Unimaginable Communities:

Mass-Mediated Political Epistemologies of the Foreign in Contemporary

Germany

by

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While the main text of this essay keeps roughly within the boundaries of the word count limit, the footnotes go beyond. If you are in a rush skip them, they are not necessary to follow the argument, yet they offer hopefully illuminating extensions.

A Death Retold

Berlin 7 February 2005, shortly before nine o'clock in the evening. At the busstop

"Oberlandgarten" just south of the Tempelhof airfield, the 23 year old Hatun Sürücü was murdered with

five shots into her chest and head. Her violent death was big news in Berlin. Two days after the crime all

local print media reported it. The papers more to the left jumped on board as much as those more to the

right, the "quality" papers self-consciously addressing themselves to the urban bourgeoisie as much as the

"tabloids" claiming their readership among "common men and women."[1]

Unlike other murders, this one was not as quickly forgotten as reported. Even though the good

looks of the victim–captured in photos reprinted in many papers—and the particular tragedy of the case—

a five year old child was orphaned—have certainly contributed to the initial gaze of the media, they do

not explain the ensuing enormous sustained media interest. Nor do dramatic police actions, man hunts,

stand-offs, shoot-outs, movie-like actions which are otherwise so attractive to the media and their

audiences. In Sürücü's case, there was nothing to report in this respect. The suspects were rather quickly

and effortlessly apprehended. Instead, Hatun Sürücü's violent death fed into several intersecting

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[1] Methodological note: This is a brand new research project which I have undertaken for the purposes of this paper and which is needless to say in a very early stage. It is based on an analysis of all articles published in Berlin newspapers in reference to Hatun Sürücü's murder (more than 80 articles). On the "quality" versus "tabloid" distinction, the *Tagesspiegel, Berliner Zeitung, Berliner Morgenpost* fall more to the former side and the *B.Z* and *Berliner Kurier* to the latter. On the left vs. right distinction, as traditionally conceived and self-consciously marked by the papers, the *Berliner Zeitung* and *B.Z* fall more to the left, the *Tagesspiegel* somewhere in the center and the *Morgenpost and Kurier* fall to the right. Of the Berlin papers the *Tagesspiegel* is the only one with something of a national presence, even though it is not considered a national newspaper. This research paper is likewise based on an analysis of the national daily press and news magazines which have printed articles in relationship to the murder (*Sueddeutsche Zeitung (SZ),die tageszeitung (taz), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), Frankfurter Rundschau (FR,) Die,Welt, die Welt am Sonntag, der Spiegel and Stern*). Moreover, it rests an analysis of all 5 debates that the diet of the state of Baden- Württemberg has conducted about a law interdicting Muslim teachers to wear headscarfs in class, the decisions of the *Bundesverwaltungsgericht* ("Federal Administrative Court") in Leipzig and the *Bundesverfassungsgericht* ("Federal Constitutional Court") in Karlsruhe about the case of Fereshta Ludin who fought a 1998 decision of the Stuttgart school district to refuse her employment as a teacher in the public service in the state of Baden-Württemberg. Finally it is based on the analysis of article samples from the national press about the so-called *Leitkulturdebatte* (debate about a "guidance-culture") in the context of the new citizenship laws and immigration laws brought under way by the social-democrat-green government elected first in 1998 (and re-elected in 2002), the revival of this debate after the murder of the Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh which centered around the term "parallel societies" as well as the coverage of van Gogh's murder itself. Finally it includes the analysis of a sample of articles covering 9/11, the Bali, Tunis and Madrid bombings in the national press. The samples were taken with a broader political spectrum in mind while, due to data accessibility excluding the left and right wing fringes. While the Berlin debates about Sürücü covers both tabloids and "quality" papers, this could no yet be done for the national press simply because Lexis/Nexis does unfortunately, not include them in its database (which tells you something about their epistemic ideology—see below).

discourses about the status of immigrants in Berlin, of Muslim above all. Accordingly the articles dealing with the Sürücü murder which first appeared in the "human interest" or "local" section of the papers, moved in due course to the more serious "politics," "feuilleton" or "commentary" sections. Two weeks into this process all important national papers[2] had covered the case and Hatun Sürücü's fate become yet another mosaic piece—and ammunition—in the ongoing national discourses about the desirability of various kinds of immigration, the meaning of "integration," the dangers of "parallel societies," the "threat of Islamicist terrorism," the necessity to have something like a "(German) guidance culture" and the chances, limits or even death of "multiculturalism."

Especially two aspects of the Sürücü case lent themselves to such a discursive appropriation. First, only six days after the deed Sürücü's three 18, 24 and 25 year old brothers were arraigned. Suspected motive: the protection of family honor. This made the case immediately interesting for non-governmental organizations campaigning for the rights of women and human rights more generally. Several of these organizations, *Terre des Femmes* for example, have ongoing campaigns against "honor killings" and thus classified Sürücü's murder became a poignant case representing the significance of their wider cause, the perceived *social* problems they aim to tackle. Some NGOs (even unlikely ones such as Berlin's GLBT caucus) saw the potential of the occasion to stage special events, such as vigils and demonstrations, to make their point and to further amplify press coverage. These moves assisted the authorization of some of these NGOs as producers and repositories of expert knowledge on the situation of migrant women in Germany or even "women in Islam" more generally. And accordingly they were interrogated by the media in the context of the wider debate for example about the situation of women in Islam.

