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Article — Published Version

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Journal of International Migration and Integration

Provided in Cooperation with:

Springer Nature

Suggested Citation: Barth, Lena; Kaiser, Paul; Tuncel-Langbehn, Gonca; Ruettner, Barbara; Goetzmann, Lutz (2022) : The Inner and the Outer Foreign Territory— A Qualitative Study Measuring Ambiguity Tolerance Within Young Muslims Living in Germany, Journal of International Migration and Integration, ISSN 1874-6365, Springer Netherlands, Dordrecht, Vol. 24, Iss. 2, pp. 507-525,
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-022-00956-z>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/308948>

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The Inner and the Outer Foreign Territory— A Qualitative Study Measuring Ambiguity Tolerance Within Young Muslims Living in Germany

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Accepted: 26 March 2022 / Published online: 11 April 2022
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Abstract

Against the backdrop of globalisation on the one hand and nationalisation on the other, the question of tolerance of ambiguity, i.e. of tolerating cultural ambiguity and vagueness, is of particular importance. This qualitative study investigates what tolerance of ambiguity means in a group of 50 young Turkish Muslims living in Germany. A high tolerance of ambiguity is mentioned much more frequently in the interviews than a low tolerance of ambiguity with tendencies towards (religious) radicalisation. Appreciation of different cultures and lifestyles and a certain resilience to discrimination go hand in hand with a high tolerance of ambiguity. However, it is also possible that despite high tolerance of ambiguity, the corresponding attitudes remain ambivalent. A lack of support, difficult interpersonal conflicts (especially in one's own family), and a turn to religion occur together with expressions of low ambiguity tolerance. The casuistic representations deepen the impression that high ambiguity tolerance is favoured in triadically structured families functioning as a collective, whereas early traumatic experiences and emotional distance in crises promote low ambiguity tolerance, especially in adolescence. The results underline the importance of high tolerance of ambiguity on the part of both the host country and the migrants.

Keywords Integration · Ambiguity · Identity · Exclusion · Radicalisation

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Introduction

Introducing Cultural Ambiguity

Ambiguity tolerance is a term coined by the psychoanalyst Else Frenkel-Brunswik (1908–1958). Inspired by her personal biography, characterised by forced migration and exile, Else Frenkel-Brunswik focussed her research on tolerance of ambiguity which she understood as a personal trait that provides information about the extent to which a person tolerates an ambiguous situation, i.e. the ambiguity of a situation. The definition of ambiguity tolerance also includes the fact that different patterns of interpretation must be present at the same time. Ambiguity phenomena are usually passive: they persist until one of the competing interpretive patterns becomes predominant (Bauer, 2011, p. 28). In later studies, individuals with high ambiguity tolerance were shown to tend to seek out and enjoy ambiguous and vague situations (Budner, 1962; McDonald, 1970). Budner (1962) defines an ambiguous situation as a “situation that cannot be adequately structured or categorised by a person because he or she does not possess the necessary cues” (Budner, 1962; German translation in Bauer, 2011, p. 37).

Even before Frenkel-Brunswik’s scientific experiments, Sigmund Freud already introduced the unconscious as the prime example of an ambiguous structure. Due to his lectures, it is the “inner foreign territory” that makes human existence arguably even its ontological, ambiguous, and opaque. Later, the concept of ambiguity was adapted to various other fields, e.g. linguistics, cultural studies, and social sciences. For the present study, it seems to be of greatest interest to understand more about the concept of “cultural ambiguity” which Bauer (2011) defines as follows:

A phenomenon of cultural ambiguity exists when, over a longer period of time, a concept, a way of acting, or an object is simultaneously assigned two opposing meanings or at least two competing meanings that clearly diverge from one another, when a social group simultaneously draws norms and assignments of meaning for individual areas of life from opposing or strongly diverging discourses, or when different interpretations of a phenomenon are simultaneously accepted within a group, whereby none of these interpretations can claim exclusive validity. (Bauer, 2011, p. 27)

Thus, it could be said that cultural ambiguity describes the environment (as well as its internalised aspects, cf. Morel, 2017, p. 271 ff.) of an individual that shows high or low tolerance of ambiguity. According to Bartoloni and Stephens (2010) the extent of cultural ambiguity often becomes most visible when a (dominant) host culture is trying to defend its own culture in objection to the cultural impacts of a minority culture (Bartoloni and Stephens, 2010, p. 2). Against the backdrop of globalisation on the one hand and nationalisation on the other, the question of tolerance of ambiguity is of particular importance. The present qualitative study investigates what tolerance of ambiguity means and how it is developed within a group of 50 young Turkish Muslims living in Germany.

Accordingly, low ambiguity tolerance is the inability to tolerate ambiguous or contradictory facts, which can be seen as the basis for frustration intolerance, racism, and authoritarianism (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949). Later, Stangl (2022) expands this early idea explaining the effects of intolerance of ambiguous situations. Individuals might therefore be unable to empathise with other people's points of view in terms of a change of perspective, so that a rigid, inflexible, compulsive attitude prevails. In the process, nuances and complex issues are rejected because the related intrapsychic irritation caused by the (threatening) ambiguity. A defensive tendency is closely related to a negative attitude towards others being "different" as well as the rejection of what is culturally "alien" (Stangl, 2022). Societies with low tolerance for ambiguity press for the rapid elimination of an emerging vagueness. Unpredictability, uncertainty, and incompleteness are basic aspects of human existence in pluralistic societies as people solely exist "in the majority", as the philosopher Hannah Arendt stated (Kristeva, 2018). In a globalised world, encompassing high movements of migration, tolerance of ambiguity is essentially needed equally from the arriving migrants as it is for the host population to avoid respective radicalisation. Therefore, a tendency to ward off aspects of reality that do not fit into rigid systems of order and unambiguous identifications is crucial. This defence is often accompanied by a hostile attitude towards individuals or groups who are considered to have these characteristics. This defence mechanism of projection might arise from being overwhelmed by the complexity and dynamics of rapidly changing, modern societies.

