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*To Viktoria,
for believing in me and giving me the strength that I needed.*

*To Samia,
for giving me unconditional love, no matter the distance.*

*To Hava,
for showing me that “home” can also be a person.*

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Abstract - English

Since the 1960s, Germany has welcomed millions of Turkish migrants, only to become home to the largest group of the Turkish diaspora. Today, it counts almost 3 million people with Turkish origins or born in Türkiye. Despite an initial positive reception of Turkish migrants, their integration process within the German community was arduous and did not result in the desired outcome, as the current societal divisions and tensions demonstrate. With constant legal and political debates about loyalty, identity and the legislations which regulate citizenship, the Turkish diaspora has been constantly battling for its belonging to Germany. From media narratives, to artistic, culinary and religious manifestation of their identity, to access to voting rights, the Turkish community's struggle for integration marked their experience in German society.

After interviewing an indicative sample of members of the diaspora, the findings were used to consider alternative modes of thinking about and practicing citizenship. What emerges above all is the need for a wider and more inclusive framework for democratic participation, which could prevent Germany from falling back into nationalist and backward narratives, anchored in conservative values.

The key to the success of future policies lies in the establishment of a culture of dialogue and transcultural exchanges, ensuring that all voices are given equal prominence. Basing citizenship rights not on the mutable or ascribed characteristics of an individual, but on concrete actions and engagement with the community, has the potential to foster a more inclusive and prosperous society.

Abstract - Deutsch

Seit den 1960er Jahren hat Deutschland Millionen von Migranten aus der Türkei willkommen geheißen und beherbergt somit die größte Gruppe der türkischen Diaspora. Heutzutage zählt man fast 3 Millionen Menschen, die entweder türkische Wurzeln haben oder in der Türkei geboren wurden. Trotz eines anfänglich positiven Aufnehmens, war der Integrationsprozess dieser Gemeinschaft mühsam und hat nicht zum gewünschten Ergebnis geführt, wie die derzeitigen gesellschaftlichen Spaltungen und Spannungen zeigen. Mit ständigen rechtlichen und politischen Debatten über Loyalität, Identität und den Gesetzen, die die Staatsbürgerschaft regeln, hat die türkische Diaspora ununterbrochen um ihre Zugehörigkeit zu Deutschland gekämpft. Von Medienberichten über die künstlerische, kulinarische und religiöse Manifestation ihrer Identität bis hin zum Zugang zum Wahlrecht - der Kampf der türkischen Gemeinschaft um Integration prägt ihre Erfahrungen in der deutschen Gesellschaft.

Nachdem eine repräsentative Auswahl von Mitgliedern der türkischen Diaspora befragt wurde, haben die Ergebnisse dazu geführt, alternative Formen des Denkens und der Ausübung der Staatsbürgerschaft in Betracht zu ziehen. Es zeigt sich vor allem die Notwendigkeit eines breiteren und inklusiveren Rahmens für die demokratische Teilhabe, der verhindern könnte, dass Deutschland in nationalistische und rückständige Narrativen verfällt, die in konservativen Werten verankert sind.

Der Schlüssel zum Erfolg künftiger Politiken liegt in der Etablierung einer Kultur des Dialogs und des transkulturellen Austausches, die sicherstellt, dass alle Stimmen gleichberechtigt zur

Geltung kommen. Staatsbürgerschaftsrechte nicht auf veränderbare oder zugeschriebene Eigenschaften eines Individuums zu gründen, sondern auf konkrete Handlungen und Engagement für die Gemeinschaft, hat das Potenzial, eine integrativere und wohlhabendere Gesellschaft zu fördern.

Introduction

The inspiration for this topic comes from its resonance with my own personal story. I grew up with dual citizenship, German and Italian; one acquired by *ius soli* and the other by *ius sanguinis*. Many times I was asked which country represented me the most. I always felt conflicted when put in front of this question: was my answer supposed to be based on cultural affinity, my somatic traits or the language that I spoke more frequently? What aspect of my individuality mattered most when determining which country I could feel patriotic towards, loyal or emotionally tied to? Did I even feel this kind of attachment towards a State?

There have been many episodes where someone went as far as to question my belonging to one of the two countries and, in these instances, I could not help but feel hurt. Why was it necessary for me to demonstrate or justify my nationality? While my personal story is not comparable in terms of the complexities and controversies within the Turkish diaspora, it triggered an internal dialogue that I hope to elaborate and extend to a wider audience.

In 2018, a notorious German football player was at the centre of a symbolic event that encapsulates the essence of this thesis: it has to do with loyalty to one's country, diasporas, national identity and ways in which one expresses their sense of belonging to a community. "Ich bin Deutscher, wenn wir gewinnen, aber Immigrant, wenn wir verlieren."¹ These are the words of football player Mesut Özil, when he was retelling the scandal that arose from a photograph he took in 2018 with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Özil, born in Germany with Turkish origins, suffered great criticism from this picture. The German public opinion was particularly harsh with the player, prompting questions about his loyalty to Germany. It got to the point that Özil felt that resigning from the German national soccer team was his only way to get out of the heated debate. This episode perfectly describes how the discourse on citizenship, rights and identity goes beyond the institutional level and finds a place in more popular contexts as well. This debate shapes the daily lives of German-Turks: from the way they interact with each other within and "outside" of their community, to how they engage in political life.

¹Simmank, Bogner, 2013

For a long time, Germany did not offer possibilities for emotional symbolic attachments. There exist various ways of expressing one's Germanness, but rarely are these associated with any kind of national pride nor patriotism. This is due to its complicated relationship with recent history: the aftermath of WWII and the Holocaust. The fear of promoting values and principles, evoking memories of *Nationalsozialismus*, prevents Germans from using symbols and nationalistic narratives to express their loyalty to their country.

A rare example of patriotism that has been accepted in public spaces can be identified in the show of support for national sports teams, such as in the context of the 2006 World Cup. Ten years later, in 2016, retired German General Hans-Peter von Kirchbach published a brief paper on patriotism, notably issued by the Federal Academy for Security Policy. His position is that Germany's current notion of patriotism is, or should be, based on a feeling of freedom, unity, respect for human dignity and common roots, and finally a strong emphasis on cohesion.²

This stance is in stark contrast with the idea of the famous German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, who aptly described the German attitude towards patriotism. In the 18th century, he wrote that *"The cheapest sort of pride is national pride; for if a man is proud of his own nation, it argues that he has no qualities of his own of which he can be proud; otherwise he would not have recourse to those which he shares with so many millions of his fellowmen. The man who is endowed with important personal qualities will be only too ready to see clearly in what respects his own nation falls short, since their failings will be constantly before his eyes. But every miserable fool who has nothing at all of which he can be proud adopts, as a last resource, pride in the nation to which he belongs; he is ready and glad to defend all its faults and follies tooth and nail, thus reimbursing himself for his own inferiority"*.³

Though it might be considered outdated, this quote clarifies why most Germans do not exactly express feelings of pride for their nation: they see their presence in a country as being practically coincidental, since they did not actively choose to be born there. Therefore, to them, it does not make sense to celebrate something over which they had no say in. Rather, they might feel pride for important figures who contributed to developments and successes of their nation, for example the scientists who created the Covid-19 vaccine, politicians (i.e. Konrad Adenauer, Willy Brandt, Angela Merkel) soccer players, philosophers, intellectuals etc... Differently from other countries in the European Union, there exists a tendency in Germany where people identify more with a regional-based pride: they show appreciation and celebrate their local products and symbols. Many do not see the sense in publicly displaying the symbols of one's country, for example the German flag. They claim to be happy to be German because they live in a country which offers many opportunities and good quality services in education, health and

²von Kirchbach, pp.2-5, 2016

³Schopenhauer, 1851

welfare. Their attitude supports the idea that national pride is not correlated with one's place of birth, it has nothing to do with the territorial dimension. This proves how debates around these concepts are historically constructed and adaptable to political and social needs. In most cases, these notions are inadequate in explaining the complexities of national identity, citizenship and the likes.

Though more recent developments indicate that nationalism is regaining momentum, especially as it is being revamped by far-right populism -embodied in Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), but also from the Christliche Demokratische Union. The centre-right conservative party (CDU) presented a law proposing to have a commemoration day to celebrate the adoption of the German constitution on May 23rd. At the base of their project lies the attempt to establish a positive correlation between Germans and their sense of patriotism. While respect and appreciation for German Basic Law should be the foundation for patriotism, this controversial legal initiative includes other provisions, suggesting a return to a Germany that once was, instead of building one that includes all facets of today's society. It is particularly the increase of "year-round visibility of national symbols — especially the national flag — in public spaces", which raises concern.⁴ It comes as no surprise that members of nationalist groups, both institutional and civil-society based - for example the AfD and anti-Islam movement PEGIDA - have reclaimed this symbol to convey their message of a pure and homogenous Germany, in which immigrants are far from being welcome.

The same applies to nationalist propaganda of the Turkish President and the Justice and Development party (AKP): it falls on receptive ears among Germans of Turkish descent. The proposed ethnonational definition of nation is a new construct. The secular concept of Turkishness that prevailed before Erdoğan was also not defined ethnically.

The intention behind this research is to look at how the diaspora has shaped and reshaped cultural spaces, claiming political spheres through activism. It is especially this practice that allows the Turkish diaspora to continue shaping Germany's cultural and legal landscape in a globalized world. In regard to the political sphere, I am interested in examining how Germany's attitude towards Turkish migrants has evolved over time. Furthermore, I will be analysing the different modes in which members of this community engage with the political dimension of both Germany and Türkiye. The multiculturalist society and practices that have originated from the arrival and settlement of the Turkish community are reflected just as much in all forms: cuisine, arts, film, literature, theatre, journalism, as well as in language. It is therefore important

⁴ Knight, 2023

to take these into account when assessing the actual impact of this community on what Germany is today.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this investigation, I will be using multiple analytical lenses to highlight the tensions and gaps between how citizenship is theorized, administered, experienced, and politicized.

My argument is that the basic presumption that national identity is a stable, homogenous concept is no longer realistic nor applicable to the current era, marked by mass mobility and transnational ties between people and countries.

Instead, I propose that citizenship should be reimaged as a flexible, layered, and negotiated process that takes into account both legal and emotional belonging, especially for migrant communities.

The relationship between Germany and its Turkish diaspora has evolved through a complex interplay of domestic socio-political transformations and international diplomatic shifts. The early 1990s marked the end of the *Gastarbeiter* era and the beginning of new questions around permanent settlement, citizenship, and the place of people of Turkish origin in German society. The origins of Turkish migration to Germany trace back to 1961, when the Federal Republic of Germany and Türkiye signed a bilateral labour recruitment agreement. Between 1968 and 1973, approximately 80% of the 525,000 individuals who emigrated from Türkiye arrived in West Germany as so-called "guest workers" (*Gastarbeiter*). As a result, the Turkish population in Germany increased dramatically, rising from 6,700 in 1961 to 605,000 by 1973. Initially, the agreement restricted migrants' stays to a maximum of two years and prohibited family reunification. These conditions were relaxed in 1964, when the two-year residence limitation was abolished and family reunifications were permitted. By 1974, non-working spouses and children each constituted roughly 20% of the Turkish immigrant population. Although the recruitment of foreign labour was officially terminated in 1973, the Turkish population in Germany continued to grow in the following years, primarily through family reunification and natural demographic expansion.⁵

With the expiry of guest worker agreements and a growing second and third generation of Turkish-background Germans, Germany was confronted with the reality of being a de facto immigration country (*Einwanderungsland*)—a reality it had long denied. Discussions on the “changing face of Germany” intensified in the mid 90s. Sharing her very progressive views on the matter, then Commissioner for Foreigners and member of the FDP, Cornelia

Schmalz-Jacobsen commented “*Whether or not we like to admit it, Germany already has become a society of varied ethnicities and cultures [....]we are now into the third generation of*

⁵Türkmen, 2019

families who came here in the 1950s. It's ridiculous to talk about them as guest workers or foreign fellow citizens. These people are German, and they have to be recognized as such."⁶

Clearly, her stance was not popular at the time, as the tragic events of Solingen and other racist, violent attacks against foreigners demonstrated.

The 1993 Solingen arson attack, one of the deadliest xenophobic crimes in post-war Germany, served as a national trauma and a brutal wake-up call, spotlighting the dangers of right-wing extremism and the marginalization of immigrant communities. On the night of May 28–29, 1993, in Solingen, a city in Western Germany, four young right-wing extremists set fire to the home of a Turkish-German family, the Genç family. The arson attack killed five people and injured 14 others. Most of the victims were members of the Genç family who had lived in Germany for many years.

This happened during a period plagued by increased economic instability, causing the intellectual debate around integration and immigration to intensify. By 1998, CDU/CSU figures had begun to adopt a more exclusionary tone on immigration, promoting cultural integration but demanding loyalty to a singular national identity and feeding into the anxieties of a country undergoing demographic and social shifts. When the SPD–Greens coalition, under Schröder, came to power that year, the CDU/CSU opposition began sharpening its rhetoric, opposing plans to reform Germany's citizenship law. They even mobilised campaigns alarming people with a "parallel societies" narrative.

The 1999/2000 reform of the citizenship law marked a pivotal moment: for the first time, Germany allowed limited forms of birthright citizenship (*jus soli*), shifting from a purely descent-based model (*jus sanguinis*). While symbolically significant, the reform was accompanied by heated parliamentary debates that revealed deep societal ambivalence about granting full rights and belonging to individuals with migration backgrounds — particularly Muslims and Turks.

Meanwhile, Türkiye's internal political transformation had direct spillover effects on the Turkish diaspora. The election of the AKP in 2002 and subsequent EU accession talks in 2005 introduced new tensions into German–Turkish relations. Erdoğan's brand of populist-Islamist nationalism resonated with segments of the diaspora, while alarming liberal and secular groups in Germany. In this same period, symbolic moments of inclusion and national pride — such as the 2006 World Cup, which marked the international recognition of Germany's multicultural society — coincided with the launch of the German Islam Conference, aimed at institutionalizing Islam as a recognized part of German society. The overall positive manifestations and celebrations of the national sentiment reveal something remarkable about

⁶ Drozdiak, 1997; Die Zeit, 1992

popular culture as a field of negotiation, both cultural and practical terms. Having nothing to do with the State or the government, and thus clearly being separate from the legacy of the Nazi regime, football made it possible to revamp the nation. The visibility of German-Turkish players and fans brought the issue of integration into the mainstream. It sparked discussions about what it means to be German and expanded the notion of Germanness to include those with migration backgrounds — an important development for national identity debates that continue today. However, the tensions remained. The 2007 AKP election victory and the 2008 Cologne mosque controversy fuelled suspicions of Islamization, while the 2009 headscarf debates and fanned public fears about Muslim integration. In 2011, Erdoğan delivered a controversial speech in Düsseldorf, proclaiming, “*integration yes, assimilation no*”. To many in the German public, this reinforced fears of divided loyalties, given that he had already conveyed this message in Cologne just three years prior. To diaspora communities, it reflected their sense of being unheard and unrepresented in German politics.⁷

The 2015 migration crisis served as a breaking point in many respects. Merkel’s famous “*Wir schaffen das*” came under enormous pressure, with the CDU/CSU backpedalling under the rising influence of the AfD. Meanwhile, diplomatic relations with Türkiye deteriorated over Germany’s 2016 recognition of the Armenian Genocide and the detention of Die Welt journalist Deniz Yücel in 2017. And yet, realpolitik prevailed: Merkel brokered the 2016 EU–Türkiye refugee deal, making Ankara a gatekeeper of Europe’s borders — a move that arguably undermined Germany’s moral stance on human rights while reinforcing Türkiye’s leverage over the EU.

The 2017 Bundestag elections marked a domestic reckoning with this policy shift: the AfD entered parliament, and trust between parts of the Turkish diaspora and the German state further eroded. In 2018, Turkish-German voters participated in Türkiye’s presidential elections in large numbers, many voting for Erdoğan. This rekindled the debate over dual citizenship and national loyalty — especially as Erdoğan continued to assert a protective role over the Turkish diaspora in Europe.

Amid these complex dynamics, political progress was not entirely absent. In 2020, the SPD and the Greens reintroduced their proposal for dual citizenship reform. Despite resistance, particularly from conservative parties, the law was successfully passed in 2024, signalling a long-awaited step toward more inclusive citizenship — one that acknowledges lived realities rather than abstract notions of national identity.

The internal political trajectory of Türkiye, particularly under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP, has had a profound impact on how the Turkish diaspora was and is

⁷Gezer and Reimann, 2011

perceived in Germany. As democratic institutions in Türkiye are gradually eroding — with increasing restrictions on press freedom, judicial independence, and opposition parties — public and political suspicion toward the Turkish community in Germany has intensified, particularly following key events such as the 2016 coup attempt, the constitutional referendum of 2017, and the detention of German-Turkish journalists and activists. These developments not only strained diplomatic relations between Berlin and Ankara but also cast a shadow over the diaspora, often portraying them as extensions of Erdoğan's political influence.