Although the interventions of the NGOs are not un-important for the overall dynamic of the coverage, a comparison with previous crimes equally labeled as "honor killings" shows that a classification of the case as pertinent to "women's rights" alone would have been by no means sufficient

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[2] This list includes the daylies *die tageszeitung* (*taz*), *Südeutsche Zeitung(SZ),Frankfurter Rundschau (FR), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), Die Welt* as well as the weekly news magazines *Der Spiegel, Stern* and *Focus*.

to create the actual resonance the case has enjoyed. As will become apparent further below, this is quite ironic, given some of the pathos of the discourse pegged on Sürücü's murder which focuses on the arrogated "duty" of "western society" to protect mistreated Muslim women.

Second, then, the case is much more dramatically torn out of the sphere of individual emotionality and relationality into a broader significance by a follow-up event which effectively politicizes it as social problem central to the very "essence" of German society. At the Thomas-Morus-School, a vocational track school[3] a mere 3 bus stops to the east of Sürücü's murder site, a class-room discussion about the case based on news reports covering the brothers' arrest and their suspected motive, led especially three pupils to make public their sympathy for Sürücü's brothers. The deed was understandable, their argument is later reported, "because she lived like a German," that is independently of her parents, wearing mini-skirts and heels and frequenting discothèques. The principal declared himself so "shocked" that he felt the need to address parents and students in an open letter. This letter made its way[4] to the media making it and the students' behavior instant news.

It is important to see that this follow-up event is at the same time discursive in nature begetting even more discourse, while being triggered by preceding mediated discourse about a non-discursive event. Its moral-political resonance created a wave of reporting even bigger than the triggering event itself. This follow-up event made the whole episode particularly resonate with elected politicians who desire to make a case about the dangers of immigration, or the necessity to be vigilant and active against "Muslim violence." It serves as a vehicle to promote proposals for the introduction of the regular subject

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[3] German secondary education is partitioned into three different tracks which have traditionally funneled pupils into different types of careers: a vocational track leading into skilled blue collar employment (e.g. carpenter, auto mechanic), a medium track leading into the lower echelons of white collar work (e.g. bank clerks, accountants), and *Gymnasium* the final examination of which, *Abitur*, is the entrance requirement for university education. The whole educational system has experienced something of an "upward shift" with increasing numbers of students seeking and obtaining higher track educations. The vocational track has become frequently a residual category in which the underprivileged, including immigrants gather. In large cities such as Berlin, vocational track schools in certain neighborhoods have become educational ghettos in which non-native German speakers vastly outnumber Germans. Situated in Neukölln, besides Kreuzberg the most prominent immigrant district of Berlin, Thomas-Morus- School has a high concentration of non-native speakers. Like most (West-) German schools it is named after a (more or less local—here: European) grandee in science, art, and politics.

[4] How exactly is never explained. It is unclear whether it was the director himself or any other recipient of the letter who forwarded it with the accurate sense that this would garner a lot of public attention. Subsequently the director was universally praised by the media and by politicians for bringing the episode to public attention.

of "ethics" in Berlin's public schools; it invigorates legislative initiatives to outlaw "forced marriages,"[5] and to change the penal code in such a way that the motive of "honor" can not be used in an exculpatory way in criminal trial procedures.[6] It furthermore provides the occasion for an initiative to turn Sürücü's death day into an annual day commemorating violence against women tout court. All of these, of course, give rise to news as well and in this manner Sürücü's murder becomes a token in a number of diverse and yet connected discourses. What we have here, then, is an interesting eventuated generation of discursive process, in which non-discursive events give rise to different kinds of discursive ones, which in turn give rise to non-discursive events etc. Thus a number of discourses are maintained, reshaped, and articulated with each other. If you like, what we usually call discourse in the social sciences "falls out" of these events as spoken and written texts situated amongst other texts and, this is important, non-discursive events and experiences. Clearly, discourse-analysis' more common attention to intertextuality misses the dynamics of the discourse. What we have in fact is "inter*event*uality."

What are these discourses about? What messages do they transport? What understandings of Sürücü's murder, of Muslim men and women, Turks living in Germany among Germans do they offer? Given the diversity of media involved, given the plurality of political self-identifications at play, of intended audiences envisioned for these texts, it is striking to see how uniform they are. Of course there are the expected differences in register. There is the more sensationalist, "juicy" lingo of the tabloids rich in emotives and identification clad in brief (and often enough technically speaking incomplete) main clauses. It coexists with the seemingly cooler, subclause rich jargon of the "quality" papers. The *BZ'*s "Terrible! Pupils applaud the murder of beautiful Turkish woman" (17-Feb-2005) contrasts as headline with the *Tagesspiegel*'s "Pupils show understanding for murder" (17-Feb-2005). And yet the underlying understandings of the issues at hand are not very far apart. Even though diverse understandings find their way into the papers not least through articles written by academics with access to the feuilleton pages of

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[5] The most favored term in the discourse is *Zwangsehe* which contrasts with the more commonly used English term "arranged marriage."

