary program, for instance, rejects any nationalistic and territorial understanding of literature, be it in terms of cultural assimilation, or of dissimilation: “From the weak assimilant to the most courageous Zionist, their one desire is: soil. [Vom schwächlichen Assimilanten bis zum mutigsten Zionisten wünschen sie sich: Boden.]”²⁴³ Instead, modern Jewish literature should celebrate a diasporic existence as a “human, connected dispersion [menschliche, eine verbundene Zerstreuung].”²⁴⁴

In the case of contemporary ‘literature of migration’, the intertwining of ideology and literature is not quite found in cosmopolitan or national claims. Rather, the writers in question appear to move in a field of tension between emancipatory self-assertion and artistic autonomy. In the early years, the works of migrant writers were regarded from a predominantly sociopolitical perspective. With their programmatic article “Literatur der Betroffenheit,” for instance, Franco Biondi and Rafik Schami drew attention to a marginalized group of writers and themes. Criticizing the precarious social position of guest workers, the article reserves a particular role for a multinational literature in their emancipation process.²⁴⁵ Associations such as the politically inspired *PoLiKunst-Verein* (1980–1987) and the publication series *Südwind Gastarbeiterdeutsch* also promoted solidarity among foreign writers. At the same time, several voices rejected such readings, emphasizing the aesthetic qualities of their writings instead.

Turkish-German authors like Yüksel Pazarkaya and Aras Ören represented the perspective of literary autonomy early on.²⁴⁶ Pazarkaya's programmatic article "Literatur ist Literatur"²⁴⁷ rejects sociopolitical claims to literature as folkloristic, exoticist reductions. Instead, he draws attention to the often neglected aesthetic dimensions of texts of so-called *Gastarbeiterliteratur*.

Although that aesthetic perspective has become the more dominant one, this literature has far from lost its critical character, even if its 'politics' do not simply reiterate the familiar arguments articulated in the identity debate. As Jacques Rancière puts it:

Literature does a kind of side-politics or meta-politics. The principle of that 'politics' is to leave the common stage of the conflict of wills in order to investigate in the underground of society and read the symptoms of history. It takes social situations and characters away from their everyday, earth-bound reality and displays what they truly are, a phantasmagoric fabric of poetic signs, which are historical symptoms as well. [...] This 'politics' of literature emerges as the dismissal of the politics of orators and militants, who conceive of politics as a struggle of wills and interests.²⁴⁸

Indeed, while the calls for an embrace of *Aufklärung* by Şenocak, Kermani, or Sezgin position the authors on a 'common stage of conflict' that draws them into a narrative of ideological oppositions, a closer look at the 'fabric of signs', at the aesthetic rather than programmatic dimensions of literary texts, we may find many nuanced approaches to the ambivalences of Enlightenment.