What is problematic, however, is how this perception fails to account for the plurality and diversity within the Turkish-German community. Individuals with Turkish heritage — many of whom have lived in Germany for generations or were born and raised there — are often subjected to collective suspicion, regardless of their political beliefs, level of integration, or civic participation. This has resulted in a form of guilt by association, where cultural or ancestral ties to Türkiye are seen as political allegiance, and so undermine the efforts toward recognition, inclusion, and the full exercise of citizenship rights. It also reveals how foreign policy developments can inadvertently influence domestic debates on integration and identity, especially when communities are viewed through a strategic geopolitical lens rather than as citizens and residents with plural, multifaceted identities.

Now more than ever, Germany cannot afford to restrict the concept of citizenship, nor the access to rights and participation. The paths of these two countries and their populations have been intertwined for almost half a century, creating strong links between the German and Turkish governments, citizens and institutions. Their collaboration and mutual influence extends over multiple domains ranging from the political, to the economic and the societal sphere.⁸

Research Question

The main object of investigation of this thesis is the following: how has the Turkish diaspora in Germany contributed to transforming the concept and practices of citizenship?

The idea is to look at the influence in terms of contributions to customs, traditions and language, but also from a political and legal perspective, in regard to the modes of acquiring citizenship rights. Concerning the legal section of my thesis, an analysis of the discussions held by the Bundestag Committee will help me identify the main themes and positions that have been expressed on citizenship.

⁸Szabo, 2018

Lastly, I am also going to explore the consequences of the engagement of the Turkish diaspora in political life in Germany, and determine if there is a correlation with the state of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Should my findings allow it, I would attempt to adopt a comparative perspective and evaluate the applicability of the results to other contexts within and outside of Europe.

Methodology and Interviews

This thesis adopts a qualitative research approach to investigate how the Turkish diaspora in Germany has influenced the concept and practice of citizenship and citizenship rights. A qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate for this study, as it enables a deep exploration of personal experiences, collective narratives, and the legal and political structures that shape understandings of belonging and national identity.

To guide the analysis, I employ the Circuit of Culture model developed by Stuart Hall and other cultural studies scholars. Introduced in 1997, the model identifies five interrelated processes—representation, production, consumption, identity, and regulation—that serve as analytical entry points for examining how cultural phenomena are created, interpreted, and governed. Each element of the circuit corresponds to a chapter of this thesis, structuring the investigation into the Turkish diaspora's role in shaping German citizenship discourse from both cultural and institutional perspectives. The strength of the Circuit of Culture lies in its capacity to connect symbolic and material practices, making it particularly useful for analyzing the intersection of identity, law, and politics in a diasporic context.

The empirical foundation of this thesis is based on ten semi-structured interviews that I conducted with members of the Turkish diaspora in Germany. The duration of each interview ranged between 20 and 40 minutes, and their content addressed key themes such as national identity, cultural belonging, Germanness, patriotism, integration, generational perspectives, discrimination, and experiences of exclusion or acceptance. Fieldwork was carried out in participants' local environments, allowing for rich, context-sensitive engagement and observation. This approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of how citizenship is lived, negotiated, and interpreted by individuals with migration backgrounds. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring diversity across gender, age, and generational status.

In addition to interview data, the research includes a document analysis of legal frameworks, Bundestag committee discussions, policy reports, and relevant cultural or media texts. A

discourse analysis method was used to uncover how citizenship and national identity are constructed in public and political discourse, as well as how the Turkish diaspora has been portrayed or instrumentalized by various actors. This combination of interviews and textual analysis enables a multidimensional understanding of the research question and reinforces the analytical value of the *Circuit of Culture* as a methodological tool and structure for this thesis. Together, the qualitative data and cultural framework allow for a grounded and critically informed analysis of how the Turkish diaspora has contributed—symbolically, socially, and politically—to reshaping the meaning and practice of citizenship in contemporary Germany. To carry out quality interviews, I made sure to follow specific ethical considerations that ensured the respect, well-being and dignity of participants. This was guaranteed through informed consent, confidentiality, respect for the privacy and different cultural backgrounds of the people I interacted with. Lastly, cultural sensitivity is a crucial prerequisite that ensured a more accurate approach and interpretation of the answers I was given. Aware of the limitations of my understanding, I have critically reflected on my positioning and situatedness of the collected data.

By combining these methods, my study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how the Turkish diaspora has influenced and been shaped by the evolving concept of citizenship in Germany. All interviews began with a detailed verbal informed consent process. The interviews aimed to understand the different stages of integration and experiences with German citizenship, beginning with leaving the country of origin, first reception and cultural adaptation processes upon arrival to Germany. The interviews generally lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. All interviews were transcribed, and interviews conducted via translation were simultaneously translated and transcribed directly from voice recordings to Pinpoint Google. The analysis was conducted by first reviewing all transcripts for content understanding and to identify different experiences with the notion and manifestations of citizenship. Second, themes were developed, and the interviews were then coded using qualitative software Pinpoint Google. Third, additional themes were added as they arose in the transcripts. Finally, different cases were identified that could represent different scenarios for the analysis. The objective of this analysis is exploratory, and the interviews are meant to frame the lived realities and visions of individuals. I would then compare the general idea of how German Turkish people understand, feel towards and approach citizenship and its implication in daily life instances, to theoretical concepts and legal frameworks.

Literature Review

There are a number of definitions that will help me navigate the realms of citizenship, identity and representation. What follows is an overview of the works that have mostly dealt with and developed extensive concepts to describe this phenomenon.

When it comes to exploring the contributions of diasporas to cultural studies, we need to mention Stuart Hall as a pioneer in this field as well as a great representative of this community. In his book “Familiar Stranger”, Hall shares his life experiences and reflections on the subject. Being himself a member of the Jamaican diaspora and having directly experienced the implications of feeling a sense of belonging to two countries, he has come to think of the concept of nation as something that cannot be any longer identified with its territorial boundaries⁹. There is an undeniable discrepancy between the “nation state and the nation in its wider sense”. Further than that, Hall recognizes a constant sense of loss in the diaspora, especially because they can never return to their homes in the “exactly same way that they went”. “Under globalization, everywhere is becoming more diasporic. The very conditions of the world right now creates the movement of dispersed peoples”. Hall states that globalization has been the driving force of the displacement of people, who, wave after wave, “present the question of how it is possible for people with very different historical backgrounds and bearing a different set of cultural values, to negotiate the terms of some kind of tolerant way of living with one another”.¹⁰ A topic interlinked with diasporas is identity politics, which can be defined as a way in which these communities maintain and negotiate their identities in relation to their homeland and host country. Diasporas are understood as transnational communities with deterritorialized identities influenced by postmodern, globalised hybridization processes. Diasporic identity then becomes an issue of movement and mobilisation, but also a celebration of multiplicity and mobility. This implies a dynamic process in constant search for autonomy and identity.¹¹

In “We are all Migrants - A History of Multicultural Germany”, Jan Plamper gives a comprehensive overview of the migration flows, both inwards and outwards, that have come to shape the cultural baggage of Germany. It also explores ways of referring to migrant

⁹Hall and Schwarz, 2017

¹⁰Media Education Foundation, “Globalization & Diaspora - STUART HALL: THROUGH THE PRISM OF AN INTELLECTUAL LIFE.”

¹¹Anyanwu, 2004

communities who have become part of the fabric of German society. Plamper considers Germany as one of the optimal case studies that gave life to a plethora of ways of belonging and discussions on identity based on ethnicity, country of birth or purely national sentiment.¹² Donatella Di Cesare gives an important contribution to the topic of models of inhabiting a space and of citizenship. She unpacks the implications of migration in its more contemporary understanding. In her book, she strongly advocates for policies based on mutual solidarity and hospitality. Di Cesare believes in decoupling our feeling of entitlement or attachment to a territory from the act of inhabiting it. In so doing, she illustrates a new model of cohabiting a space, expanding the horizons of our traditional way of conceiving citizenship.¹³ The debate on the significance of German national identity has been particularly present ever since Bassam Tibi shared his concept of *Leitkultur*, which can be a good starting point for a framework to discuss the transformation from a bloodline-based identity, centred on ethnicity and language, to a civic one, emphasizing democratic values and inclusivity. A concrete outcome was the 2000 Citizenship Law, which moved beyond *ius sanguinis* and finally introduced *ius soli*. Intended as separation of religion and State, human rights and democracy, we quickly recognise the limited capacity of this concept in explaining the different aspects of citizenship and identity. Münkler's more modern views on Germanness, or *Deutschtum*, as a historically constructed notion that is adaptable to political and social needs tries to construct a clearer picture. She considers five total requirements: two socio-economic factors, two socio-cultural elements and constitutional patriotism. These are encapsulated in the notion of Germans as laborious people who only consider using social benefits in times of emergency, the idea that personal respect and social mobility comes with hard work, a rigid separation of religion and the State, the freedom of choice when it comes to partners and adherence to German Basic Law.¹⁴ This notion as well has proven its inadequacy, as it definitely is not representative of the current common sentiment in contemporary Germany, where different generations have contributed with their own interpretation of this model and keep on reviewing it. The influence of parents and grandparents' experiences, recent geopolitical crises and the growing power of social media have strongly contributed to shaping these new perceptions. The cultural framework of Germany has been inevitably transformed by the presence of these important migrant communities, the Turkish one being number one, with almost 3 million people with Turkish descent living in Germany. Along came both challenges and opportunities: the German education system was reformed to become more diverse and inclusive, with the introduction of Turkish and Arabic language courses in schools. The Christian religious community became

¹²Plamper, 2023

¹³Di Cesare, 2017

¹⁴Plamper, 2023

more tolerant and open towards other confessions, allowing the construction of mosques and synagogues, which started characterising the landscape of many German cities. There have also been instances in which the legal and administrative branch of the country has had to confront itself with these new practices, as is the case of the “Kopftuchpflicht” which put the openness of German institutions to the test. Government agencies had to find a way to ensure the respect of religious practices and protect its Muslim citizens from ethnic and/or religious discriminations, especially in public and work spaces. While doing this, they had to deal with claims for the need to guarantee public safety, which might be inhibited if there are obstacles to identifying a person’s face. Many have also brought forward accusations that the veil and headscarves are actually a symbol of Islamic oppression on women.

In light of what we have gathered so far, we can safely say that the Turkish diaspora introduced new cultural and social dynamics, challenging the idea of Germanness as ethnically homogeneous. The second and third generations of Turkish-Germans increasingly identify with Germany, while retaining strong cultural and familial ties to Türkiye. These hybrid identities question the traditional dichotomy of "German" and "foreigner" or “Other”, suggesting that Germanness can encompass multicultural and transnational dimensions.

Since the year 2000, there have been increasing debates on dual citizenship, which reflect a broader tension between maintaining traditional notions of Germanness and adapting to a multicultural reality. Some other concepts that need to be mentioned when exploring the topic of this thesis, which will serve the purpose of navigating the experience of Turkish-Germans are constitutional patriotism and transnationalism. The first one, *Verfassungspatriotismus*, is recognised as a rational, values-based approach to national identity, emphasizing shared civic principles over emotional nationalism. Tibi added to this notion, explaining it as the respect for constitutional values and principles, which has no emotional connotation nor approach to the nation and its values.¹⁵

Transnationalism is often brought up in the debate about nation and sense of belonging. Plamper recognises the validity of this concept, yet there are some limitations to it that we cannot ignore. For instance, we must realize that it is mostly applicable to those people who have access to freedom of movement, whether that is made possible by their acquired rights or because they have the financial means to do so.

Leurs and Ponzanesi’s “Connected Migrants: Encapsulation and Cosmopolitanization”, introduces two main ideas that describe the ways in which migrants can manifest their desire and intention to interact with their host societies, while maintaining transnational connections. They do so by employing digital technologies, which have come to shape their experience as

¹⁵Rindisbacher, 2013

migrants more and more. The term *encapsulation* refers to how digital technologies reinforce migrants' existing ethnic or national communities, limiting their integration into the host society. On the other hand, *cosmopolitanization* seems to suggest that digital engagement allows migrants to interact beyond their immediate cultural circles, fostering intercultural connections. The authors ultimately recognise that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive: migrants often navigate both processes simultaneously. The Turkish diaspora does not neatly fit into either encapsulation or cosmopolitanization: it navigates both simultaneously. Digital connectivity allows for transnational political engagement, but also reinforces divisions both within the diaspora and between migrants and host societies.¹⁶

My contribution to this topic would come in the form of new and hypothetical ways of approaching citizenship. Given the current resistance and opposition of nationalist and populist leaders, we should rather frame it as “negotiating citizenship”, to understand that there are new ways in which communities seek a sense of belonging. In the case of Germany, we see this more often through political participation. The first example will look at Cem Özdemir, a Turkish-German politician, who symbolizes the diaspora's struggle to redefine participation in German civic life and sees politics beyond ethnic terms. His case shows us how the phenomenon manifests itself on the institutional level, with a direct impact on civil society and grassroots organisations when it comes to representation of the Turkish community in the political class.

¹⁶Leurs, Ponzanesi 2018

Chapter One - Representation

Following the process of the Circuit of Culture, representation is the first lens I am going to employ to look at how the subject of my investigation is viewed, perceived, portrayed and discussed. In this section, I am going to unpack the narratives that dominate politics and media, when it comes to describing, understanding and explaining the German-Turkish community in Germany. Its significant presence in terms of numbers, approximately 3 million people who were born in Türkiye or have Turkish roots, makes it very clear why they are so central in most political debates on citizenship and national identity. As many countries in the European Union are going through what is often referred to as an “identity crisis”, governments have to find a way to make sense of the fragmentation and tensions within their societies. The media also plays a significant role when it comes to portraying an image and representing a specific group of individuals. Unfortunately, the way that the news work today, this often means emphasizing or exaggerating the elements that will attract more attention or produce a louder reaction, regardless of their validity or accuracy in representing the real state of things.

This is a phenomenon that is not singular to Germany, though in the case at hand it produces important polarisations and divisions within a highly complex society seen as a benchmark in the European continent, as well as on an international level.

Minorities, especially those with a migration background, do not always have access to the space or tools necessary to express themselves. When these are confined to the margins of society, their story becomes narrated by more powerful and influential actors, such as politicians or media outlets. They become the official representatives of a group whose characteristics and complexities they might not fully understand, inevitably leading to distorted, and often negative, perceptions of a group.

The Germans of Turkish descent have been the object of discussion since the early 1990s, when it became unavoidable to recognise their presence and influence over what was once just a host country.

In political speeches, debates, media portrayals, the identities of these individuals are constantly being discussed, overpoliticised, problematised and instrumentalised.

During the chancellorship of Gerhard Schröder, he showed more progressive views on the growing community of migrants arriving to Germany, directing his government’s efforts

towards the development of a more inclusive, although conditions-based, society. Then came Merkel, who had an ambiguous position on Germany as land of migration (*Einwanderungsland*). At the beginning of her career, her rhetoric was shaped around a limitation of migration. During a plenary session held just two weeks before the 2002 national elections, she justified this position with the need to focus on integration, stating that “Before we allow new immigration, we must first improve the integration of the foreign children already living among us”.¹⁷ As main representative of the opposition and Chairwoman of the CDU/CSU, she continuously criticised the government coalition for their openness to accepting more migrants, and accused these of abusing the right to asylum. Oppositely, she strongly advocated for more control and limitations to migration.

These remarks are completely in line with her later statements on the failure of the so-called Multi Kulti concept, a vision or policy of cultural diversity where people from different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds coexist and contribute to society while maintaining their distinct identities. Her quote “Multikulti has failed” (*Multikulti ist gescheitert*) will be her infamous last words against immigration and celebration of diversity, which German policies were trying to promote at the time.¹⁸ Her attacks to the integration model that German politics had tried to implement since the 1990s, when the foreigner community from Türkiye, Italy and the former Yugoslavia was expanding more and more, was replaced by a sudden show of solidarity as she opened the doors of Germany to millions of refugees without having a real plan to secure their safety and integrity in the country. In 2015, then Chancellor, Angela Merkel received over 1.1 million refugees and migrants mostly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, especially following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. Her actions were framed by the media as a remarkable humanitarian gesture, but its consequences and the deriving problematics in housing, infrastructure and resources fuelled the anger and frustration of German society against foreigners, or those perceived as such.

Fast-forward to more recent statements made by CDU/CSU members, Andrea Lindholz described citizenship as the “central legal bond” uniting individuals with the state. She argued that the governing coalition’s proposal to broadly permit dual citizenship would risk creating conflicts of loyalty and potentially undermine social cohesion within German society.