[6] In the whole press coverage there is only one direct reference to a case where this seems to have in fact been the case, although the papers write as if this was a problem of some significant scale.

the national papers, the run of the mill reporting has a surprisingly coherent center of gravitas. The understandings performed in most articles positively resonate with each other to form a chorus of dominant opinion right next to which dissent sounds meek, like the dissenting voices of isolated individuals whose understandings have little impact on the wider shape of the discourse. And although this discourse is, by the papers themselves often marked as "debate" it is at least as far as understanding of the situation of Muslim immigrants in Germany is concerned anything but. The dissent is made to perform its own isolation thus lending realism to the claim that there is in fact a debate, while making unambiguously clear where the "majority" opinion on these matters lies.

Substantively the discourses fed by Sürücü's murder are centered by what looks like a thoroughly orientalist structure of associated oppositions.[7] The West is juxtaposed to the East, Christianity to Islam, the Enlightenment as a decisive transitory event to the lack of such an event. Modernity is pitted against tradition, individualism against collectivism, the rule of law against despotism, freedom against slavery, tolerance against intolerance, education against ignorance. Above all the female body becomes the canvas for signifiers of belonging and otherness, the bearer of a semiotics of "us" versus "them." In the uncanny play of a fantasmorgical negative dialectic between self-ideal and other as nemesis, this is where the imagined Western and Eastern selves agree. Sex for pleasure with freely chosen partners is Western; sex for reproduction with an assigned partner is Eastern. "Love marriage" is Western, "forced marriage" for *raison de famille* is Eastern. Accordingly, the hypersymbol of alterity is the headscarf, and the concealed body more generally. On the other hand belonging is spotted in mini-skirts, high heels and spaghetti straps; it is recognized in the revealed body. No woman of Muslim background appears on the stage of these discourses without being shamelessly screened for these signs of belonging and alterity in an attempt to assign her a definite place in the structure.

From the perspective of the German papers, Hatun Sürücü is consitently depicted as "one of us." The *B.Z.* asks (10-Feb-05):

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[7] I say "looks like" an orientalist structure here for two different reasons. First, @

> "Did the young Turkish woman have to die, because she had shed the fetters of forced marriage?[8]...Chaste daughter at home, sweet party girl outside. Within the family covered with a headscarf, at school with billowing long hair. Still many Berlin Turkish women live between two worlds. A split which may end tragically. On 21 October 2004 Semra U, 21 was knifed by her ex-husband in front of her daughter. He saw his honor violated….Now the murder of young beautiful Hatin (sic!) S. She wanted to live like her German friends. Used makeup, wore mini-skirts, went to the disco, was an electrician's apprentice to lead her own, independent life."[9]

Her murderers, her brothers, her father are seen as the antithesis of what she stood for. She is the one who immigrates and integrates. She is depicted as the immigrant everybody wants. The males in her family are seen as the opposite of that. She is a bridge to "us" they are the unintegrable, violent and thus threatening other. Sürücü and her family are then generalized: the mainstream of the discourse supposes that it is mostly women who want to integrate and men who refuse. More even, that it is men who keep women back from becoming of their own volition who "we" would want them to become in the first place. And thus comes the further conclusion: "We" must save these women from these men. "We" want these women, the eroticizing language allows little room for doubt, but "we" don't want these men.

"Our" problem is the anti-modern, tradition governed, violent Muslim male. He represents an essentialized "culture" consistently identified as "archaic" which he has transported form the distant and decisively past places of inner-Anatolia right into the heart of Berlin.

> "What is so terrible about this [honor killing] is the opaque impermeability with which an archaic tribal tradition is able to reach into a big German city. The otherwise presupposed mechanisms of osmotic penetration have failed which more or less quickly assimilate the alien to the liberal universalistic civilization. One can not even blame Islam in this context…It is culture which has such murderous effects (*FAZ*, 3-Mar-05, p. 37)."

What is particularly surprising about this discourse is not that such understandings are brought into play at all. They have a long tradition and have always been used in German debates about migrant workers throughout the postwar period. What is surprising is that they are largely uncontested, that they are not critiqued effectively for their essentializing presuppositions both about "West" and "East." These

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[8] The *Berliner Kurier*, besides *Bild* the other competitor *of B.Z.* on the Berlin tabloid market emphasizes the freedom pathos even more in a commentary (18-Feb-05, p. 4): " The freedom we mean. A man can be destroyed but not defeated. That's how Hemmingway put it. And that is valid for women too. Hatun Sürücü was just such a woman. She took the freedom which we mean, she fought with her life-style against the merciless suppression of tradition. That's why Hatun was murdered. But maybe the tremor deriving from her destruction will rattle or even shatter the edifice of tutelage and self-submission of Muslim women. A brave principal has already taken out a pick-ax. Thank you, Hatun Sürücü! Thank you principal Steffens."

[9] The language employed here deviates from what is considered "high German" by making use of incomplete brief sentences. Sürücü's first name is given here as "Hatin" rather than "Hatun."

effectively preclude from view how the "honor" supposedly giving rise to killings may in fact not simply originate in a distant land and a distant past, but that it may in fact be reproduced through the interactional dynamics of the present. What is occluded is a potential insight into how "honor killings" may in fact be very today, very Berlin, very German. The old "left" formerly ventriloquating in papers such as *taz* and *Frankfurter Rundschau* can no longer be relied upon to make these points. It too falls into the totally a-historical use of "Christianity" and/or "Enlightenment" as pristine (even if strangely empty) symbols of pure goodness, in times which seem to feel a universal urge for a renewed and (finally!) un-ambiguous labeling of "evil." It is not only the case, then, that leading politicians such as Germany's social democratic chancellor Gerhard Schroeder can make his distaste for teachers with headscarves publicly known, or that Angela Merkel, the likely conservative candidate for chancellor pronounces that "multiculturalism is dead" (assisted by former social democratic chancellor Helmut Schmidt who proclaims it an "error"). Intellectuals from Martin Walser in Germany to Harry Mulisch in the Netherlands have abandoned understandings which have previously been associated with the left.

