

Research Project

Affective Citizenship: Religion, Migration and Belonging in Europe

Third-party funded project

Project title Affective Citizenship: Religion, Migration and Belonging in Europe

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Organisation / Research unit

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Status Active

This research project explores the relationship between religious incorporation and citizenship with a comparative study on Muslim communities who have migrated from Turkey to Europe. Building on the emergent literature on affective citizenship that highlights the role of affect and emotions in the relationship between states and citizens, this project examines religious incorporation as an affective citizenship regime in which not only religious rights but also political belonging is being negotiated. In public debates about whether or not Islam belongs to Europe, it often goes unnoticed that all states in Western Europe with significant Muslim populations have already modified their existing regulations and laws to various degrees in order to accommodate religious difference after migration. While naturalization rates and the level of political enfranchisement remain low among Muslim migrants, the degree of their religious incorporation has accelerated considerably. Moreover, both in official migration policy and in migrant claim making, the focus has gravitated from political to religious incorporation. Literature in the social sciences has engaged with the legal integration of Islam mostly in terms of political opportunity structures for Muslims, or as a source of conflict and tension with European values and society. Yet there is no research on the motivations for the increasing recognition claims or on the effects of religious incorporation for political belonging.

This project studies the religious incorporation of Muslims in European states at local or national levels and asks a) how citizenship is negotiated by state and Muslim community actors through the process of religious incorporation, and b) if and how religious incorporation affects their feeling of belonging to the states in which they live. With a comparison of the religious incorporation process of two antagonistic religious communities from Turkey—Alevi and Sunni Muslims—in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria, the project seeks to present nuanced insights that accounts for the heterogeneity of Muslim claim makers. The project proposes that in the process of the legal integration of Islam in Europe, Alevi have emerged as *desirable subjects* of the integrating state—quite in contrast to Sunni Muslims, whose compatibility with European values remains contested. The project examines how religious incorporation of both Alevi and Sunni communities are responding to the various forms and degrees of recognition, asking if it informs their political belonging or not.

The research contains three subprojects. The first subproject documents and analyses the legal integration process of Alevi in Europe in eleven countries, where Alevi have formed communities and processes of recognition have been initiated. This will fill an important empirical research gap, as no encompassing account of the institutional integration of Alevism in Europe exists. The methods entail qualitative fieldwork with expert interviews and document analysis. The second subproject analyses the effects of religious incorporation on political belonging by conducting an ethnographic fieldwork in three cities, where Alevi and Sunni communities have been incorporated to varying degrees (Basel, Hamburg, Vienna). The third subproject examines in detail three incorporation processes (Basel, Hamburg,

Vienna) as an affective citizenship regime, in which both states and claim makers are negotiating the terms of belonging to secular democracies. The research contributes both the theoretical enhancement of the emergent field of affective citizenship and the wider literature on accommodation of Islam that has focused so far mainly on the majority denomination. Empirically, it provides rich and new insights on the rather neglected case of Alevis in Europe, as well as on the perspectives of Muslim communities on Citizenship and belonging.

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