In more recent years, the far-right party AfD has made a comeback, quickly acquiring a more prominent role in political discourse. Members of this party share a vision of Turkish citizens, Muslims in particular, that leverages the fears and insecurities of Germans. Their constant targeting of German Turks demonstrates their intention to identify a scapegoat in them,

¹⁷Bundestag, 2002

¹⁸Reuters 2010

attributing them with the responsibility for the political, economic and overall societal crisis that Germany is experiencing.

The AfD has consistently opposed measures that would ease the path to German citizenship for immigrants, including those of Turkish descent. The party argues that such reforms could undermine national identity and social cohesion. They advocate for stricter immigration controls and policies that emphasize assimilation over multiculturalism. For instance, during many discussions of the Bundestag, Gottfried Curio, a prominent AfD member, has been vocal against dual citizenship, arguing that it undermines democratic values. In past debates, he has criticized the concept of dual nationality, particularly concerning the Turkish community in Germany. He argued that the reforms would "completely dismantle" the prerequisites for obtaining German citizenship, accusing the coalition of "squandering the passport to inadequately integrated individuals" and fostering "parallel societies."¹⁹

Alice Weidel, co-chairwoman of the party, strongly contributes to this narrative. Using harsh language, she describes the proposed reforms on citizenship rights as an attack on democracy: "The impending naturalization tsunami is an attack on the foundation of our democracy and endangers the future viability of our country. The migration crisis will be exacerbated, and the German people—the sovereign—are being transformed without their consent. Making dual citizenship the norm creates divided loyalties and fifth columns, and degrades native-born Germans to second-class citizens."²⁰

The AfD's criticism of the citizenship reform overlooks its core intent: the recognition and inclusion of individuals who are de facto members of German society. While the right-wing party frames the reform as a "naturalization tsunami" or a threat to national identity, this rhetoric ignores the fact that many of the reform's beneficiaries are people born and raised in Germany, often fluent in German, educated in German schools, and integrated into German society—yet denied full legal recognition due to the nationality of their parents. By refusing to acknowledge this context, the AfD presents a distorted narrative that equates legal recognition with the erosion of German identity.

The media does no better at echoing extreme and irrational fears and ideologies. The first example of controversial media portrayals will illustrate how the decision of electing Cem Özdemir as MP in the European Parliament was narrated back in 2004. In most cases, the headlines and the introduction of the articles dedicated to this event, focused on his family background and Turkish roots.

¹⁹Bundestag, 2022

²⁰Weidel, 2024

Deutschland.de titles its article „Anatolischer Schwabe wird Minister” (*Anatolian Schwaben becomes Minister*), Politico calls him “Young Turk”.²¹ Euractive goes even further by deciding on a misleading title, “*Turkish-born MEP elected leader of German Greens*”. The last example is worthy of further analysis and fact checking: those who are more informed may have been able to detect the inaccuracy of this news, as Özdemir was in fact born in Urach, a small town close to Stuttgart, to Turkish parents.²² While most of the articles also talk about his potential role as representative of ethnic minorities in Europe, one can clearly see the trend that these media outlets follow: one based on the instrumentalisation of an individual to feed the narrative that they want to create. Many of these news sources are left-leaning and do not antagonise him nor show oppositions to his election.

Sadly, Özdemir’s criticism of the right-wing political class in Türkiye, as well as his condemnation of the Armenian Genocide, made him the perfect target for Turkish politician and former mayor of Ankara Melih Gökçek. The scandal broke out when Gökçek called Özdemir an “Armenian servant”. He attached a distorted image to the German MP in order to produce a narrative, though not reflective of reality. By depicting Özdemir as an Armenian sympathiser, to use a euphemism, he antagonised and vilified the opposition for the purpose of discrediting his political opinions.²³

The Mesut Özil picture scandal, has exacerbated this mediatization, making it evident to public opinion. In May 2018, German footballers Mesut Özil and İlkay Gündoğan, both of Turkish descent, met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in London. Photographs from this meeting, where the players presented Erdoğan with signed jerseys, were released shortly before Türkiye's general elections. The photos sparked significant backlash in Germany, with critics accusing the players of endorsing Erdoğan's policies and questioning their loyalty to the German national team. The German Football Association (DFB) and political figures criticized the players, intensifying the public debate. While Gündoğan issued a statement clarifying the non-political nature of the meeting, Özil remained silent initially. Following Germany's early exit from the 2018 World Cup, Özil faced increased scrutiny and was blamed by some for the team's performance. In July 2018, Özil announced his retirement from international football, citing experiences of racism and disrespect.

The current political turmoil in Türkiye adds negative consequences for the perception of German Turks, and are reflected in the great level of fear and antagonisation that pervades German society. People with a migration background have begun to feel more insecure, vulnerable and almost scared of being exposed. This feeling usually manifests itself as a

²¹Göbel, 2021 and Carstens 2009

²²Euractive, 2008

²³Schumacher, 2017

tormenting fear of seeing their, already limited, rights being arbitrarily taken away, or experiencing more racism for their appearance both in schools and in workplaces. Negative narratives that are produced and circulated are much louder and have sunk in deep within the social fabric. So much so, that some people are even afraid of being recognised and approached for their “Turkishness”, as was the case for several of my interview attempts. Whether that means not wearing a veil, carrying pepper spray as precautionary measure for possible attacks on the streets, like Zeynep, a forty-eight woman living in Berlin, told me during our interview: “So, before I could go anywhere in Berlin. Nowadays, I am 48 years old and I always have to carry pepper-spray with me, because I got scared.”²⁴

In some cases, the deep feeling of fear and anger borders betrayal for the neglect and veiled racism exercised by political leaders. Not only does the media sustain certain opinions, it is also people on a day-to-day basis who often stop at the physical appearance of people, associating negative or positive connotations to certain characteristics, despite the lack of a causal link between the two. Two of the interviewees I talked to, Emi, a woman in her forties living in Gomaringen and Emine, a woman from Spandau who lives in Berlin, mentioned that people frequently assume they are not German simply because of their darker skin colour, black hair and other physical features. Her experience with people assuming that she is a foreigner are based on the fact that her skin colour is not as light as the majority of the population, shows how deeply ingrained the canons of “fair-skinned, blue-eyed Germans” are.

Emine: “.... Because I’m quite dark-skinned, not really light-looking, you’re automatically seen as a foreigner...”²⁵. This results in the representation of a community based on prejudice, stereotypes and racism, which affects the Turkish diaspora at all stages and in all spheres of their lives.

Being born in the country, having undergone the national educational system and being an active member of society through the workforce is still not enough to be granted recognition as German or “one who belongs”. Somatic traits and clothing take precedence over the language spoken and the actions of people, revealing the shallowness, if not ignorance, of certain figures in the political class, as well as the low level of opinions promoted in the news.

German Turks living in Germany often face a dual form of marginalization: they are contested not only within German society, but also by segments of the population in Türkiye, where they are likewise subject to criticism and ambivalence.

A recent debate on TikTok has sparked discussions about the representation of Turkish girls living in Türkiye versus those living in Germany. The conversation began with a video that portrayed Turkish girls in Germany, using a doll named “Almançı Kız” (translates to *Almançı*

²⁴Interview with Zeynep, Berlin, 26. March 2025

²⁵Interview with Emine, Berlin, 26. March 2025

Girl, the word *Almançı* refers to a Turkish person living in Germany). This toy-version girl typically wears very heavy make-up, has a specific fashion style, and is also immediately recognisable for her “weird accent” when she speaks Turkish. The use of the word “*Almançı*” is not casual, as it is one that the Turkish diaspora tends to reject or refrain from using, since it forcibly excludes them and implies they are foreigners also in Türkiye. The kit also includes references to their shopping habits and consumption habits, thus showing a thoroughly ideated representation of their lifestyle.

In response, a Turkish girl residing in Germany shared her perspective over what she called a “culture war on TikTok level”, highlighting the cultural nuances and challenges faced by the diaspora. Other than discrediting the generalisations expressed in the original TikTok, such as “they make fun of our accent”, she also justified some of the lifestyle choices of Turkish girls living in Germany. As an example, she refers to the boycotting of Starbucks for its position vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She explains how the coffee company is highly popular in Türkiye and is even a “real status symbol”.²⁶ She ends the video by recognising that this has been a long-standing issue: “What emerged from a make-up video is actually the mirror of a much deeper problem: this tension between those who live in the homeland and those who have grown up abroad has been around forever... We are never considered real Turks in Türkiye”.²⁷ This exchange has opened up a broader dialogue about representation, stereotyped appearances and speaking manners, but also deeper issues such as economic conditions and social status. German Turkish girls lay the claim that they can at least afford that “expensive” lifestyle by working and don’t need to pay in instalments for a coffee from Starbucks (many Turkish girls in Türkiye pay by credit card and are indebted). The debate has gained significant attention, with numerous TikTok users contributing their viewpoints, opinions and stories. This ongoing conversation highlights the frustration for the situation that both sides experience: on the one hand, Turkish in Germany feel rejected by their own community. On the other hand, Turkish people in Türkiye suffer for the critical economic and political turmoil, which has put people of middle and lower classes in serious difficulty. Turkish girls criticise girls in Germany for supporting Erdoğan’s AKP party, who justify their position with the claim that he is the only political figure who takes their interests into consideration. What is contested is that, their support overlooks the problems he has created in the domestic context. In 2004, the AKP secured its presence abroad through the Union of European Turkish Democrats (UETD), and four years later a law was passed, allowing Turkish citizens to vote in national elections and referenda from outside Türkiye. Lastly, in 2010 the party consolidated its support by creating an additional participation mechanism, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities

²⁶helalgossip, 2025

²⁷ibid, 2025

(YTB), as a special government department. However, Erdoğan's increasing authoritarianism has generated intra Turkish conflicts, also affecting the diaspora.

The social media episode I described, is strictly linked with the next element which will be discussed, concerning identity and, more specifically, dual and multiple identities and internal conflicts when it comes to one's sense of belonging. It also illustrates the immense power and agency that grassroots communities can have, when they make effective use of the instruments they have at hand. The girls involved in the debate, relied on the large outreach of social media, not only to convey a message to a broader audience, but also to show solidarity and unity to those who share their experience, therefore demonstrating a strong sense of social cohesion.

Chapter Two - Identity

This chapter will be dealing with multiple domains in which the entanglement between identity and citizenship manifests itself, affecting both concrete day-to-day situations and the emotional sphere of people. The section on “Identity” aims to analyse how individuals form a sense of who they are in relation to the object or practice, while also having to prove this identity to the outside or fight against the identity that is forced onto them. Individuals do so by adopting certain emotional, cultural and political stances. At this stage, I will address possible ways of nurturing one’s sense of belonging: how citizens express their identities and citizenship, and the demands or reactions that arise from such expressions.

The TikTok exchange mentioned in the previous chapter offers a microcosm of broader issues, such as how people with migration backgrounds navigate between cultural expectations from both the host and home countries, often feeling pulled in different directions. Some users mentioned the frustration of constantly feeling “in between” (*arasalik yissusus* in Turkish) two countries, while not belonging anywhere at the same time. The comment touched on this lack of belonging and alienation, particularly experienced by Turkish girls born and raised in Germany, who are in a deep search of their identity and become defensive because they feel as though they do not belong neither to Germany nor to Türkiye. Some users responded to the video and gave their own explanation for what they see as the root causes of this phenomenon: “the reason why the Turks in Germany react is because they ignore the problems in Turkey (even if they know what the truth is), and they support Erdoğan because this is their business”.²⁸ Political affiliation is one of the most delicate matters, as it places one’s sense of belonging on a delicate balance, particularly so when it intersects with different national and cultural contexts. Another comment which came up quite frequently, and that was repeated in many of my interviews, was “No matter where I am, I am the foreigner” (*Egal wo ich bin, ich bin Ausländerin*).²⁹

To give a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals shape their identities in a society, I will be relying on theories of identity politics and resistance identities. My intention is

²⁸ibid, 2025

²⁹ibid, 2025

to provide a clear theoretical background, in order to recognise the different versions in which identity is expressed, acquired or assigned.

The notion of *identity politics* offers a crucial analytical lens to understand how diaspora communities — including the German-Turkish population — maintain and negotiate their sense of self in relation to both homeland and host country. Rooted in political theory and cultural studies, identity politics centres on the idea that identity is not merely a personal or cultural trait, but also a political force. For diaspora subjects, identity becomes a site of struggle: a terrain where questions of recognition, inclusion, and representation are constantly negotiated and contested. It becomes particularly salient in transnational and deterritorialized communities, whose identities are shaped by globalisation, hybridization, and postmodern flows of culture, capital, and people. As Anyanwu argues, there is a dynamic process in which diaspora individuals engage in a continuous search for autonomy and identity. This process is both a response to displacement and a celebration of multiplicity and mobility — a refusal to be fixed to a singular, national narrative.³⁰

In this sense, identity politics challenges the notion of a homogeneous national identity by asserting the legitimacy of diverse lived experiences, cultural expressions, and political claims. Diasporic identity is not a passive inheritance, but a constructed and performative space where individuals navigate both structural constraints and creative possibilities. Hall's idea of diasporising identity describes exactly this process of negotiation, in which the individual questions the hegemonic narrative of nationhood and racial purity, for instance by producing new cultural expressions resulting from the mixing and combining of cultural elements. In expressing their hybrid identities, people defy the feeling of displacement by celebrating their transnational linkages and multiple affiliations.

Recognizing identity as malleable, context-specific, and historically contingent allows societies to move beyond exclusionary frameworks and toward more pluralistic models of coexistence—ones that embrace complexity rather than suppress it.³¹

The conversation I held with Dr. Alpbek and Dr. Kolat centred around the different layers of identity of the human experience. Throughout the discussion, we touched on ethnicity, religion, politics, individual identity and collective identity. Dr. Kolat was Federal Chairman of the Turkish Community in Germany for nine years. He made concrete examples of how these intertwined layers manifest themselves in one individual: someone could identify as a German, a German with Turkish origins, a German with Turkish origins and Alevi tradition, or a German with Kurd ethnic roots. As demonstrated, a person adopts a different identity, depending on the characteristic they decide to display.

³⁰Anyanwu 2004

³¹Gilroy and Gilmore 2021

Dr. Kolat thoroughly unpacked the layers of identity, explaining how identity-building occurs through experiences, attributions and self definition or description of one's image. Identity is thus both defined by the self and the others. When we are defined by others as "foreigners" as a way to discriminate and criticize, this word acquires a negative connotation. As a consequence, we develop a negative identity or resistance identity. The hegemonic group in German society, and the pressure they exercise over minorities, has contributed to the creation of these identities. Social rules and local system also contribute to identity shaping. Dr. Kolat explained how the process of ascribing identities to another provokes a reaction within the individual who is being defined by an external actor: "...when someone constantly labels and insults me as a foreigner, let's put it that way, then I said, okay, I am a foreigner. I am Turkish. I am Muslim—even though I've never been to a mosque in my life. That means I developed a kind of negative identity... This is particularly evident in the second generation, where such identities have emerged due to the way the majority society defines the world, due to the pressure—yes, also because of that pressure.”³²

In his experience with these issues, a majority of Germans sees themselves as having two basic characteristics: being white (Caucasian) and being of Christian faith, also including the Judaic group. He clarifies that, while this is not written anywhere in the constitution nor in any law, it is inscribed in the collective imaginary of the people.³³

Similar findings are shared in an article by sociologist Gülay Türkmen, who includes a relevant extract from her own interviews in which the respondent perfectly summarises the issues and clashing notions of national identity. She says that “national identity is not only about phenotypic features and demographic details. Multi-layered and constantly negotiated, it is also about emotions, language, cultural codes, and familiarity. That is why, despite underlining their alienation from Türkiye, highly-skilled Turkish immigrants have difficulty in developing a sense of belonging in Germany and get perplexed when told they don't look Turkish. As Demir puts it, they “are just black sheep. [They] don't fit anywhere.”³⁴

An important takeaway from my conversation with Dr. Kolat is that we need to distinguish between national and cultural identity. While the former implies a historical belonging to a territory, the latter can reflect one's political, religious or linguistic identity, which are not necessarily rooted in a single country. Intuitively, this difference has inspired my conviction that citizenship should be decoupled from the affiliation with a nation. The difference between nationality and citizenship is not always clear, in some languages it is even used interchangeably.

³²Interview with Dr. Kolat, Berlin, 25. March. 2025

³³ibid

³⁴ Türkmen, 2019

Generally speaking, nationality is a legal status linked to a state, while citizenship represents the political subjectification to an institution or a membership to it. Either way, to avoid improper uses of this terminology, it always needs to be contextualised.

In light of the points that have emerged so far, the chapter on identity requires a discussion on the question of national identity and the intrinsic loyalty to the country. While smaller communities and individuals are able to recognise the multiple identities of people, society and institutions are hesitant to recognise this. The inability to comprehend or even approach these different layers that make up hybrid identities are perceived as a threat to the oneness, the unity, the known.