Understanding the Political

The question which suggests itself then is how come that today traditional orientalist understandings can pose as such certain knowledge (again)? I have elsewhere (Glaeser, n.d.) described the question of how people come to develop an understanding of the political world in which they live from various social vantage points such as that of a state bureaucrat, a politician, a citizen, a journalist etc. as constituting the field of political epistemology. Its core concern is the interaction between political processes on the one hand and processes of knowledge making about the polity on the other. The analysis of political epistemologies is central to comprehending how political institutions come to rise and decline no matter whether these are institutions of state or civil society.

Although power and knowledge processes are sometimes intertwined in the manner insinuated by Foucault's handy power/knowledge formula, they are just as often not (cf. Glaeser 2003). I have therefore proposed a methodology, a sociology of understanding, to investigate the dynamics of political

epistemologies (Glaeser, n.d, esp. ch 2) which can treat both types of processes as separate and yet intertwined. It can reveal the epistemic reasons why political institutions stabilize or change and the political reasons why particular epistemic processes are sustained or undermined. Here is a nut-shell view of this approach.

Understandings are simultaneous differentiations and integrations of elements supposedly constituting some aspect of the world. They operate as practical ontologies presenting to us some aspect of the word *as if* it existed in a particular way. Understandings are both conscious and unconscious and for my purposes at least three different modes need to be distinguished. They can be performed, first, cognitively in the use of symbols (for example in discourse), second, emotionally, and, third, kinesthetically that is in practice, through the movement of our bodies in time and space. These modes need to be distinguished not only because they have characteristic ways of organization, a grammar, if you like, which is particular to each mode, but also because they stand in interesting dialectical relationships to each other. Understandings across the three modes can both amplify and undermine each other.

The discourses latching onto Sürücü's assassination offer examples of all three modes of understanding. Cognitively they are organized by the orientalist structure which I have described further above as an associated chain of oppositions differentiating and integrating two categories: the "Christian" — "enlightened" — "West" versus the "Muslim" — "unenlightened" — "East." Yet, this discourse also conveys powerful emotive understandings which connect both categories via feelings of interest, suspicion, fear, nausea, anxiety and even hatred. Discursively these emotions are not encoded primarily through the use of emotion-words ("fear" "love" etc.), but through a whole barrage of semiotic devices including identifications (e.g. "Berliner of Turkish origin" as opposed to "Turk"), projections (e.g. "testosterone laden youth,") , word choice (e.g. "archaic ritual" to qualify Sürücü's murder), the evocation of images ("young Germans, having become a minority will find their ham sandwiches denounced as impure") register, the use of tropes etc. Finally, practical understandings transpire from the practices of making news (who is invited for interviews and who is not), the description of everyday practices (the

couple who moved out of Kreuzberg because they could no longer stand seeing "Turkish women clad in headscarves trailing their husbands").

Understandings are basically of two kinds. First, we are aware of some understandings which to us are merely *possible*. These are understandings we might play with as hypothesis, or which we know are held by others, past or present, but which we do not yet inhabit as our own. Then there our *actual* understandings, the ones we hold to be "true," "good," or "real," the ones *in* which we live and *through* which we act. My central contention is that understandings become actualized through validating events, of which it pays to differentiate at least three different kinds. First, we match up our own understandings against those of others. We take agreement to *recognize* our own understandings positively thus making them more certain, disagreements to recognize our understandings negatively thus drawing them into doubt. Of course not everybody's understanding matters to us in every respect. Instead, we move in networks of authority which are highly differentiated according to whose understanding we take seriously in which regard and under what kinds of circumstances. Second, we attribute the successes and failures of actions—ours and others'—to particular understandings which are thereby taken to be *corroborated*. Tests of hypothesis, trials of courage and scientific experiments are organized forms of corroboration. Finally, we match up new understandings against others we already have. If they are consistent with existing beliefs, if they are in accordance with values which we already hold or if they answer our desire, then these understandings *resonate* with older ones and thereby gain credibility.[10]

Recognitions, corroborations and resonances interact with each other in interesting ways. Sometimes negative resonances can be overcome by positive recognitions; negative corroborations may remain without any effect in the face of strong resonances etc. We all operate with cultural forms, *epistemic ideologies and practices* which help us to organize the various modes of validation and to

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[10] Here is a very simple example to illustrate the differences between these three forms of validation. You believe that $2 \times 3 = 6$. But you have some remaining doubt about your abilities to multiply correctly. Asking your best friend, whom you respect as a math wiz whether you are right, is asking for recognition of your belief. Translating the equation into action by putting twice three marbles into a bowl and counting them out one by one is a way to corroborate it. Remembering finally that multiplying a number by two is like adding that number to itself while being absolutely certain about your adding capabilities you perform the operation $3 + 3 = 6$ thus validating your belief qua resonance.

resolve conflicts between them. Epistemic ideologies and practices provide us for example with criteria to evaluate and adjudicate between contradicting authorities; they help us to ascertain whether or not a test or trial was performed well enough to count as a corroborating event; and they help us to identify imperfect consistency with already existing beliefs, lacking agreement with espoused values, wanting answers to open desires.