During my interviews, a specific reflection was shared by different interviewees which I believe deserves particular attention: those belonging to the second and third generation in particular feel the need to go beyond the need of labelling, defining and judging based on identity. Instead, they suggest that people should start to be judged based on what they *do*, meaning the different contributions that they bring to society, instead of who they *are*.

Until now, people have been excluded or included based on their place of birth, the colour of their skin, their religion etc... The sample of people I interviewed suggested that everyday life actions should be the determining source for judgement or consideration, recognising it as a more legitimate criterion. Looking at the real impact people have on society can be a fairer way of assessing their level of integration or sense of belonging. In this, Emine and Volkan, a man who was born in Markdorf (south of Germany) to Turkish parents, shared similar views.

Emine put it in these words: “Do you feel proud to be Turkish or German?- Well, I feel proud more when I am a good person—not so much because of being German or Turkish. I’d rather do good deeds and be a good person—that’s when I can be proud of myself. Otherwise, I actually think nationality or religion plays a minor role. The most important thing is to respect one another. I believe that everyone, no matter where they come from, has beautiful sides and also difficult ones”.³⁵

Volkan’s experience as German living in Berlin is encapsulated in this quote: “When people talk to me, they don’t feel like they’re speaking to a Turk or a German—it’s just simple. They’re talking to Volkan.... I try not to focus on that, you know? I just try to take care of myself. I’m here in Germany; I was born in Germany. My family came here and sacrificed a lot so that my brother and I could grow up with better opportunities in Germany—and they did that. And I see it as my responsibility to carry that forward and to make things even better for the next generation.”³⁶

³⁵Interview with Emine, Berlin, 26. March. 2025

³⁶Interview with Volkan, Berlin, 25. March. 2025

To make the discourse surrounding identity more approachable, I asked people to free-associate words, images, and concepts with Germany and Türkiye. Their answers reflect complex emotional relationships to both countries, beyond legal status or residence. Below is a visual presentation of their responses, which allowed me to dive deeper into the perspectives that were shared and highlighted generational differences.

The following table shows how my interviewees emotionally map Germany and Türkiye. It reveals the emotional geography of their dual or hybrid identities: Germany is linked to security, future, system, while Türkiye evokes emotions, family, roots, and simplicity. It supports the argument that belonging is layered, plural, and emotional, not just legal or rational.

Germany	Türkiye
Security	Simplicity
Future	Lack of discipline
System	Good food/cuisine
Organization	Hospitality
Freedom	No freedom
Humanity	Approach to emotions and feelings
Peace	Warm weather
Structure	Sunshine
Discipline	Holidays
Home	Relatives/family
Childhood	Sea
Bad weather	Blood (roots, ancestors)
Unfriendliness	Love
Poverty in people	Land of my emotions
Friends	Land of my worries
New home	Land of my future
Bureaucracy	—

The key patterns resulting from this question show how Germany is mostly associated with conventional, sometimes reductive, connotations, which are based on its pragmatic, structured and future-oriented character. However, some interviewees did attach some more emotional characteristics to it, although mostly on the negative side: for example, some people gave “cold” as an answer, which referred both to the weather and to the stereotypical, unfriendliness of Germans.

On the other hand, most images that people connect with Türkiye belong to the realm of emotions, whether that be through the warmth of the sun or the family, or again the friendly culture. Türkiye also generates feeling of worries, especially for the lack of systemic security ("land of my worries").

What is important to notice is that democratic participation is only linked to Germany, but blood, emotions, and family ties only to Türkiye. This illustrates why dual or hybrid identities are natural responses to migrants' lived realities, as each country fulfils different emotional, cultural, and existential needs. Individuals' experiences—and their perceptions of the country in which they reside—vary significantly depending on their generational background and the circumstances under which they migrated to or were raised in Germany. These differences shape their personal and collective relationships with the state, democratic values, and the broader society.

This analysis links back to theories about diaspora identity, resistance identities, or emotional citizenship. Stuart Hall's theory of identity as both *belonging* and *becoming* offers a useful lens to understand the Turkish diaspora's negotiation of identity in Germany. While *belonging* refers to emotional and cultural ties to the homeland, expressed through language, religion, media consumption, and community networks. The essence of *becoming* lies in a view of identity as a dynamic process shaped by adaptation, transformation, and hybridization within the host society.

When belonging is denied or conditional—such as when Turkish-Germans are viewed as perpetual outsiders despite formal citizenship—resistance identities may emerge.³⁷ These identities challenge the dominant narrative by reaffirming minority culture, asserting political agency, or rejecting imposed norms. They come as a reaction to practices of exclusion, racialization, and cultural othering. Individuals or communities resist assimilation into

³⁷Castells, 1997

hegemonic cultures that do not recognize their histories, values, or rights. For example, the expression of pride in Turkish culture, critiques of German media representations of migrants, or support for transnational political causes (solidarity with political movements and support for protests against AKP in Türkiye) all illustrate how resistance identities are formed in response to exclusion, using for example digital media as a space for visibility and contestation.

Members of the Turkish diaspora in Germany have many ways to construct and express their identities also through digital connectivity, as exemplified in the TikTok case. This practice illustrates the interplay between encapsulation and cosmopolitanization: drawing on Leurs and Ponzanesi's theory of the "connected migrant," the discussion highlights how diasporic identities are formed at the intersection of home and host societies, shaped by both cultural continuity and adaptation.³⁸ German Turkish citizens are able to maintain ties across borders, fostering simultaneous attachments to both host and origin countries. Leurs and Ponzanesi's conceptual framework of the "connected migrants" addresses that feeling of being "in-between" societies. The authors reframe the internal conflict that plagues members of a diaspora by suggesting that individuals who construct "co-presence" by utilizing digital technologies can maintain bonds across geographical divides. This notion of being "here and there at the same time" is particularly relevant in the case of the Turkish community in Germany, as it explains how transnational family networks, political affiliations, and cultural identities are routinely sustained through smartphone use, social media engagement, and digital news consumption. For instance, the continued engagement of Turkish-German individuals with Turkish media outlets or political developments in Türkiye exemplify how the digital sphere facilitates a sense of ongoing involvement in the public life of the homeland, even across decades of physical distance.

Encapsulation refers to the preservation and reinforcement of ethnic or diasporic ties, such as participating in community-based Turkish associations or maintaining language and religious traditions. Simultaneously, cosmopolitanization entails the capacity to build intercultural bridges, form relationships beyond one's ethnic enclave, and engage with the cultural and civic life of the host society. The Turkish diaspora in Germany often exemplifies both tendencies. On one hand, Turkish mosques, media, and community centres serve as pillars of ethnic solidarity. On the other, many second- and third-generation Turkish-Germans navigate hybrid identities that blend Turkish and German cultural references and participate in broader German civil society.

This framework is particularly relevant in discussions on integration, belonging, and identity politics in Germany, where individuals of Turkish descent often contend with racialization, legal

³⁸Leurs and Ponzanesi, 2018

exclusion, or political suspicion despite their formal citizenship. The “connected migrant” model thus helps move beyond reductive assessments of loyalty or assimilation by foregrounding the dynamic and relational ways in which diasporic individuals construct a sense of belonging. It recognizes that participation in the host society does not necessitate a rupture with the country of origin but can coexist with meaningful transnational engagement. The ability to be present in multiple locations, while to different degrees and dimensions, defies the rather obsolete requirement of affiliation to a land. By allowing the individual to fulfil a plethora of needs and identities, their human experience acquires more depth and meaning. In sum, the Turkish diaspora in Germany exemplifies the potential for migrants to maintain active connections with multiple societies. Digital technologies play a central role in enabling this dual orientation, challenging outdated notions of national belonging and offering new ways of understanding citizenship as a layered and negotiated process.

Chapter Three - Production

Having examined the narratives that shape my research subjects' experiences, I will now turn to the agents behind their construction and the conditions under which these narratives take form.

My analysis will first dive into the discourse promoted by political actors and national institutions. Further on in the chapter, I will be looking at how grassroots communities shape their own identity, also in reaction to the approaches and power structures present in Germany. For many years, government institutions, such as the Bundestag and several other branches of the bureaucratic system, have been the only ones holding decisional power over the life and residence requirements for Turkish migrants. This responsibility also entailed significant influence over how the community was perceived, as authorities held the final say in defining the criteria for their integration and participation in national affairs, for example, through the formulation of questions in naturalization tests.

Initiatives for integration mostly revolved around language learning classes and culture courses, both considered fundamental requirements to be able to engage with the native community and understand the German way of life.

In these regards, the first integration programmes aimed at improving the quality of life in Germany were promoted by Gerhard Schröder. His *Fördern und Fordern* (Support and Promote) programme encompassed a series of reforms implemented by then human resources executive of Volkswagen, Peter Hartz. Schröder's plan to review the existing social welfare system, under the name of Agenda 2010, included significant cuts to social services and increased taxation, with the idea of eventually making the German state-system "future-proof".³⁹ Its logic was partially extended to integration policy—framing integration as a mutual responsibility between the state and migrants. Schröder's government helped pave the way for a more proactive and structured integration regime, especially through language and civic education policies that became formalized around 2005. One example is the 2004 *Integrationskursverordnung* (Integration Course Regulation).⁴⁰ This regulation detailed the structure and

³⁹Stahl, 2010

⁴⁰Mediendienst Integration, 2019

implementation of the integration courses introduced by the *Zuwanderungsgesetz* (Immigration Law). It outlined the curriculum, participation requirements, and the role of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in overseeing these courses. The regulation emphasized the importance of language acquisition and civic knowledge as foundational requisites for successful integration. In retrospect, a more careful evaluation of these initiatives could hint at a tempted assimilation plan, rather than an integration effort, by the German government. The notions of conditional belonging and imposed behaviours and norms challenge the fine line between the two, while the inflexibility of institutions to recognise multiple versions of being and coexisting demonstrates a tendency towards a forced homogenization with German society.

Contrary to its intended purpose, the German naturalization test (*Einbürgerungstest*) has often been instrumentalized as an additional barrier to acquiring citizenship.

First and foremost, before 2008, this test was not uniform in all federal regions, leading to great discrepancies in the possibility to obtain naturalization. Depending on the political positioning of the individual land, questions were formulated in a way as to challenge specific ideological or religious beliefs. Some of the most controversial questions were criticised for being intentionally discriminatory and for targeting Muslim communities. Not exempt from public scrutiny, critics intervened in the matter and pointed out to these unfair inconsistencies within German federal bureaucracy, demanding that the government provide for a nationwide standardised formatting of the test. The current naturalization test was developed under the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community. It was created in cooperation with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), and in consultation with academic experts, particularly from the Institute for Educational Quality Improvement (IQB), as well as integration and policy experts. The test was officially introduced on September 1, 2008, following debates about integration and national identity. The questions include topics such as democracy, history, the rule of law, and cultural norms. The revised set of questions aligns with EU standards and fundamental democratic principles, yet it still leaves room for improvement, particularly in relation to matters concerning religion.

Another relevant institutional actor involved in diaspora affairs is the German-Turkish Parliamentary Group (*Deutsch-Türkische Parlamentariergruppe*). Supporting intercultural relations, it works to foster political dialogue and integration between Germany and its Turkish-origin population. It was established in 2002 in North Rhine-Westphalia—a region with the highest concentration of Turkish migrants in Germany. The group has since expanded and solidified its presence within the German Bundestag and serves as a crucial parliamentary bridge between Germany and Türkiye. It plays a significant role in strengthening diplomatic

relations and supporting cooperative initiatives. It advocates for civil rights, addresses social and integration-related concerns affecting the Turkish community in Germany, and promotes mutual understanding between the two countries. Through its activities, the group contributes to both the political empowerment of German citizens with Turkish backgrounds and the broader aim of fostering inclusive, transnational cooperation.

After a decades-long relationship between Germany and Türkiye, the community started to solidify its presence through independent and self-managed organizations. Since 1995, the Türkische Gemeinde in Deutschland has been an incredibly relevant actor, advocating for the recognition of German Turks' rights and engagement in the country. The TGD is strongly committed to providing support to its community by organising events, raising awareness and sharing information. Both its national and federal headquarters offer their services and facilitate communication between the government, its affiliated institutions and civil society. Their aim is to bridge the gap between top level political leader and bottom up collectives, make the bureaucratic system more accessible and return agency to the individual by informing and educating about their rights as citizens. This translates into continuous political activism through newsletters and public statements, seminars and campaigns. Their end goal is to increase the political participation of this significant portion of the German population.

By creating a dedicated space in which the community can discuss all aspects related to citizenship, from rights acquisition, to integration and naturalisation processes, as well as the different ways of becoming politically active, they empower third country nationals and promote greater representation. Despite not holding legislative authority, the TGD has a strong presence at the ministry level: its representatives are often invited to participate in advisory committees, hearings, and expert panels on: integration policy, anti-racism strategies and reforms to immigration or citizenship laws. This underscores the pressing need to strengthen the collaboration and coordination of activities between the two parties. While official interventions of government institutions attempted to create a welcoming multicultural environment, their efforts have not been sufficient in addressing the needs of migrants and citizens with migration background. That is why independent organizations, NGO's and federal unions, like the Migrationsrat and the TGD, have decided to fight against the serious underrepresentation of migrant communities in political parties and the parliament, advocating for stronger participatory and decisional rights. For instance, in 2023, the Alliance "Citizenship suits us all" (*Pass(t) uns allen*) brought together a number of national and local organizations of migrant and justice groups, united by the desire to review the laws on citizenship, naturalisation and voting rights and make them a universally guaranteed right.

As the community grew larger and stronger, it also managed to become active through informal civic networks, gaining access to a wider and more diversified audience. The members of the diaspora started producing their own narratives and sharing their experience as migrants coming to Germany or being raised in Germany by Turkish parents. A significant collection of media, in the form of literature, art, film and journalism, now tells the stories of millions of people who came to Germany decades ago to build a new life, hoping for better living conditions for them and their families. The content of this media not only gives a glimpse of the lived experiences of German Turks and their journeys to adjust and adapt to a new environment, it also became part of the rich cultural heritage of Germany as *Einwanderungsland* (land of immigration).

The recent increase in activism and civil initiatives testifies to the different generational approaches and attitudes to integration. Generally speaking, younger generations are less afraid to speak up and be critical: they tend to feel as though, since being born in Germany, they have a legitimate right to express their point of view. What makes a big difference in the level of engagement is also the educational background of each generation: while the first migrants arrived in Germany after their formative years and with little chances to invest in their education, later generations could benefit from high-quality German schools.

When it comes to acquiring and practicing citizenship, there are two examples worth mentioning, which were created at the institutional level but rely on the collaboration with local communities. Ferda Ataman, journalist and political scientist, and Tülin Akkoç, Project Manager of the naturalization project "I'm citizen of Hamburg!" are both excellent representatives of the mission to create a more inclusive and just framework in Germany.

Ataman has dedicated her career to promoting diversity and implementing anti discrimination policies and protection mechanisms. She works to create fair opportunities in Germany, particularly providing support to disadvantaged minorities. Promoted by the Türkische Gemeinde Hamburg, Akkoç's project is also centred around the idea of facilitating the process of integration and citizenship acquisition for all people with a migration background. The actions range from awareness and informational sessions, to support in the bureaucratic process. Additionally, by addressing the obstacles and the anxieties related to this phenomenon, Tülin Akkoç's initiative abolishes the misconceptions which often refrain and limit people from requesting citizenship, which they would be rightfully and legally entitled to.

The profound influence of the Turkish diaspora on Germany's cultural system is collected and illustrated in the TAM museum. Co-founded by Dr. Gülşah Stapel and Müge Avar, the TAM Museum in Berlin is a primary evidence of how the Turkish community is reclaiming its voice and finally producing its own story of the migration, integration and exclusion process in Germany. The project seeks to address and reframe the longstanding and multifaceted historical

relationship between Germany and Türkiye, a connection that spans over five centuries and encompasses shared experiences in the realms of art, science, economy, literature, music, and everyday life. Despite the depth of these historical ties, such intercultural narratives have often been marginalized, reduced to isolated anecdotes or framed through a singular dominant lens—most notably, that of the "guest worker" and the perpetual practice of "othering". In contrast to this reductive paradigm, TAM, which stands for Türkisch-deutsches Archiv- und Museumsprojekt (it is also Turkish for whole, complete, exact, full) positions itself as a counter-narrative institution, challenging the conventional portrayal of individuals with Turkish heritage in Germany solely as migrants. Instead, it recognizes them as an integral, dynamic part of contemporary German and European society. The project embraces transculturality not as a state of in-betweenness or dislocation, but as a historically grounded and enriching feature of human coexistence. TAM Museum aims to create a platform for preserving, curating, and exhibiting the neglected or suppressed narratives of German-Turkish entanglements. It emphasizes the value of ambiguity, complexity, and difference as tools for cultural growth, empathy, and understanding. Through its activities, TAM intends to foster a more inclusive understanding of identity and belonging. Ultimately, TAM Museum envisions itself not only as a cultural institution, but as a movement that seeks to expand the contours of collective memory and promote intercultural dialogue within German society.⁴¹ This project is intended as an independent and non-profit organisation, funded by people with a common objective. It brings together historians, artists, gallery curators, academics, journalists, architects, researchers from both Germany and Türkiye, with both a direct and indirect connection to migration and diasporic phenomena.