One particularly useful aspect of the model just outlined is that it allows for a dialectical analysis of knowledge formation on several interlocking levels: the dialectic between cognitive, emotive and kinesthetic modes of understanding, the dialectic between the recognizing, corroborating and resonating forms of validation and finally the dialectic inherent to each form of validation which is conceived in each case as the result of a dynamic interplay between two poles: at least two people's understandings in the case of recognition, one person's understanding and a contingent event in the case corroboration and finally already existing understandings, desires and values in relation to a new understanding. This focus on dialectics opens a route to comprehend circular, that is self-referential knowledge-making processes which in their nominal adherence but practical undermination of these dialectics run the danger of producing increasingly useless (qua understanding as knowledge), albeit seemingly well-founded because well-validated understandings. These are bound to implode catastrophically in fast changing environments if knowledge matters in the. I will analyze a complex of such circularity further below.

Parts of the Contemporary German Political Epistemology of Muslim Immigration

While I have developed the sociology of understanding to analyze how real people in real social contexts have gained and lost certainty in particular political understandings, they are also of value to analyze discourses. Its contributions lie on three different levels.[11] First, on a substantive level, any particular contribution to a discourse aims to air, propagate, evaluate, normalize, subvert (etc.) understandings which it thereby makes more or less certain for people who consider the contribution as

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[11] Actually there are two more such levels: the reception of understandings aired in discourse and the production of such understandings. Alas, one would need ethnography to shed a closer light on either.

authoritative. In an important sense, discourses are about the projection of understandings into a public

sphere where many people can see them and react to them. In doing so contributions to discourses

positively and negatively recognize understandings, they argumentatively mobilize corroborating

evidence, they invoke and clarify or occlude resonances. They are also more or less explicitly working

with particular epistemic ideologies and practices.[12]

At this first level, one of the more interesting aspects of the discourses about Muslim immigration

into Germany is how they construct authority. Within the epistemic ideologies and practices in which

many contemporary western audiences work, authority is not a given; it has to be won and as maintained.

In fact authority does not only have the power to recognize. Agreement, that is in fact mutual recognition

is in many contexts constitutive of authority. If dissent thus leads to de-authorization, a potentially

dangerous route to self-referentiality is opened, unless the systematic and serious engagement with dissent

is maintained at some higher level of organization. Thus it is interesting to see who is regularly invited to

present understandings (either directly in form of an interview or a published article or indirectly by

reference) in the main discourse venues of the German immigration debates. From the material which has

found its way into print[13] it appears that especially those experts and witnesses are covered that are in

agreement with key aspects of the orientalist structure outlined above. More it is this agreement which is

used to authorize them. This strategy is particulary blatant for people or organizations cast as authorities

which do have a Turkish or Muslim background. Here is an example. The TBB,[14] a small secular

immigrant organization with about 6000 members, has developed a "ten point plan" in response to recent

debates about immigration, which was presented after the Sürücü murder. The Berlin papers have

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[12] Discourse analysis has always been a rather loose term. There is no such a thing as a defined Foucauldian method of discourse analysis (Hook, 2001). However, it is clear from his writing that Foucault was particularly interested in the rules and conventions underlying the production of speech or text which are not rendered explicit in the text and which therefore have a clandestine power of shaping discourse production, the questions asked, the way they are answered etc. (e.g. 1981, 1982). The investigation of reflexive forms of speech more generally and of metapragmatics and linguistic ideologies more particularly (e.g. the collections in Lucy, 1992, Kroskrity, 2000) shares some of this Foucauldian interest, albeit with much more attention to levels of code in the text itself.

[13] Of course it would be very interesting to know what material was considered by the editorial boards of these venues and what criteria they have applied to make decisions about what to include and what to exclude. Likewise it would be interesting to see how journalists go about gathering material. Unfortunately, in spite of decades of media studies, the ethnography of journalism and news making is still in its infancy (cf. Boyer, in press).

[14] *Türkischer Bund Berlin-Brandenburg* ("Turkish Federation Berlin-Brandenburg").

responded favorably to this plan. Here is how one of the papers has reported and authorized it (*Berliner Zeitung*, 26-Feb-05, "*Schluss mit der Toleranz für kulturelle Eigenheiten*"(""Down with the tolerance for cultural idiosyncrasies""))

> "All Turkish and Muslim organizations have to declare their support for the right of self-determination for women. Forced marriage has to be made illegal and strictly penalized…The legal obligation to attend school with regards to instruction in swimming, sports, biology and sexuality have to be strictly enforced. This initiative met with a positive reaction. The undersecretary for education youth and sport, Thomas Härtel said, the tolerance for cultural idiosyncrasies has to come to an end…."

The totalizing suspicion inherent in this demand which is so characteristic for boundary work between opposed categories becomes immediately apparent if "German" and "Christian" were to be substituted for "Turkish" and "Muslim."[15] The unqualified use and thus open recognition of the "forced marriage" vocabulary works in the same direction. Moreover, what is in fact at work here is a double authorization: the orientalist structure and its social-democratic proponent is recognized by a Turkish organization which is in turn recognized by the ranking politician's assent. Thus authorized the politician can turn the totalizing screw once more: differences are delegitimized as idiosyncrasies which no longer need to be tolerated, the demand for the public endorsement of values is converted into a proposal for a policy of suppression and exclusion. Subsequent to the publication of this plan the TBB was referred to in the press more frequently and its functionaries were invited for interviews.

One of the favorite authorities on the status of women in Islam is Seyran Ates, a Berlin lawyer of Turkish origin who has become a prominent activist for womens' rights among Muslims. This is how she got authorized in an interview with the *Berliner Morgenpost* (16-Feb-05, *Seyran Ates: "Muslim Women fear Emulation"*):

> "The news about so-called "honor killings" of women disturb in particular those who are subject to this violence issuing from tradition. The Berlin lawyer Seyran Ates (41) has for years made public how Muslim women are suppressed. She has managed in hard conflicts to emancipate herself from the collective demands of her own family. In 1984 she was heavily injured in an

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[15] What is at work here and throughout the debate is what I have called elsewhere "synecdochical mischief" the strategy to discredit wholes on the basis of faults found with parts (Glaeser, 2000, 2004). The practice, suspicion and fear of synecdochical mischief is a very important boundary constructing device demarking insiders from outsiders. The TBB has through this strategy effectively placed itself on one side of the orientalist structure.

> attack on a women's group which was probably committed by a member of the Turkish fascist "Grey wolfs." Another woman (40) who had come to be counseled died in the attack."

The orientalist structure here is here corroborated by yet another case of violence against women, while the victim who uses this structure in the interview is thus authorized. When Ates was attacked a little later in the Turkish newspaper *Hürryet* (6-March-05) in an article with the headline "This lawyer has gone crazy" for allegedly arguing that "all Turkish women live like prisoners" German politicians immediately jumped to her defense. The speaker for Berlin's senator for women affairs declared that "she is a red flag for many Turkish men" and furthermore that the reaction of the Turkish paper revealed Turkey's patriarchical structures (*Tagesspiegel, 8-Mar-05, Politicians support women's activist after attack by a Turkish paper)*. This is, of course, taken as another corroboration of the orientalist structure in the sense of "here they go again!" Interestingly, in the interview which was criticized by *Hürryet,* Ates did in fact use a totalizing orientalist framework implying without any ambiguity that Turkish women in Berlin live like slaves (*taz*, 28-Feb-05, p.13). Only once criticized did she make qualifications about the domain about which she spoke ("her clients" not all Turkish women living in Germany). Not surprisingly, a carefully worded communiqué of the "women's forum" of the TBB urging care with generalizations from individual cases, which was obviously intended as a contribution to the discourse about the *Hürryet* attack on Ates did not resonate with any of the contributors to the discourse.[16]

Even though authority is frequently constructed by agreement over some central aspect of the orientalist understandings depicted further above, dissent over this center of gravitas of understandings is in fact voiced on the pages of even the more conservative papers. However, as I have argued already, the lack of recognition for dissenting understandings voiced in the Sürücü case effectively isolates them. Thus, any attempt to suggest that the male mistreatment of females, that notions of "honor" with the consequence of "honor killings" may have something to do with the situation of Muslims as underprivileged immigrants in a society which openly rejects them, has either been negatively

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[16] TBB (10-Mar-05) *Stellungnahme des TBB Frauenforums—"Verhärtung der Fronten nützt niemandem"* (www.tbb-berlin.de/de/frame.html).

corroborated by direct rejection[17] and more commonly by ignoring them. This makes them not only less effective as an understanding kept in ciruculation and thus with continuing recognizing power, but it also undermines their very authority simply because authority itself requires recognition.

In effect then, every contributor to the discourse needs to be mindful of advocating understandings which will resonant with others and who are thus willing to recognize them. What this means is that via the very dialectic of resonances and authority there is a built-in conservative principle governing discursive processes. This effect is further amplified by the market integration of discourse venues. Editors are encouraged by owners to see to publishing papers which positively resonate with their audiences which they thus recognize. A paper can certainly promote some understandings which sit uncomfortably with their readers but beyond some threshold readers are prone today to switch their patronage to other news media. Again, authority is tenuous. Editors are prone therefore to form strong understandings about what it is their audiences would want to hear and what deviance they might be willing to tolerate.

In effect then, the use of the orientalist structure defines authority which in turn recognizes the orientalist structure. Moreover, the use of the orientalist structure creates angry reactions which are systematically read not as an answer to a previous discursive events triggering it, but as emanations of a cultural or religious essence. Thus made seemingly contingent, they can be used to corroborate the structure again. Finally, the side glances of discourse participators to their peers in the interest of maintaining their own authority as well as the side-glaces of editors and owners to discourse venue subscribers can lead to a regression of understandings to some minimal consensus which may be hard to break. Knowledge making about Muslim immigrants can thus become effectively self-referential.