One last compelling example of self-produced narratives by civil society which is worth mentioning is that of Işıl Eğrikavuk, a Turkish artist and academic based in Germany. Contributing to the mission of those who contest imposed identities, her work directly challenges reductive stereotypes projected onto Turkish women by the dominant society. In response to repeated comments such as "But you don't look Turkish," Eğrikavuk explores the visual and discursive frameworks through which identity is externally defined. Her photographic project *But You Don't* reflects this confrontation, by turning the comment back on its speakers and questioning the assumptions it reveals. Through both her academic presence and artistic production, Işıl Eğrikavuk resists the inherited image of the Turkish *Gastarbeiterfrau* and instead asserts a multifaceted identity as feminist, diasporic, and globally educated. Her practice exemplifies how members of the Turkish diaspora are increasingly

⁴¹TAM Museum

reclaiming narrative control, using artistic media to articulate self-defined identities and disrupt dominant visual codes and standardised representations.

Behind these projects, there lies the ambition to challenge the implicit criteria for asserting Germanness or claiming citizenship rights—criteria that persist in the public consciousness and are reinforced through prevailing political discourse. Among the most harmful narratives and forms of language used historically—both institutionally and in everyday contexts—is the term *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker). This label was never fully embraced by those subjected to such labour agreements, and opposition to it has grown significantly over time, as the resulting social divisions and discriminatory treatment have become increasingly evident.

Dr. Alpbek, from the Türkische Elternverein in Berlin-Brandenburg, aptly pointed out during our conversation how the term “Gastarbeiter” reveals an inherent contradiction: it fuses two concepts — *guest* and *worker* — that embody opposing temporalities and levels of integration. A *guest* is, by definition, a temporary presence, someone who is tolerated for a limited time, often expected to leave without fundamentally altering the host environment. A *worker*, on the other hand, implies a more enduring contribution — a person who participates in the economic and social life of the community, shaping and being shaped by it. In his words: “You’re a guest for three days, uh, and after those three days, you either stay and become part of the family—with all the rights and responsibilities, so to speak, that’s kind of the extended understanding—or you leave. But being a guest and a worker for your entire life doesn’t go together. And that’s why the term is, of course, constructed in this sense—perhaps also based on previous experiences. Maybe they didn’t want to say ‘foreign worker’...”⁴²

This tension encapsulates the ambivalent position many Turkish migrants and their descendants have occupied in Germany: welcomed for their labour, but not fully included in the political or cultural community. The very use of the term “Gastarbeiter” reinforced a logic of externalization and conditionality, one that Di Cesare would describe as emblematic of the “*straniero residente*” — the foreigner who resides, contributes, and becomes embedded in the fabric of society, yet remains excluded from political membership and symbolic recognition. The language of guesthood sustains the idea that belonging is contingent and always revocable, undermining the permanent, lived realities of those who were never simply passing through.⁴³ The conceptual dissonance embedded in the term *Gastarbeiter* did not simply affect the first generation of migrants, but has also had enduring consequences for subsequent generations. Children and grandchildren of those labelled as “guests” inherited not only the social and legal ambiguities of their parents’ status, but also the symbolic weight of being perceived as *permanently provisional*. Despite being born and raised in Germany, many from the so-called

⁴²Interview with Dr. Alpbek, Berlin, 25. March. 2025

⁴³DiCesare, 2017

"second" and "third" generations continue to experience a disconnect between cultural familiarity and political legitimacy. They speak the language, attend German schools, and participate in society, yet remain subject to subtle — and sometimes overt — reminders that they are still perceived as "other." This inherited sense of ambiguous belonging shapes identity in complex ways: while some choose to assert their connection with Germany unapologetically, others reclaim their Turkish roots as a form of resistance or empowerment.

An example of this is a linguistic trend that started emerging in the 90s. Younger generations started employing certain expressions taken from their migrational background and implementing them in everyday German language. What is often criticised as an improper form and use of grammar, has now been recognised as a new urban dialect called “Kiezdeutsch”. It is shaped by the high degree of linguistic diversity typical of cities. It developed in residential areas where different dialects, linguistic styles, and languages come together (i.e. Arabic, Kurdish or Turkish) and this diverse linguistic context has made *Kiezdeutsch* a particularly innovative dialect. Furthermore, it brings language development and grammatical innovations that fit within the system of the German language. Lastly, it illustrates the possibilities that language offers in expanding the spectrum of modes of living one’s Germanness.⁴⁴ Professor Heike Wiese, a German linguist who specializes in slang forms, published the first official book on Kiezdeutsch. In her book, Wiese seeks to analyse the structural features of this urban dialect and advocates for its recognition as a legitimate dialect of the German language. Her work aims to challenge prevailing prejudices and stereotypes associated with Kiezdeutsch, countering criticisms that it represents a degradation of standard German grammar. Instead, she frames it as a valid and dynamic form of communication that reflects the linguistic evolution of contemporary German society. In collaboration with the Chair of German Linguistics and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Wiese is also leading an educational initiative designed for teachers. The project aims to familiarize educators with the dialect, with the broader goal of enhancing communication with younger, linguistically diverse generations.⁴⁵ With the production of new forms of communication, Turkish and other migrant communities have enriched Germany’s cultural heritage, while simultaneously posing an implicit challenge to institutions to adopt more progressive and inclusive approaches to societal development.

⁴⁴Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

⁴⁵new communication, 2012

Chapter Four - Consumption

The aim of the following section is to examine the ways in which people use, engage with, and respond to the practice of citizenship. More specifically, the analysis will look at how German society consumes Turkish-German culture, while also revealing the systemic exclusion that certain products and practices are subject to. Additionally, the chapter will touch on the experience of German Turks in their approaches to culture, both German and Turkish.

In essence, it will be an overview of the cultural manifestations of citizenship that people accept or reject as makers of daily lives. The process of reception, interpretation and adaptation is applied to all elements that make up a culture, from the culinary to the artistic sphere, even including forms of interacting with each other.

The cultural and civic contributions of German-Turkish individuals have enriched the national fabric, but mainstream German society has not always welcomed these shifts in their totality. The reception of German-Turkish cultural production has ranged from celebration to commodification to open resistance—revealing the conditionality often placed on belonging. In some instances, German-Turkish voices have been enthusiastically embraced—particularly when their narratives align with dominant values of integration, self-reliance, and multicultural harmony. Films like *Almanya: Willkommen in Deutschland* were widely celebrated for their humorous and heartwarming portrayal of migrant experiences.⁴⁶ Likewise, authors who write in German and reflect on themes of longing and identity, have received literary praise and national recognition.

However, other expressions—especially those that confront systemic racism, inequality, or police violence—have been met with discomfort or even backlash. For example, German-Turkish musicians like Eko Fresh, who use aggressive or politically charged lyrics, are often accused of promoting anti-German sentiment or failing to integrate. Ekrem Bora, the rapper's real name, rejects the idea that his identity be reduced to that of somebody with a migration background: to him “migration is just part of personal experience.” Filmmaker,

⁴⁶Samdereli, 2011

Sükriye Dönmez, explains how she started making her own movies after her career as an actress was encountering the limit of being typecast as a stereotyped Turkish-veiled woman.⁴⁷

In such cases, the cultural product is not evaluated solely for its artistic merit but is judged against an implicit standard of "acceptable" migrant behaviour. This dynamic echoes what Paul Gilroy calls the "non-recognition of political presence despite cultural presence."⁴⁸ He sheds light on a paradoxical situation, in which cultural diversity is tolerated or even celebrated to a certain extent, while in other contexts it is marginalised or completely shut down. Moreover, cultural contributors who speak out about racism or exclusion are frequently accused of being ungrateful or divisive.

There is also the question of co-optation: Turkish elements—be it cuisine, music, or linguistic expressions—have increasingly found their way into mainstream popular culture. Ahmet, a first generation German Turk, who immigrated to Germany in 1971, observed how his Turkish culinary and social traditions gradually made their way into German daily life. Ahmet gave his responses in Turkish, while a companion provided simultaneous German translation. The following English excerpt is based on that German interpretation. "The food culture, the way people sit outside in all the parks—that's something they (the Germans) picked up from us, something they learned from us and adopted, so to speak. Back in the day, they weren't out on the streets as much, they didn't sit in cafés or on terraces like they do now... and that's something they got from us."⁴⁹

Yet these instances of cultural readaptations often occur in ways that strip these elements of their original social or political context. For instance, the popularity of *Döner* as a "national snack" contrasts sharply with the marginalization of many other cultural manifestations originating or inspired by Türkiye, which are instead rejected. The dish now receives worldwide recognition and appreciation, while its origins are claimed by both Germany and Türkiye. So much so, that Germany was willing to fight Türkiye in a legal case brought to the European Commission. The Euronews article titled "Kebab war ignites as Germany fights Turkey over food protection" examines the dispute between Germany and Türkiye, concerning the European Union's recognition of the döner kebab as a "Traditional Specialty Guaranteed" (TSG) product. In April 2024, Türkiye submitted an application to the European Commission seeking TSG status for the döner kebab, aiming to standardize its preparation methods and ingredients across the EU. Germany, where the döner kebab has become a staple street food since its introduction by Turkish immigrants in the 1970s, opposes this application. The German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture filed an objection, reflecting concerns from German producers that the

⁴⁷Böttcher et. al, 2009

⁴⁸Gilroy, 1987

⁴⁹Interview with Ahmet, Berlin, 26. March. 2025

TSG designation could restrict the diversity of döner kebab preparations prevalent in Germany. Additionally, critics argue that the Turkish proposal does not encompass these popular adaptations, potentially impacting the €2.3 billion döner industry in Germany. The European Commission has initiated a six-month period for both parties to resolve the disagreement. If no consensus is reached, the Commission will make a final decision on the registration.

This conflict underscores broader themes of cultural identity, culinary heritage, and economic interests within the EU framework. With both sides claiming ownership over the döner and wanting to define its characteristics, they demonstrate how this “origin mentality” is employed to appropriate cultural objects for political or economic reasons.

When native Germans travel to Türkiye for leisure, their perception of the country is shaped by a romanticized and selective lens. In the context of tourism, Türkiye is viewed as a land of scenic beauty, rich cuisine, vibrant culture, and welcoming people. However, these same cultural elements are frequently devalued or problematized upon return to Germany. In the domestic context, Islam is often portrayed as inherently oppressive and backwards, and the Turkish population is homogenized and associated with extremist ideologies. This conflation reflects a broader tendency to collapse distinctions between practicing Muslims and radical Islamists, contributing to a stigmatizing and reductive discourse surrounding the Turkish diaspora.

This inconsistent approach to cultural elements is subtly exposed by Angst Yok, an anonymous collective of street artists, who bring “bold and humorously disruptive elements to everyday life. A cause of public pausing - without trying to spread any broad moral or political hints.”.⁵⁰ One of their most famous works is a series of images depicting typical Turkish/Middle Eastern food, followed by the caption *Alles Deutschland* (All Germany). The collective describes Germany’s culinary diversity as evidence of the melting pot system. They recognise a much deeper exchange between cultures, of which these foods are just the tip. The range of artistic mediums, including film, theatre, music, and photography, serve as critical tools for the articulation and negotiation of Turkish-German identity. These forms not only facilitate individual and collective self-exploration, but also promote discourse around formerly marginalized or taboo subjects, thereby empowering previously silenced voices. These examples point out to how mainstream Germany often wants the “colourful” aspects of migrant culture, but not the confrontation that comes with deeper inclusion. Emotional expressiveness, alternative identities, and political critique are welcome only when they don’t challenge the dominant narrative too directly. In shifting the focus on how citizenship and integration is received and interpreted by the German-Turkish community, each generation has reacted differently to state-led integration

⁵⁰Angst Yok website

programs, education policies, and public campaigns. Earlier generations often experienced integration as a process of adaptation and institutional marginalization. Instead, younger Turkish-Germans increasingly engage with these initiatives from a more critical and self-reflective standpoint. Many see them not simply as tools of inclusion, but as mechanisms of cultural regulation and symbolic assimilation. This section explores how perceptions of integration have evolved between generations of the Turkish diaspora, paying particular attention to how younger voices are redefining what it means to "belong"—not through passive acceptance, but through active participation, critique, and the production of alternative narratives that challenge and expand the very notion of integration itself.

The first generations described initial reception as a relatively successful process, mentioning the willingness of the natives to help and assist. During my interview with Ahmet, who came to Berlin under the Gastarbeiter agreements, he shared his experience: “He says that the Germans back then, who welcomed us so warmly, no longer exist today. Back then, we were received very warmly by the Germans. We got along very well, but today’s Germans are apparently no longer like they used to be... They [the earlier Germans] knew that [the newcomers] didn’t speak the language, and they still tried to integrate them in some way, to offer them as much care and protection as possible...”⁵¹

I also discussed this matter with Sultan, a woman in her sixties, who came to Germany when she was 18 years old, following her dad who had moved to Germany in 1969, also under the Gastarbeiter agreement. She described her first interactions with the native Germans as follows: “People were all so generous to foreigners. Yes, they helped so much at the time. We were communicating with our hands, but that was also enough...”⁵²

For the first generation of Turkish migrants, those who came under the so-called *Gastarbeiter* contracts, life in Germany was already a big improvement compared to conditions of poverty to which they were used to in Türkiye. The older members of the Turkish community have always expressed huge gratitude for the opportunities that they were granted by the German State to work and provide for their families. This might be due to their very low expectations and standards in terms of labour, social rights and compensations. For one, the lack of language skills and knowledge of the culture contributed to their feeling of inferiority. This humble approach to German society marked the first real exchanges of Germans with foreigners. The overall positive response of the native self organised civic groups, was met with obedience and adherence to the requests of integration, in some cases concealed assimilation by the host country.

⁵¹Interview with Ahmet, Berlin, 27. March. 2025

⁵²Interview with Sultan, Berlin, 23. March. 2025

Later generations use more resentful and frustrated tones and images to retell their journey to recognition within German society. There are various factors that contribute to justifying these generational differences. In the second generation, these stark differences in attitude and perception towards Germany's political and overall societal system came as a reaction to the pressure and hardship that their parents experienced. The second wave of German Turks started becoming more rebellious or resistant, refuting prescribed identities or ethnic identities. People started identifying more in localities like Berlin, Kreuzberg etc...

Significantly different is the experience of the 3rd and 4th generation. Their situation recalls the concept of hybridity mentioned by Dr. Kolat and Dr. Alpbek. While some younger individuals are considered as "fully integrated", others believe that the absence or limited access to certain rights and the rising discrimination is unacceptable, even more so because of how far back Turkish migration dates. The general inability to recognise them as authentic Germans fuels their frustration and resistance of anything that is associated to prevailing images of German identity. Because they see little acceptance and respect towards their community, they turn inwards and become more attached to one side of their identity, almost as a defence mechanism. They display their Turkish roots in different forms in their daily lives: via language, customs, traditions, religion, moral values, media consumption, political affiliation, inter-relational approach, cuisine etc. In our interview, Emine admitted that she felt a sense of moral obligation to learn Turkish, framing this endeavour as a means of rectifying what she perceived as a disconnection from her cultural origins: "How did you decide that you wanted to learn Turkish?- Because I didn't think it was right that I only knew the German language, and I felt a lack of connection to the Turkish language".⁵³

Her reconnection with the Turkish side of her identity is also manifested through culinary practices, which she actively embraced as part of her heritage. Similarly, Zeynep articulated her attachment to her Turkish roots through her religious identity, proudly affirming her affiliation with Islam and observing its associated practices as a key aspect of cultural expression: "How do you express this in your daily life? Through the cuisine of course, Turkish cuisine, also maintaining our mentality, our celebrations. For example, our Ramadan is coming up soon. There is a big celebration at my house...everyone dresses up nicely, they buy something, they visit the elderly, there is hand-kissing and on that I place great value... I pray..."⁵⁴.

This chapter has explored various ways in which citizenship can be enacted and performed, emphasizing its intersectional dimensions. Such complexity necessitates a recalibration of the policies and legal frameworks intended to uphold and safeguard the diverse expressions of

⁵³Interview with Emine, Berlin, 26. March. 2025

⁵⁴Interview with Zeynep, Berlin, 26. March. 2025

citizenship, without privileging one form over another. Citizenship is simultaneously a universal principle and a deeply personal experience, beginning with the fundamental distinction between those who possess it and those who do not. It profoundly shapes individual and collective existence and, as such, requires a comprehensive framework that acknowledges and accommodates its multiple meanings and manifestations.