With such considerations I have reached the second level on which the sociology of understanding is of useful to study discourse-dynamics. I have further above called this plane somewhat

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[17] For example "Motive Culture: The Berlin honor killings of Turkish Women" (*FAZ*, 3-Mar-05, p. 37) cites Germans of Turkish origin recognizing "honor killings" as a Turkish (and more specifically: Kurdish) cultural problem, while an article by anthropologist Werner Schiffauer who has studied notions of honor both in Turkey and among Turkish youth groups in Berlin (*SZ*, 25-Feb-05, "Battleground Woman") is rejected with an off-hand remark. Subsequently, Schiffauer is not referred to as an authority any more.

polemically and ironically the "intereventuality" of discourses. From the above it is clear that discourses exist in process. This means in effect that they have to proceed in such a way that participation begets further participation. Once this triggering of new participatory events ceases, the discourse as such comes to an end. Of course it has long been understood by public relations professionals that an effective way to maintain discourses is to stage further discursive events. This is what press conferences, the distribution of press-communiqués etc are mostly about. Needless to say that there are enormous power differences with regards to who gets attention in such efforts which it takes considerable ingenuity to break.

An alternative is the production of non-discursive events which are used to carry discursive ones. Accordingly protesters and marketers have long been ingenious in producing spectacles. Think of Green Peace here, of mass demonstrations, of hunger strikes, and in the extreme self-immolation (see Biggs, forthcoming). Another much less predictable but also an often more effective path is the appropriation of suitable historical non-discursive events (such as Sürücü's murder) which can be made to resonate with the participants' agenda. This intereventuality of discourse does not only shape, as I have just pointed out, the dynamics of discourses in shorter time horizons, but it opens them to significant transformations within longer time horizons. In what follows I will provide a fast-forward view of discourses on immigration and their changes in response to extra-discursive events and discursive events staged for political exigency to provide a sense of the historicity of discourses their impact on the rise and decline of particular understandings. [**You can skip from here to the "Conclusions" if you like**]

Germany has witnessed in the last two decades a string of discourses about immigration which were significantly transformed in response to non-discursive events and their significance especially for electoral politics. Often discourses center around a signal-concept which highlights a particular problem or desideratum. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s the core term used on the right was the *Asylantenproblem* ("problem with asylum seekers") which focused on Germany's comparatively high rate of asylum seekers. Effectively kept from participation in the workforce, all asylum seekers had to be fed and housed by tax-financed welfare programs. Any attempts at that time to open a wider debate about immigration, was blocked by conservatives (who were then also in government) who argued that

Germany was not a "country for immigration" (*Einwanderungsland*). Migrant workers were then still categorized as sojourners or "guest workers" who were expected to go home once their work contract expired or they were no longer needed. This was so in spite of the fact that demographers and economists began to emphasize that the German welfare system would come under considerable duress, if the sinking birth rates could not be compensated by new streams of immigrants.

In the face of rising unemployment rates in the aftermath of German unification (1990), foreigners were increasingly depicted by the right as holding the jobs Germans needed. Thus the *Asylantenproblem* became again more and more a general *Ausländerproblem* ("problem with foreigners"), something it had already been right after the second oil price shock and its detrimental effects on the labor market. The argumentative counter-concept to both the *Asylanten-* and the *Ausländerproblem* was the liberal left's "multi-cultural society" which in may ways was presented also as a post-national solution to Germany's Nazi past which was seen to shine through in the very terminology used on the right. The demand of the 1990s boom industries for qualified IT workers, the left's model of a multicultural society, and demographers increasing alarm about worsening birthrates in the aftermath of unification effectively began to combine to bring a debate on immigration on the agenda which could be used by Social Democrats and Greens as an election platform which included the demand for a thorough reform of the citizenship law and the promulgation of a new immigration law. Shortly after a new coalition government of Social Democrats and Greens was voted into power in 1998 it launched according legislative initiatives triggering a national debate about immigration.

Throughout the 1990s, right wing parties made a surprise return into several state-diets riding on a platform warning of an *Überfremdung* of German society which means literally an "over-foreignization" or alienation by too many foreign things around. This was accompanied by rising numbers of violent attacks by Neo-Nazis and skin heads against foreigners and socially marginal people. A

shocking number of them ended in the death of the victim.[18] The electoral success of these right-wing parties persuaded many conservatives to use anti-immigration stances in electoral campaigns. Thus the Christian Democrat candidate for prime minister in the state of Hesse, launched in January 1999 a campaign to collect signatures against the proposal of the new left-center government to allow dual citizenship. The campaign was highly successful and is widely credited with winning him the election. A little later in the year, the Christian Democratic candidate for prime minister in the state of Northrhine Westfalia used a proposal of the federal government to ease the immigration of qualified workers in the IT industry with a campaign slogan of *Kinder statt Inder* ("children instead of Indians"). In the Fall of 2000 the general national party manager of the conservatives used the governments launch of an independent commission to make proposals for an immigration law to demand a binding *deutsche Leitkultur* ("German guidance culture"), thus rejuvenating the debate that had already been stirred up around the dual-citizen proposal which had more recently died down.

Through the 1990s, the affluent south-western state of Baden-Württemberg saw both, Neonazi attacks and the forceful return of the right-wing Republican Party to the state diet first in 1992 (10.9%) and than again in 1996 (9.1%).[19] When in 1997 a German woman of Afghani decent, Fereshta Ludin, was allowed by ministerial decree to continue her practical training as elementary school teacher wearing a headscarf to class, the Republicans launched a legislative initiative to forbid teachers to wear headscarves in the public schools of the state. This initiative was roundly defeated by the deputies of the other four parties even though there were already sympathies for such a law in substance, even though the source of the proposal made it despicable. Yet in 1998 the ministry of education refused to take over Fereshta Ludin as tenured civil servant, triggering a second debate in the diet which approved the decision but still felt that no legislation was needed. Ludin took her case through all the legal hurdles right to the constitutional

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[18] In 2000, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the *Tagesspiegel* researched together the number of fatal attacks committed by Neonazis. They arrived at a total number of 93 deaths, about half of which among people of foreign origin, over the decade from unification to the time of publication (*FR,* 17-Sep-2000).
[19] German electoral law for federal and state elections requires a quorum of 5% of the proportional vote before a party can claim any seats in parliament. For the longest time in postwar history this has effectively kept right wing parties out of parliamentarian representation. In summer 2001 the Republicans garnered only 4.4% of the vote and were thus no longer represented in the diet. 9/11 and its aftermath might have made a difference.

court which concluded in 2003 that the state had no legal basis to deny here employment. However, the court made clear as well that the state could in fact bring about a new law which would prevent teachers from displaying overtly religious symbols in class. The court insisted however, that such a law, must not discriminate against any particular religion,. Baden-Württemberg and 5 other states have in the meantime rushed such legislation in place. In the case of Baden-Württemberg the 2004 debates in the diet make clear that this law was specifically intended to prevent Muslim teachers from wearing headscarves. Yarmulkes, crosses or a nun's habit were not seen as disturbances and the legislator took great pains to craft the law in such a way, that while heeding the injunctive of the constitutional court it effectively forbade headscarves while allowing habits (in a few rural areas of the Black Forrest nuns still play a role in teaching). In the end even the leading members of the Greens voted in favor of this law, which is everywhere only referred to as the "anti-headscarf law." In an interview the leader of the Green contingent in the diet later said that he originally intended to vote against the law. But then on the way to the assembly hall he saw Muslim women, all covered with headscarves protest, against the law outside of the building. And it was this sight (the sight of otherness?) which made him change his opinion! Throughout the case Ludin was very closely followed in the press giving rise to the so-called "head-scarf struggle" in the course of which any form of female Muslim headgear was stylized into a hyper-symbol of alterity.

More generally it can be shown that the whole dynamic of the discourses changed in response to 9/11, the discovery of terrorist cells throughout Europe, the sudden attention to radical political Islam, the Bali, Tunis and Madrid bombings and finally the murder of Theo van Gogh which triggered in Germany a second "guidance-culture" discourse now centering around the dangers of "parallel societies." The debates about the membership of Turkey in the European Union which have been conducted on and off since the 1980s, cross-sect and intersect all of these discourses. It is important to remember, that the 1990s also brought another change in perspective which made these events all the more significant. While in 1990 many people saw immigration as a temporary phenomenon, there was by 2000 no longer any doubt that it was indeed a permanent phenomenon. It is precisely this longer historical transformation of the discourse

which in a next step I am going to trace with the help of theoretical tools provided by the sociology of understanding.

Conclusions

For Germany and Europe more generally immigration has become a fateful question: Without massive immigration dramatic population decline is all but inevitable thus shifting the age-pyramids of European societies in such a way that present welfare arrangements are not sustainable beyond the near future. At the same time, however, Europe feels fundamentally threatened by immigration which is frequently depicted as destructive of its very identity. It is therefore of the utmost importance to understand how political understandings of immigration are co-constructed through the mediation of public discourses.

The epistemic force which these discourses generate[20] is shaped by the ways in which the discourses on immigration are organized by the successive interlacing of discursive and non-discursive events and the use of particular epistemic ideologies and practices which shape the ways in which this is done. The sociology of understanding offers at least one way to show how such seemingly epistemologically irrelevant social arrangements as the market integration of discourse venues, the professional cultures of journalists, the strategic calculus of election campaigning or of parliamentarian debates have in fact profound epistemic effects which together shape the political epistemologies of mass-mediated democracy in particular contexts. Under certain circumstances these political epistemologies are such that their processes of knowledge production become ultimately self-referential thus decreasing the chances of reformist adjustments while increasing the chances of catastrophic failure.

If Germans (and again the problem seems to be a wider European one) have currently difficulties to imagine themselves in community with Muslim immigrants, then this is not simply the effect of

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[20] In this paper I have only begun an analysis of how discourse participation wields, via processes of validation, epistemic force on other discourse contributions. What is obviously missing is a study of reception, and discourse production. Ethnography thus needs to complement any analysis focusing on contributions to mass-mediated public discourses, which has taken by itself very serious limitations.

something like "deep" cultural understandings ("structures"), but it is a consequence of the processes by which some understandings are validated at the expense of others. In the context of extradiscursive events and their discursive appropriation, the notion of "multiculturalism" has fallen on hard times. Surely, in the way "multiculturalism" was used it was, judged from some intellectual or political ideal, a "shallow" notion hinging on facile distinctions between the public and the private. However, it was certainly no "shallower" than the all too familiar orientalism which in the one form or the other seems now to reign the day. What will happen in the future will depend on as of yet unforeseeable events, on possible changes in the ways in which the flow of contributions of discourses is organized, on possible changes to epistemic ideologies and practices. It will also depend on the political will to use existing arrangements to re-pluralize the discourse into a debate again.

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