Chapter Five - Regulation

The last step of my investigation will be focused on navigating the legal framework which has regulated the notion and practices of citizenship in Germany so far. My initial belief was that the structure of the legislative system was built on clear and rational principles and rules. Upon closer examination, I have come to find that it has been strongly impacted by emotions and is deeply intertwined with broader political ideologies and social and historical shifts.

Citizenship laws mirror the marginalisation of those who are considered as not fitting or not belonging to Germany, as is the case of the Turkish diaspora. In this sense, citizenship has been more a tool for exclusion from society, rather than one aiming to expand and extend the participation of individuals in everyday life and decision-making processes. There is a constant struggle between inclusion and exclusion, between embracing a multicultural society, as promoted during the chancellorship of Angela Merkel, and the more recent urge to defend a narrowly defined national identity.

In the last thirty years, the process of law making highlighted the structural differences and divisions within the political body and, more in general, among Germans.

The evolution of citizenship rights in Germany can be divided into four main phases:

1. In the 1990s, the “legal right” to citizenship was first introduced in the Aliens Act;
2. In the year 2000 children born in Germany from foreign parents were granted *ius soli*;
3. 2014 marked the abolishment of the *Optionspflicht* to choose a nationality at 18 or 23 years old;
4. In July 2024, Germany finally recognised the different cultural backgrounds of people, granting the right to hold dual citizenship and recognizing hybrid identities, multilingualism, cultural and ethnic identities. In so doing, there was an adaptation to EU values and principles of both the Turkish community, and of German national law.

Following its reunification in October 1990, Germany maintained a largely *jus sanguinis*-based approach to citizenship. This continuity reflected a cautious national mood—while the country was redefining itself post-Cold War, there was also growing anxiety about integrating long-standing migrant communities. The Turkish population, many of whom had lived in Germany for decades under *Gastarbeiter* policies, remained legally foreign. The bilateral agreement between Türkiye and Germany was initially limited to the temporary employment of Turkish workers in the Federal Republic, without anticipating the long-term settlement of these individuals. As a result, no proper legal framework was established to regulate their residence nor facilitate their integration into German society. However, when a significant number of Turkish citizens chose to remain in Germany, establish families, and pursue stable livelihoods, they made efforts to adapt to local customs and societal norms. However, these efforts proved to be ineffective, since their legal and social position remained precarious due to the absence of an official integration framework. This situation led to growing tensions among segments of the native population, who often perceived the settled Turkish community as insufficiently integrated. Public discourse subsequently reflected divergent attitudes: some advocated for enhanced integration policies in recognition of the community's contributions to post-war reconstruction, while others called for a more assimilationist approach aimed at preserving a cohesive national identity.

Calls for reform were mainly pushed by the Deutsch-Türkische Parlamentariergruppe, alongside the Bündnis/Grüne party and Die Linke, both left-wing parties. Representatives of the various federal unions also played a crucial role in bridging institutions with civil society, raising the needs of the latter to the German government and its parliamentarians. Despite their growing activism, the dominant narrative was still rooted in ethnicity and ancestry.

In 1982, Chancellor Helmut Kohl emerged as one of the first high-ranking political figures to publicly acknowledge the growing issue of integration concerning the Turkish population in Germany. Despite openly expressing a largely restrictive approach and hostile attitude towards migrants, for example with his desire to significantly reduce the number of Turks residing in the country, Kohl initiated a process within the Bundestag to re-evaluate the legal framework governing citizenship. Substantive legislative reform, however, would not materialize until 1999, under the chancellorship of Gerhard Schröder. The coalition government formed by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Alliance 90/The Greens introduced a landmark proposal to amend the nationality law, aiming to “improve the integration of long-term foreign residents and their children in the Federal Republic of Germany by easing the requirements for acquiring German citizenship.” The reform marked a critical shift in German integration policy, as reflected in the statement by then-Minister of the Interior Otto Schily, who emphasized the need

to align the Basic Law with the evolving realities of a pluralistic and post-migration society. This moment signalled a departure from ethnonationalist conceptions of citizenship toward a more inclusive, civic-oriented model.⁵⁵ In his address to the Bundestag, he thanked all of those who engaged in a constructive dialogue and showed a proactive approach to changing the laws regulating citizenship. Schily went on to say: “The reform of the nationality law is even more than that: it is the core of a comprehensive integration concept, because integration — I am firmly convinced of this — can only succeed if citizens of foreign origin are granted equal participation in social life in Germany through the acquisition of German citizenship”.⁵⁶ The year 2000 marked a watershed moment: years of advocacy and social pressure managed to introduce a more inclusive framework that combined *jus soli* elements with existing *jus sanguinis* laws. Children born in Germany to foreign parents could now acquire citizenship under certain conditions. Dual nationality was tolerated temporarily, under the “option model,” where individuals were expected to choose one nationality by the age of 23. While the general acceptance of dual citizenship remained restricted, the reform also eased naturalization by reducing the required period of legal residence from fifteen to eight years. Additionally, applicants were required to demonstrate financial self-sufficiency, German language proficiency, and affirm loyalty to the constitutional order through a formal declaration.⁵⁷ This reform was a symbolic recognition of Germany as an immigration country (*Einwanderungsland*), and it signalled a more liberal, pragmatic approach. It coincided with broader European trends favouring integration and multiculturalism. At the time, centrist and left-leaning parties framed the change as necessary for social cohesion, whereas right-wing parties resisted, warning of a dilution of what they thought defined the German identity. The naturalization test in Germany sparked significant controversy, with critics arguing that the test was less a measure of civic knowledge and more an instrumentalisation of a legal procedure, designed to assess the degree of cultural assimilation and conformity to a normative model of “Germanness.” This perception is underscored by the media discourse surrounding the test, with headlines referring to it as the “*Pascha-Test*” or “*Muslim-Test*”—terms that reflect the public suspicion that the test was disproportionately aimed at individuals from Muslim-majority countries.⁵⁸ Such framing reveals how legislations and integration policies were often utilised not as inclusive efforts to foster pluralistic belonging, but rather as mechanisms requiring the renunciation of religious or cultural identities. In this context, the naturalization process appeared to reinforce the notion of an inherent tension—or even incompatibility—between Islamic cultural heritage and the values of the German political and legal order. Acknowledging

⁵⁵McFadden 2019

⁵⁶Bundestag, 1999

⁵⁷McFadden, 2019

⁵⁸Kelek, 2006, Die Zeit, 2009

the limitations of the 1999 citizenship reform, the SPD viewed it as a necessary but provisional compromise.

The need for revision became urgent by 2006, when efforts were made to standardize naturalization requirements across the German Länder. Significant discrepancies in language proficiency standards and the content of cultural knowledge tests highlighted the lack of uniformity, prompting initiatives to harmonize integration criteria nationwide. Initially, federal states were free to choose which questions to ask in the test, in addition to their autonomy with regard to administrative tasks. Baden-Württemberg, for example, decided to introduce an attitude-test (*Gesinnungstest*), which clearly targeted Muslim applicants by asking them on possible reactions to their children's sexuality, their stance on premarital relationships or on the independence of their daughters.⁵⁹ This accusatory and discriminatory procedure was an evident violation of Article 3 of the *Grundgesetz*, which affirms the principle of equal treatment before the law. State authorities were called out for this unlawful behaviour and, although there was no involvement of the Federal Constitutional Court, Baden-Württemberg was harshly criticised by national stakeholders and European human rights organisations. The pressure exercised by public discourse on federal and state authorities, who demanded that these violations be corrected, initiated a political and legal debate on the overall compliance of Germany with human rights standards in the framework of the European Union.

The new regulations were also contested for their controversial use of legal terminology, which became subject to political instrumentalization. The term *Optionspflicht* (obligation to choose) was increasingly reframed by critics of the 2000 Citizenship Law as *Optionszwang* (compulsion to choose), in order to emphasize the perceived coerciveness of the system and to underscore dissatisfaction with its restrictive stance on dual citizenship.

In 2014, under pressure from both migrant communities and progressive political actors, the government abolished the "option model" for many individuals—allowing them to retain dual citizenship if they were born and raised in Germany. While celebrated as a step forward, this reform still came with strings attached, including cultural integration benchmarks and documentation of residency. Doubts and ambiguities concerning the naturalisation test remained. What leaves many puzzled is the illogical procedure of the test: the version submitted after initial orientation—usually six months after immigration—is identical to the naturalization test, which can normally be taken after eight years of residence. Moreover, the test mixes simple questions—for example, whether Poland borders Germany—with more complex ones about the meaning of the second vote (*Zweitstimme*) or the challenges faced by the government if the balance of power in the Bundesrat shifts after a state election.

⁵⁹Güngör, 2006

The duality is clear: the law allows for formal inclusion, but continues to place the burden of *proving* belonging on individuals with migration backgrounds. Legal status, once again, depends not only on birth but on behaviour, language, and demonstrated “loyalty.”

The outcome of this reform also pointed out to how citizenship, a matter that has direct implications on questions of fundamental rights and identity, falls under constitutional law and is thus regulated by a legislative process that is primarily driven by federal ministries and state-level authorities. These top level institutions play a central role in shaping such laws, exercising a profound and lasting effects on the lives of millions. However, there is frequently a disconnect between legislative or policy frameworks and the complex socio-cultural fabric they seek to govern. That is why civil society representatives, such as integration researchers and migrant advocacy groups, are granted a consultative role. Their participation, although quite determining for an effective result, is subject to some clear limitations. First, their involvement typically begins only once a bill enters parliamentary deliberation—not during its initial drafting. Second, while their input can influence public debate and exert political pressure, it remains entirely non-binding.

This imbalance was particularly evident during the 2014 citizenship law reform. At the Bundestag hearing, Safer Çınar, a leading representative of the Türkische Gemeinde in Deutschland (TGD), voiced strong opposition to the restrictive *Optionspflicht* model. He argued that full recognition of dual citizenship was essential to ensuring democratic inclusion and social justice. Çınar described the requirement for individuals to choose between German citizenship and that of their parents as discriminatory—especially for third-country nationals who had long resided in Germany, and for children born and raised in the country. The following excerpt of his statement particularly stood out to me, as it highlights the unfoundedness of the restrictions applied to citizenship acquisition: "Not least, the options model—with its requirement to give up one of two nationalities after 22 years of holding German citizenship (and dual nationality)—has reinforced among young people born and raised here the impression that they are not accepted or respected. This feeling is all the stronger when a German-Turkish youth is aware that their classmate, who holds both German and Italian (or even Swiss, a non-EU) citizenship, is not subject to this requirement, and also knows that Türkiye accepts dual citizenship."⁶⁰

Despite presenting integration data, testimonies, and fieldwork findings to support the case for broader reform, the resulting legislation only permitted dual citizenship under specific conditions. This limited progress contributed to a deepening sense of institutional mistrust and political disengagement within parts of the Turkish diaspora, who were ultimately required to

⁶⁰Safer Çınar, Deutscher Bundestag, 2014

wait another decade—until 2024—before dual citizenship was universally recognized. The long delay underscores how citizenship legislation, while formally rooted in democratic norms, can be mobilized in ways that reproduce exclusion and reinforce societal divisions.

The most recent reform debates, as seen in Bundestag committee hearings and public speeches, have unfolded in a very hostile climate. Following the 2015–2016 refugee arrivals and the rise of the populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the discourse has shifted dramatically. Right-wing narratives now frame citizenship not as a right earned through residence or birth, but as a privilege threatened by “uncontrolled migration.” The strong and immediate impact of this rhetoric was immediately reflected in the naturalisation trends: UK citizens surpassed the number of Turks applying for naturalisation, increasing by +361% compared to the year before. The number of Turks applying for naturalisation had already been experiencing a significant decrease.⁶¹ The migration crisis of 2015, Erdoğan’s electoral coup, seen as an authoritarian and undemocratic act, and the consequent straining of political and diplomatic ties, immediately reflected on the perception of the Turkish community. This selective openness within German integration policy, with British citizens benefitting from a more streamlined bureaucratic procedure, highlights a big divergence and hypocrisy within the legal system.

The article by Katharina Schuman and Frida Thurm demonstrates just this: how opposition to dual citizenship is less concerned with doubts about its legality or problematic integration process, and more with political ideologies of identity, loyalty and other symbolic forms of belonging. Even as the governing coalition has pushed for a more liberalized path to citizenship—shortening residency requirements and simplifying the application process—these moves have sparked fierce backlash. Legal reforms, in this sense, have become battlegrounds for identity politics.⁶² Committee recordings from 2023 and 2024 show how right-wing MPs frequently invoke language of overwhelm, abuse of the system, and threats to cultural cohesion. Gottfried Curio’s frequent contestations in plenary sessions exemplify this shift. In a session held on June 6th of last year, 2024, he talked about stopping the political Islam and the importation of violence. According to his view, the “migration fanatics” want to turn “Germany into a settlement area for foreigners from all over the world.” Those who bring in hundreds of thousands every year, of whom “99 percent are not criminals, are still bringing in thousands of criminal Islamists like this attacker with the last percent.”⁶³

The choice of linguistic register, employed in a context that should be dictated by law and order, is evidently mandated by the intention of fuelling feelings of fear, anger and alarm in the audience.

⁶¹DeStatis, 2017

⁶²Schuman, Thurm, 2016

⁶³Bundestag, 2024

Despite the outward image of constitutional stability and legal coherence, parliamentary debates on citizenship reform reveal that the *Grundgesetz*—Germany’s Basic Law, often revered as the moral compass of the republic—is far from immune to political instrumentalization. On paper, it enshrines equality, dignity, and democratic inclusion. In reality, however, interpretations of these values diverge dramatically along ideological lines.

For many Germans, constitutional pride (*Verfassungspatriotismus*) is a central component of national identity. The *Grundgesetz* is not just a legal document—it is a post-war legacy, a break from authoritarianism, and a symbol of liberal democracy. Yet the tensions within the Bundestag reflect how even this unifying text becomes a site of contestation when applied to migration and citizenship. Right-wing actors frequently invoke national sovereignty to justify restrictions, while progressive voices lean on Articles 1 and 3, emphasizing dignity and non-discrimination. This interpretive divide underscores a fundamental truth: law is not static, nor is it universally understood. It is shaped, deployed, and weaponized according to prevailing political currents. In the case of citizenship law, the oscillation between inclusive and exclusive reforms shows how legal definitions of belonging are deeply vulnerable to the mood of the nation and the ideological commitments of those in power. As Germany navigates a complex future shaped by migration, globalization, and demographic change, the gap between constitutional ideals and political practice raises pressing questions. Who gets to define the “German values” that the *Grundgesetz* is supposed to represent? And more importantly, how can a democratic society ensure that these values are not selectively applied?

The presumption that emotional attachments can be subject to legislation is a very dangerous one: it echoes a time in which a rigid idea of who could be considered German resulted in one of the most horrific historical events of the last century. The creation of a one-size fits all paradigm would ultimately end up excluding people and denying the unique experiences that have shaped their identities.

For those who find themselves navigating these laws, in particular individuals with a migration background and non EU citizens, the experience of citizenship extends far beyond the administrative. As my interviews reveal, citizenship is often felt as something to be proven, rather than simply acquired through a legal procedure.

Emi, born and raised in Baden-Württemberg to Turkish parents, described how even after obtaining a German passport, she is still considered as a foreigner. She notices it in the looks that she gets, as a person who does not have a typically Caucasian skin tone. This attitude, exposes the gap between legal recognition and social acceptance. Her experience is shared even among individuals who only have one foreign-born parent. Such is the case of Emine, who expressed this tension clearly: “Do you also feel like a foreigner here?” — “Yes, I do.” “Even

though you were born here?” — “Yes, because I’m quite dark-skinned, so visually I don’t appear light, and that automatically makes people see me as a foreigner. Even though, actually, my father is German and I am technically German myself.”⁶⁴

Her words perfectly portray how, regardless of her legal status, she continues to be seen—and to feel—like an outsider. Her father is German, and she holds German citizenship by birth. And yet, visual markers like skin colour override both legal status and biographical rootedness in shaping her experience of identity. A central paradox in German citizenship discourse comes to the surface: the idea that *being German* is still often linked not just to legal and constitutional criteria, but to appearance, cultural coding, and ancestry. This undercuts the supposedly inclusive ideals of *Verfassungspatriotismus*, exposing a gap between legal status and emotional-national acceptance.

The central takeaway from this analysis is the use of citizenship as a tool, for exclusion on one side and for participation on the other. Citizenship is viewed differently depending on the adopted perspective: when it comes to politicians, it is frequently instrumentalised and infused with emotional significance to endorse an idea of belonging which cannot be realised without the possession of a German passport. On the other hand, migrant communities and in particular my interviewees of the Turkish diaspora, view citizenship and owning a German passport in more pragmatic terms: it is a document that grants them a set of rights, primarily voting, but also equal working conditions, access to the welfare system and more freedom of movement within the EU. To most of the people I talked to, holding a German passport has no emotional connotation, certainly not one that can be drawn back to a physical attachment to the country. Rather, it is viewed as the key to emancipation and participation.

Currently, participation at any level is how people define their sense of identity and belonging to society. Whether that be through contributing to the workforce or actively engaging in the political life of a country: many interviewees placed great value on the actions with which they express their belonging to a place and a community. Approximately 1.2 million German Turks hold the right to vote in Germany; however, this figure represents only about half of the total population with a Turkish migration background residing in the country—many of whom have lived in Germany for over a decade. For years, a significant portion of this population was excluded from formal political participation due to restrictive citizenship policies, resulting in a disconnection between state institutions and segments of civil society. In particular, the first generation of Turkish migrants, who contributed substantially to Germany's post-war reconstruction, often lacked adequate support for integration and language acquisition. Not only were they denied political representation for decades, but this also hampered their education on

⁶⁴Interview with Emine, Berlin, 26. March. 2025

German politics. This historical marginalization is reflected, to some extent, in the voting behaviour of eligible German Turks today. Nevertheless, the absence of formal citizenship does not imply a lack of political engagement. On the contrary, both citizens and non-citizens of Turkish descent have demonstrated active involvement in Germany's political landscape through alternative forms of civic participation. These include engagement in labour unions, minority advocacy groups, and federal associations, but also participation in demonstrations and political protests. Obviously, there are generational differences in these trends: the priority after immigration, rather than being shaped by a desire of becoming politically active, might be more on language acquisition, education, employment and social integration. It is also a question of internal efficacy, which determines the degree of accessibility of the political discourse, so if citizens and eligible voters are able to understand the issues that are discussed.⁶⁵

Recent efforts of the TGD include a campaign which sought to engage voters of Turkish descent to exercise their right to vote. It provided all the key information about the 2025 federal election and Gökay Sofuoğlu, chairman of the union, said that he aimed to double the voter turnout, in recognition of the growing importance of electoral outcomes. According to the organization, a total of 7.1 million people with a migration background was eligible to vote on February 23, accounting for approximately 15 to 17 percent of the electorate.⁶⁶

Due to the responses of my interviews, this section cannot be considered complete without including a focus on rights insecurity, a feeling shared by many German Turks and individuals from many other communities with migration backgrounds. The inconsistencies and fragility of the legal system and protection mechanisms have contributed to a growing sense of fear and uncertainty within people. The scenarios envisioned by the Turkish diaspora include the possibility of being pushed out of the country, or having their rights suddenly and arbitrarily being taken away. This is partly due to the hostile behaviour of right wing parties, and partly due to the increasing migrant population residing in Germany. It should not surprise, the hostile reforms and xenophobic campaigns proposed by right wing politicians have diffused a growing fear within migrant communities and diasporas that they might one day “consume” and eventually exacerbate the level of tolerance of Germans towards them, regardless if they were born in the country or legally acquired residence or citizenship. The language employed by politicians, their threats and alarming public statements nurture these fears and uncertainties. The most blatant and controversial testimony of racism and discrimination was, without a doubt, AfD’s campaign to promote the remigration of non-citizens and irregular migrants. In Karlsruhe, the party distributed approximately 30,000 flyers designed to resemble airline

⁶⁵Wüst, 2022

⁶⁶Decker, 2025

boarding passes. These mock "deportation tickets" featured a departure from "Germany" to a "safe country of origin," with the passenger listed as "illegal immigrant" and the flight date set for February 23—the date of the federal election. Slogans such as "Only remigration can save Germany" and "It's nice at home too" were prominently displayed, aligning with the AfD's advocacy for "remigration," a term used by far-right groups to denote the mass deportation of immigrants and their descendants. The initiative was met with great disdain, especially from the left side of the political spectrum in Germany, but also from the international community. A representative of the UN Human Rights office said that it was "vital that states speak out 'firmly' against xenophobia, discrimination, and racism against people on the move."⁶⁷ This phenomenon brings me to address a deeper issue within the German system, which is the lack of trust and reliability of its legal framework: had Germany promoted secure and solid laws that truly guarantee the protection of all of its citizens, their fundamental rights and duties, it would have received greater support from civil society. Instead, by failing to establish clear and fair regulations governing its population, it lost credibility and is now forced to face the consequences of the erosion of democratic principles.

This chapter has examined Germany's legal framework as a central mechanism for regulating access to rights, including the right to citizenship. A thorough analysis of the integration attempts of Germany's oldest and most established migrant community—the Turkish diaspora—reveals the limitations and contradictions inherent in earlier legal models. These frameworks often failed to encompass the full spectrum of relevant factors involved in acquiring and exercising citizenship. Instead, they tended to adopt a one-dimensional lens, defining the prospective citizen either primarily as an economic contributor or, conversely, as a potential threat to national security. In the latter case, policy responses were shaped by an assimilationist and emotionally charged logic that implicitly required migrants to distance themselves from their cultural origins, familial ties, and collective memories. As a result, the legal system came to mirror the anxieties and vulnerabilities of the nation-state, producing a paradoxical structure: while it functioned as a formal source of rights and obligations, it simultaneously imposed normative expectations regarding identity, sentiment, and belonging—domains that should arguably remain within the private sphere. This tension underscores the need for a more inclusive reformulation of citizenship, one that respects both its universal and individual dimensions.

⁶⁷Arslan, 2025

Final Reflections

Through my investigations and analysis, I have collected a significant amount of material that has helped me to identify how the different dimensions of citizenship interact with each other: the interconnectedness between the political and social narratives that have been produced and continue to be produced in Germany, are clearly reflected in the evolutions of the legal framework. While the academic discourse hovers over these realities, it still remains too detached from the actual context.

In the last chapter, I suggested that Germany reflect on the set of values it claims to adhere to and the kind of society it envisions. The approach adopted so far vis-à-vis its largest diaspora group reveals a need to review the institutions' rules and relations to citizenship. The demand for top-down recognition and bottom up participation, for instance through the expression of one's needs, is the common thread that best describes the experience of the people I interviewed and of millions of unrecognised individuals. My reflection thus takes this appeal as a starting point for a rethinking of citizenship.

First and foremost, I understood just how much integration and participation, both as theoretical concepts and as concrete practices, are intertwined with one another. To achieve true participation and engagement, people have to bear the same duties, while also having access to equal rights. By questioning the current status quo and starting a conversation with the intention to agree on an adapted set of founding principles, for example the universal legal rule that *everyone is equal before the law*, German society could take a first step for the resolution of its internal turmoil.

A fairer inclusion of migrant communities could be achieved by establishing a more direct and efficient communication channel between institutions and civil society. In the case of the Turkish diaspora, this could happen with the collaboration of the Türkische Gemeinde Deutschland and its federal and local representatives. Ultimately, the demand is that civil society is granted de facto access to decision-making processes, especially in those matters that directly affect them. With this, I do not intend to undermine the important cooperation with mediating government-level actors, like the Deutsch-Türkische Parlamentariergruppe, although these remain too tied to higher institutional levels.

In their paper, Böttcher, Burford and Niebauer advocate for the creation of an honest and respectful dialogue, which will “truly allow for Turkish and German communities to live as

equals and, perhaps, to live as one community”.⁶⁸ However true it is that conflicts are somewhat inevitable and part of human nature, these can and must be negotiated democratically. This vision might be a source of inspiration for the kind of society Germany should aim to foster: one constructed around the peaceful coexistence of peoples.

Moving on to more elaborate proposals, when it comes to the question of citizenship and coexistence, Donatella Di Cesare’s compelling theory of the resident foreigner (*straniero residente*) comes to mind.⁶⁹ Her work urges a fundamental reconsideration of how our society defines *who belongs* — emphasizing presence, coexistence, and contribution over origin or legal status. The figure of the *straniero residente* embodies a new political subjectivity: one that lives within a society, participates in its economic and social life, and builds community, but remains structurally marginalized by legal and political frameworks that continue to privilege the citizen as the ideal subject.

In the German context, this concept is strikingly relevant. Millions of individuals — especially from the Turkish diaspora and other long-established migrant communities — live in Germany as “foreigners” despite being born in the country, speaking the language, and contributing to its society. Even with naturalization, many continue to be perceived and treated as *Ausländer*. Di Cesare’s critique resonates here: it reveals the limits of legal frameworks when they are not accompanied by broader societal recognition and cultural inclusion. Her philosophical call to “detach belonging from the land” invites the reader to think about citizenship not as ownership of territory or a legacy of descent, but as a lived, relational, and dynamic process. This deterritorialized understanding is particularly urgent in times of increasing mobility, transnational identities, and global interconnectedness — and it opens up space for thinking of Germany not as a nation-state with fixed borders and an essentialist identity, but as a plural society shaped by diverse trajectories of residence, participation, and meaning-making.

In an interview with *Internazionale*, political theorist Lea Ypi critically examines prevailing narratives surrounding migration and citizenship. She highlights how contemporary governments strategically employ rhetoric depending on their objectives: incoming migration is often framed as an “invasion,” while emigration is lamented as a “brain drain.” In Germany, this discursive shift is reflected in the AfD’s instrumentalization of migration narratives to serve their political agenda. Ypi advocates for a reframing of the debates on migration: these should move beyond questions of national belonging and identity, and instead be approached through the lens of social justice. One of the most concerning developments she identifies is the growing commodification of citizenship—a trend now visible even in long-standing democracies such as the United States and member states of the European Union, including Hungary. Transforming

⁶⁸Böttcher et. al., 2009

⁶⁹Di Cesare, 2017

citizenship into a financial matter, the eastern European country developed a plan which involved offering a fast track to citizenship acquisition to immigrants who would invest into Hungarian government bonds.⁷⁰ This shift from birthright citizenship to investment-based models represents not an expansion, but a restriction of democratic inclusion. Conceived during the Enlightenment period as a progressive mechanism to promote equality and civic participation, today citizenship has become a gatekeeping device. Whether conferred by lineage or by wealth, it remains largely inaccessible to the economically disadvantaged, thereby perpetuating structural inequality and limiting social mobility. Ypi also critiques the tendency to portray migration primarily as a cultural or identity-based conflict. Such reductive narratives obscure the structural causes of displacement and social division. Migration, she notes, is not inherently problematic—human mobility has been a constant throughout history. The real source of tension lies in the political mismanagement of migration and the socioeconomic fractures it exacerbates. For instance, both native and migrant workers often face similar challenges: low wages, precarious employment, and inadequate social protection. This situation was described by Zeynep in her interview, as she expressed frustration towards the negligence of the German government. Yet instead of bringing people together in an act of solidarity, these shared grievances are frequently manipulated by political actors to pit the groups against one another, with migrants scapegoated for systemic failures. In doing so, states capitalize on these divisions to advance exclusionary and self-serving agendas.⁷¹

To recapitulate, the Turkish diaspora in Germany has acted as a catalyst for social change by holding German institutions accountable for failing to uphold the very democratic principles—such as freedom of expression and religion—that they purport to defend. In this light, I argue that the poor integration of the Turkish diaspora exposes Germany’s gradual estrangement from its core democratic values, some of which were originally embedded in the concept of *Leitkultur*.

When Bassam Tibi first introduced the concept of *Leitkultur* in 1998, he envisioned it as a framework for social peace, based on a consensus around democratic values—such as human rights, separation of religion and state, and tolerance. These beliefs were to be shared by all members of a culturally diverse society, regardless of their religious or cultural backgrounds. However, over time, the concept has been appropriated and distorted to support nationalist narratives. A prominent example is its reinterpretation by Friedrich Merz, the current Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, who framed *Leitkultur* in terms of fixed historical traditions and institutions, emphasizing cultural homogeneity over pluralism. In his later

⁷⁰Daily Mail, 2012

⁷¹Ypi, 2025

writings, Tibi revisited and refined his concept, criticizing the deterioration of democratic discourse in Germany. He observed a lack of a robust and informed culture of debate, describing the national discourse as increasingly superficial and unresponsive to meaningful dialogue.⁷² At the heart of this issue lies a misunderstanding of identity. Citizenship should not be conflated with cultural, political, or ethnic identity, as Dr. Kolat stressed during our conversation. These facets of identity coexist within individuals, but are not necessarily activated in all contexts. They function in parallel, and denying this internal plurality diminishes the individual's capacity to exercise discernment and to engage meaningfully in the public sphere. Acknowledging the ability of the individual of drawing upon different aspects of their identity, depending on the context, allows for the possibility of collective diversity without demanding the sacrifice of individual complexity.

The imposition of integration into an ethnically defined community is inherently problematic, as ethnic identity is neither transferable nor something that can be acquired through socialization or a language test. If anything, it is the unequal access to rights and denial of expression which creates the conditions for parallel societies, often evoked with concern by nationalist politicians. As Tibi argues, emphasizing ethnic distinctions within the integration process tends to entrench these identities further, fostering division rather than unity.⁷³ Such an approach ultimately impedes integration and undermines the prospects for peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic society. This tension stands in direct contrast to the right to personal freedom, enshrined in Article 2 of the German Basic Law. The constitutional principle affirms the individual's autonomy and the legitimacy of diverse expressions of identity, reinforcing the idea that integration should be grounded in shared democratic values rather than ethnic or cultural conformity.

Taking into consideration the dynamic and evolving nature of our existence, I refer to the concept of cultural democracy proposed by Adams and Goldbard, to imagine a new understanding of our experience as citizens. They defined this as *“a set of related commitments: protecting and promoting cultural diversity, and the right to culture for everyone in our society and around the world, encouraging active participation in community cultural life, enabling people to participate in policy decisions that affect the quality of our cultural lives and assuring fair and equitable access to cultural resources and support...[.] Cultural democracy is therefore a deeply radical idea. It is the ultimate extension of the idea of democracy: that each one of us, each community, each cultural minority has rights that deserve respect, and that each must have a voice in the vital decisions that affect the quality of our lives. It inspires a vision of humanity which embraces us all. Each of us is as complex and fascinating as the multiple*

⁷² Tibi, 2017

⁷³ibid, 2017

factors and influences which have shaped our own identities".⁷⁴ This idea should not be confused with a top-down approach that seeks to make instances of high culture accessible and affordable to all. Instead, it opposes the imposition of a single, cultural standard and recognises the universal right to participate in the creation of culture, of which politics is a fundamental dimension.

This worldview should take into account the risk of falling into the trap of conditional celebrations of cultural diversity, as Giulia Pelillo-Hestermeyer warns us about in her chapter on "Re-Thinking Diversity and Transculturality".⁷⁵ Her critique points out to how diversity is often rendered visible only through exceptionalization, regulation, or commodification, which tends to reinforce hierarchies and normative ideas of cultural legitimacy. The ambiguous, and sometimes problematic, framing of cultural diversity has been discussed at length. It can be used as a mechanism to protect minority cultures considered to be at risk against a dominant or hegemonic culture, or as a tool for anti-discriminatory practices, for instance in work or school environments. In these contexts, cultural diversity acquires a positive connotation and is taken as a solid principle for a more equitable society. Oppositely, when it comes to religion, language or political ideology, institutions lean more towards a conservative and protectionist approach. Rather than treating diversity as a deviation from the norm, a transcultural approach highlights the ordinariness and fluidity of cultural exchange, while recognizing that processes of standardization and institutionalization often obscure the multiplicity and negotiated nature of identities. Similarly, Adams and Goldbard's principles of cultural democracy advocate for equitable access to cultural resources, participation in cultural policymaking, and the recognition of each individual's right to cultural expression. Culture, understood in this sense, is not static but living—constituted by intersecting, historically situated threads that both preserve tradition and invite transformation. It becomes a mirror reflecting societal conditions—a litmus test for the state of democracy—making it imperative that policymaking be reoriented to ensure representation, participation, and a voice for all, including those historically marginalized. A prerequisite for cross-cultural exchanges to take place in a proactive environment, is clarifying what is meant with a community: for most it is the idea of a people who are bonded by a sense of unity and solidarity based on common roots, language, religion and ethnicity. While a sense of mutual support and closeness can endure over time, today's high levels of mobility and increasingly porous borders—both physical and symbolic—make it difficult to identify other common characteristics shared by many. This explains why transcultural approaches are gaining more and more traction, in that they help to go beyond the binary and exclusionary logic that forces individuals to choose "either or": for example, between host

⁷⁴Adams, Goldbard, 1990

⁷⁵ Pelillo-Hestermeyer, 2021

society and origin society. At this point, a challenging and provocative question emerges: why not both? Or, in even bolder terms: why not all?

This call for societal self-examination must take into account the significant demographic transformations Germany has undergone over the past two to three decades. Referring to the Turkish population solely as a “migrant minority” is increasingly inadequate, as it now constitutes a substantial segment of the German population. According to a 2023 report by the Federal Statistical Office, approximately 21.3 million people in Germany—nearly one-fourth of the total population—have a migration background.⁷⁶ This figure underscores the urgent need for political and legal frameworks to adapt to and reflect this demographic reality. The challenges and opportunities arising from such diversity must be addressed comprehensively and systematically, ensuring that policies, citizenship laws, and public discourse evolve to meet the needs of Germany’s pluralistic society.

Especially transcultural visions, allow people to maintain multiple connections, sometimes physical and sometimes symbolic. As Vertovec explains it, through their dual lives, migrants can uphold identities that span across national borders.⁷⁷ The 2004 Law on Freedom of Movement in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union introduced a regulatory framework that served as a trailblazer for fostering transnational ties and cooperation. It is thus illogical that we, citizens of the European Union, struggle to recognize this ability to third nationals. Denying the interconnectedness we have reached through globalisation, with the subsequent compression of time and space, brings to an inward-looking attitude which will not help our societies evolve. As such, future policies should focus on the creation of an inclusive framework which supports transcultural and hybrid practices, allows for coexistence, while still maintaining what our societies have achieved up until now.

The study conducted by the SVR-Forschungsbereich (2020), *Mitten im Spiel – oder nur an der Seitenlinie?*, explores the patterns and barriers of political and civic participation among people with a migration background in Germany. Drawing on empirical data from the SVR

Integrationsbarometer, the report highlights significant disparities in participation rates between migrants—especially first-generation immigrants—and the native population, with particular emphasis on the role of socio-economic factors, language skills, and legal status. Central to the study is the application of the Civic Voluntarism Model, which posits that individuals are more likely to engage in society when they possess the necessary resources (e.g., time, knowledge, networks), are motivated (e.g., through perceived political efficacy), and are actively mobilized (e.g., being invited or included). The report advocates for policies that not only promote naturalization and reduce institutional barriers but also recognize civic engagement—formal and

⁷⁶DeStatis, 2023

⁷⁷Vertovec, 2004

informal—as a catalyst for broader political participation. Integrating this model as a shared framework for both migrant and non-migrant communities offers a promising foundation for constructive democratic dialogue and mutual societal shaping. It suggests that civic engagement, when adequately supported, can serve as a platform to foster trust, strengthen social cohesion, and empower all residents to participate meaningfully in shaping the public sphere.⁷⁸

In Italy, various exponents of the political class and civil society contributed to the debate with the so-called *ius culturae* and *ius scholae*. They are alternative models based on the idea that people who have completed the national education system should be considered sufficiently integrated in the country. These examples represent a step towards more just and inclusive models, since they reinforce the idea that through education one can become an informed, active and engaged member of society. Their limit lies in the exclusion of all those people who have come after their formative years but are still giving tremendous contributions, for example as part of a State's workforce.

By expanding this paradigm, and so including people from all layers of society, the new idea of citizenship would allow for the creation of a transcultural community that recognises the connection to a plurality and the exchanges that are occurring among people, societies, countries.

⁷⁸Studie des SVR-Forschungsbereichs 2020-3, 2020

Conclusion

Drawing on the insights shared by the individuals I interviewed and the trajectory of past citizenship law reforms in Germany, I have reached the following conclusion.

In today's Germany, public discourse on citizenship—rather than fostering inclusion—often contributes to division and societal fatigue. Debates that were intended to promote cohesion have increasingly placed communities in opposition to one another. Despite facing shared socio-political challenges such as political disenchantment, rising costs of living, shrinking welfare provisions, and uncertainty in global affairs, individuals with migration backgrounds and native Germans frequently remain locked in mutual critique and exclusion. The continued necessity to point out someone as a “German with a migration background” reflects a deeper structural issue: citizenship remains unequally distributed not only in legal terms but also in its social recognition. This signals an urgent need to move away from a homogenous conception of community and place more value on cohesiveness and inclusivity.

A more constructive and sustainable approach would focus on the shared dimensions of civic life—on those practices and forms of participation that unite rather than separate. Allowing a plurality of cultural traditions, experiences, and contributions in one space—regardless of where individuals were born—should be recognized as a valuable component of a respectful and open society. When integrated equitably, all individuals have the potential to enrich the social fabric and represent a powerful source of human capital for collective development.

Alternative forms of participation and civic engagement already exist, but they are not taken into consideration by top-down institutions, who remain fixed on inadequate categories. Simply the fact that Germany is still debating on how to improve the integration process but not acknowledging the overall societal transformation that has occurred in the last two or three decades, is quite telling of the state of delusion of the political class. Therefore, the concept of citizenship must evolve from its archaic conception, anchored in territorial birthright, a historical narrative of national pride or be granted on the condition of one's proven loyalty.

Today's increasingly diverse and interconnected society requires a redefinition of citizenship that represents the right—and the capacity—to participate fully in public life: culturally, economically, socially, and politically. This understanding affirms belonging based not on the past, but on current presence, contribution, and commitment to a shared future.

Germany has the opportunity to build a more cohesive and future-ready society, where citizenship becomes a lived experience of belonging rather than a contested marker of difference. Recognizing citizenship as a right that intersects with multiple aspects of life—education, culture, community involvement, and more—demands that lawmakers,

policymakers, and political leaders alike afford it the gravity and nuance it deserves. A prerequisite being the acknowledgement that citizenship is not merely a legal category or a national privilege, but a dynamic and evolving institution through which the democratic system of society is continually shaped.

This is particularly essential in the context of Germany and the European Union, where democracy is not only a political system but a foundational normative principle. The *Grundgesetz* explicitly affirms the democratic and participatory nature of the state in Article 20, while the European Union identifies democracy as one of its core values under Article 2 of the TEU.⁷⁹

While placing greater emphasis on political participation as a criterion for assessing an individual's degree of integration into society represents an important starting point, this shift must be accompanied by concrete measures that actively enable and support such engagement. Promoting political participation demands concrete sustained investments by the State, including financial ones, in initiatives that foster civic education, critical thinking, and accessible platforms for democratic involvement. In particular, efforts should be made to ensure that all members and layers of society are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to understand political processes, engage with policy debates, and contribute meaningfully to public discourse. Only by cultivating a sufficient level of civic competence across the population can political participation serve as a genuine indicator of integration, rather than a privilege reserved for the already-empowered.

In reflecting on the evolution of citizenship in Germany, it becomes increasingly evident that the Federal Republic must reckon with the profound and multifaceted contributions of its diasporic communities, particularly the Turkish diaspora. This community has not only played a pivotal role in the physical reconstruction of post-war Germany, but has also significantly enriched the country's cultural, social, political and intellectual landscape.

In response to the central question of this thesis—how the Turkish diaspora has influenced concepts of identity and citizenship in Germany—the findings from my interdisciplinary analysis and interviews indicate that this community has acted as a pivotal factor for both institutional and discursive transformation. Turkish migrants have challenged exclusionary models of integration, exposed systemic inequities, and demanded accountability regarding the allocation of rights. In doing so, they have expanded the understanding of identity beyond static ethnic, linguistic, or historical definitions.

Through persistent activism and civic engagement, members of the Turkish diaspora have held (and continue to hold) state institutions accountable for fostering a more equitable and stable

⁷⁹Basic Law, 1949; Treaty on European Union, 2016

society, for example by highlighting the discrepancies and hypocrisies that unfold in the decentralised and multilevel governance. Such progress came with some conflict, but these tensions are a natural byproduct of a society in transition and constantly aiming to improve. With their tireless and multifaceted manifestations of dissent and discrimination, the Turkish diaspora is redirecting German institutions towards those very same democratic values on which they are founded.

By developing their own cultural, or rather transcultural practices, the Turkish diaspora and other migrant communities have taken it upon themselves to fill in the legislative gap which has so far impeded them from participating in traditional manifestations of plural democracy.

With the diversification of media narratives, and the elevation of previously marginalized voices, Turkish migrants have broadened the thematic scope of public discourse. Their presence has also prompted reforms in the educational sector, including the integration of non-European languages into school curricula. Furthermore, the promotion of openness and respect for all religious beliefs has fostered a more inclusive and pluralistic social environment. These developments exemplify the added value migrant communities contribute to the fabric of contemporary Germany.

Their experience serves as a valuable lesson to enact a clear shift from obsolete policies. A collaborative process would involve lawmakers, institutions, and the direct participation of civil society actors, beyond formal representative bodies. Looking at the activities proposed by unions and independent organisations, and the language that they employ to engage with individual actors, can help lawmakers and policy developers bring a more critically engaged society to the institutional level. Greater emphasis should be placed on initiatives that promote critical thinking, civic education, cooperation, and intercultural dialogue. Germany should not undermine the potential of transcultural exchanges and the embracing of alternative modes of thought and expression, on equal footing with traditional frameworks, as a powerful tool for democratic inclusion and social cohesion. This approach could eventually help heal the State's relationship with its citizens. If Germany truly aspires to embody the principles of a progressive democracy, it must be willing to embrace and negotiate the evolving nature of citizenship and identity. The future of integration ultimately lies in a shared and ongoing process of democratic participation and mutual recognition.

If successful, this forward-looking model for citizenship could be applied on a larger scale, for example at the EU level. This would entail formal recognition of new governmentalised communities. By creating institutionalized bodies that are granted the right to consultation, participation, and shared governance, this programme could address the societal divisions and structural challenges and discriminations that continue to impede social cohesion in most of the

Member States. These tensions manifest across various layers of society—political, institutional, and grassroots—and their resolution demands a critical self-examination. The urgency of this task is underscored by broader European developments: among younger generations, there is a noticeable shift away from the traditional nation-state paradigm, with many identifying as “Europeans” rather than strictly by national categories. These citizens advocate for transnational and transcultural identities that transcend fixed notions of nationality and belonging, since the territorial logic no longer adequately reflects the lived experiences of people in contemporary Europe. This attitude is shown in the increasing number of students who are taking advantage of the various mobility programs in education and employment, such as the Erasmus and Erasmus+ programme.⁸⁰

In developing such a framework, EU actors should remain cautious of constructing an overly idealistic model. The potential pitfalls of the cosmopolitan approach, despite its normative appeal, often reinforces class divisions and lacks adequate political and legal support for practical implementation. Adopting a new model of membership that expands democratic participation instead of restricting it, may offer a constructive response to the democratic deficit and growing social disengagement observed across the European Union.

In a shift toward a transnational framework of citizenship, Yasemin N. Soysal challenges the conventional notion that our rights are strictly tied to instruments of national and international law, such as constitutions, treaties or declarations, which are then validated by high institutional mechanisms. Instead, she stands for the idea that our rights derive from our status as person, a concept which she calls *universal personhood*. Conferring this importance to the individual as such, contributes to recentring the attention on their power and the impact of their actions. Her approach opens the possibility for a deterritorialized, inclusive community, while also emphasizing political, social, and symbolic performative acts as the foundation of citizenship. Rather than strictly relying on the legal status alone, this model reorients the value of citizenship towards active participation. Such a framework aligns with the vision voiced by my interviewees, who seek to be recognized not for an ascribed identity, but for their actions in everyday life. The passive possession of a national passport is thus overcome by a performative and participatory model of citizenship, which affirms the agency of individuals to shape democratic life through lived practice.

⁸⁰ European Commission, 2024

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On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

Nike Giulia Attanasio

The following are original excerpts from the interviews I conducted in German, listed in the order in which they appear in the thesis:

“Also, ich konnte früher in Berlin überall hin. Heutzutage ich bin jetzt 48 (Jahre alt, edited), ich muss immer Pfefferspray haben, weil ich auch schon Angst bekommen habe.” - Zeynep, 26. March 2025

“Ja, weil ich halt auch sehr dunkel, also vom optischen nicht wirklich hell bin und man sich auch automatisch als Ausländer gesehen wird....” - Emine, 26. March 2025

“Aber wenn jemand mir ständig als Ausländer bezeichnet und beschimpft, sage ich mal jetzt so, dann....okay, ich bin jetzt Ausländer. Ich bin Türke. Ich bin Muslim, obwohl ich nie in Moschee gegangen bin in meinem Leben. Das heißt eine ich habe dann eine negative Identität entwickelt....Das ist insbesondere bei der zweiten Generation zu sehen, dass sie sozusagen durch die Weltbestimmung von der Mehrheitsgesellschaft durch den Druck ähm auch durch den Druck solche Identitäten entstanden sind”

.....

“Das heißt, Ich werde nicht vollständig als Deutsch angesehen, weil die Meinung der deutschen Gesellschaft, obwohl das nirgendwo steht, nicht in der Verfassung, nicht in einem Gesetz, sondern die Mehrheitsgesellschaft sieht sich als christlich und weiß. Christlich und weiß, das ist für viele Deutsch.” - Dr. Kolat, 25. March 2025

“Fühlen sie sich stolz, dass sie Türkisch sind oder Deutsch sind? - Ja, stolz bin ich eher, wenn ich ein guter Mensch bin und so jetzt nicht Deutschland oder Türkei Aber lieber gute Tatentätige und ein guter Mensch bin so dann kann ich stolz sein für dich, weil sonst finde ich eigentlich Nationalität oder auch die Religion, das finde ich eigentlich spielt eigentlich weniger die Rolle, Hauptsache man respektiert sich und ich finde alle alle komplett egal wohin woher man kommt, alles hat seine schönen Seiten und auch seine schlechte Seiten.” - Emine, 26. March 2025

“Wenn man mit mir redet, hat man nicht das Gefühl jetzt man redet mit einem Türken oder in Deutsch, das ist einfach. Man redet mit Volkan.... Ich versuche mich darauf nicht so zu fokussieren, weißt du? Ich versuche einfach ähm ja, für mich zu sorgen und ich bin hier in Deutschland, ich bin in Deutschland geboren. Meine Familie kam und hat viel geopfert so, dass mein Bruder und ich hier in Deutschland bessere Möglichkeiten haben aufzuwachsen und das

haben sie auch gemacht. Und ich nehme mich einfach in die Verantwortung, das weiterzuführen Mhm. und für die nächste Generation noch besser zu machen.” - Volkan, 25. March 2025

“Gast ist man drei Tage äh äh und nach drei Tagen bleibt man entweder dort und und ist ein Teil der der Familie mit allen Rechten und Pflichten, also sozusagen, das ist so wie die weitergehende Erklärung oder man geht weg so, aber sein Leben lang Gast und Arbeiter zu sein, das passt nicht zusammen und deshalb ist der der Begriff natürlich so in diesem Sinne konstruiert, eventuell auch aus den vorher gegangenen Erfahrung darauf, also man wollte vielleicht nicht Fremdarbeiter sagen..”- Dr. Alpбек, 25. March 2025

“Das mit der Essenskultur, das mit dem draußen sitzen in den ganzen Parks, das haben sie (Die Deutschen) alle von uns angeeignet, also von uns gelernt und von uns übernommen sozusagen. Also früher waren die nicht so viel auf den Straßen, früher saßen nicht so vielen in Cafés, auf den Terrassen...und das haben sie von uns mitbekommen.” - Ahmet, 26. March 2025

....

“Er sagt die Deutschen von damals, die uns so herzlich aufgenommen haben, die gibt es heute nicht mehr." Also wurden wir damals sehr herzlich aufgenommen von den Deutschen. Wir haben uns super verstanden, aber die heutigen Deutschen sind wohl nicht mehr so wie die immer waren....Sie wussten Bescheid, dass sie die Sprache nicht kennen wissen und haben versucht sie irgendwie hier anzubinden denen irgendeiner Art und Weise so behilflich zu sein, wie es nun geht..” - Ahmet, 26. March 2025

“Menschen waren alle so gut zu den Ausländern. Ja, ja, die haben damals so sehr geholfen. Wir hatten zwar mit Hände und gesprochen, aber das war auch gut.” - Sultan, 23. March 2025

“Wie ist es gekommen, dass Sie Türkisch lernen möchten?- Weil ich mich...weil ich das nicht richtig fand, dass ich nur die deutsche Sprache kann und die Zugehörigkeit der türkische Sprache hat mir gefehlt.” - Emine, 26. March 2025

“Wie äußern Sie dass er in im Alltag? In der Küche sowieso auf türkisch kochen, auch unsere Mentalität einbehalten, unsere Feste z.B. bald kommt unser Ramadan Fest, das wird groß gefeiert bei mir...alle ziehen sich schön an, kaufen was, gehen zu den Älteren, Händeküssen und so, darauf lege ich auf jeden Fall Wert, ich bete.” - Zeynep, 26. March 2025

“Aber fühlen Sie sich hier auch Ausländerin?“ — „Ja, schon.“ — „Obwohl Sie hier geboren sind?“ — „Ja, weil ich halt auch sehr dunkel, also vom Optischen nicht wirklich hell bin und man sich auch automatisch als Ausländer gesehen wird. Obwohl eigentlich mein Vater Deutscher ist und ich eigentlich Deutsche bin.“ - Emine, 26. March 2025