According to Bauer (2011, p. 15 and p. 74 ff.), Islam has been a "culture of ambiguity" for many centuries, due to the internationality and multiculturalism of the Islamic world. Ambiguity tolerance is also recognisable in the diversity of the Arabic language as a consonant language or, for example, in the typical ambiguities of Arabic poetry. In comparison, Western thought and scientific thinking seem much more intolerant of ambiguity according to Bauer (2011, p. 398). Thus, since the beginning of the twentieth century, societies in Islamic countries show a tendency towards disambiguation with a decrease in tolerance of ambiguity (Bauer, 2011, p. 387). With its imposed turn to its origins, radicalised Islam is a comparatively modern phenomenon. With the collapse of the Eastern bloc, Islam was then constructed on the Western side as a substitute enemy, as explained by Lüders (2021), who states that the Western world keeps creating its own enemies. Thus, in the West, "xenophobia" and "Islamophobia" became the symbol of a disambiguation process in an increasingly ambiguity-intolerant society (Lüders, 2021). According to Bauman (2005), radicalisation process occurred on both sides, the Islamophobic West and the fundamentalist Islam. Our study tries to understand and evaluate the effects of this dynamic on young Turkish Muslims living in Germany.

Radicality as a Consequence of Low Ambiguity Tolerance

Radicalism might be regarded as a consequence of ambiguity intolerance. A tendency to radicalism can be observed in both groups: within the population demonstrating no migration background (in our study Germans without a migration

background) and the population demonstrating a migration background (in our study Germans with a Turkish migration history within the family). Bauman (2005) points out that this modern state of a global and rapidly changing world inevitably goes hand in hand with the feeling of ambivalence. Ultimately, the interpretations and orientation patterns of the past offer only limited answers to the contradictions and ambiguities of the present and future. Kiehl and Barbara (2018) designate that modernity inevitably produces contradictions and ambiguities, accompanied by the constant feeling of dissonance. Seen from such a perspective, it is understandable that ideological propositions that make clear propositions of identity and belonging and promise definitive answers can appear very attractive. There are various indications that Germans are increasingly reacting in a xenophobic-radical manner towards people with an immigrant background, with a simultaneous tendency towards religious radicalisation among young Muslims in particular (Bauer, 2018; Bozay, 2020). In both cases, radicalisation is to be understood as a decrease in ambiguity tolerance, which in extreme cases leads to a breakthrough in action, a “passage à l’acte”: the act of terror as the last line of defence against the intolerable, i.e. the return of the unconscious (Goetzmann, 2021).

Already Else Frenkel-Brunswik (1949) noted a connection between low ambiguity tolerance and racism. The authoritarian personality shows classically a decrease of ambiguity tolerance. Later research confirmed this link between low ambiguity tolerance and ethnocentrism, dogmatism, rigidity, and authoritarianism (Bauer, 2011, p. 36; Reis, 1997, pp. 109–131; Adorno, 1950). Radical groupings offer unambiguous explanations and structuring instructions for action that alleviate feelings of insecurity, frustration, powerlessness, and injustice (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Andrea Mura (2014) shows how radical movements preserve the libidinous occupations of their adherents in the form of a “mimetic representation” of archaic society and define them, above all, in terms of their low ambiguity tolerance (e.g. on the basis of binary rules of dress and behaviour). Fethi Benslama (2017) considers the restoration of one’s ego ideal as the most important motive in the psychodynamics of religious or political radicalisation. Thus, the “Über-Muslim”, as Benslama puts it, is particularly proud of his faith: he considers himself the only true Muslim and thus sets himself apart from both the enemy image of an imperialistic and Islamophobic West and the enemy image of an ambiguous Islamic culture. The fantasy of an ideal world is meant to banish a profound disorientation resulting from the competition between the secular West and a religious, ascetically oriented Islam. Geneviève Morel (2018) also explains in her book that radicalisation of migrants might occur as a response to the experience of a social injustice, which takes place in three phases: the detachment from previous structures (1), the emergence of an inner void (2), and the seduction to a new, religious-political self-identity (3). The influence of family circumstances is also significant: Almost 70% of young Muslims with radicalisation tendencies grew up in “broken families”. Andersen (2021) defines a “broken family” as unhealthy relationships within the family unit which are often associated with physical and/or mental abuse, mental health issues, financial hardship, differing beliefs, boundary crossings, overly controlling parents or parental figures, and refusals to apologise. Within chaotic constitutions, the desire for clear, non-ambiguous, supportive structures might arise (Gruber and Lützing, 2018).

2015; Eilers, Gruber and Kemmesies, 2015). Jaccard and Tiscini (2021) describe an inner feeling of emptiness, inexpressiveness, and stagnation among young Islamists interviewed in prison. The authors describe a “melancholic core” from which both feelings of hatred and destructive impulses to act arise. Moreover, radicalisation processes often take place during adolescence, in which personal crises and offenses often occur (cf. Neumann, 2013). In this phase of life, the cycle of ambiguity surplus and regulating disambiguation is often particularly intense, depending in each case on the personal tolerance for ambiguity.

On the Situation of Young Turkish Muslims in Germany

Today, about 4.5 million Muslims live in Germany, who make up 5.5% of the total population (Migration Report of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2015, no more recent survey). The proportion of Muslims with a Turkish migration background is 50.6% (Migration Report and of Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2015). Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, close political and military relations existed between Turkey and Germany. After the World War II, however, the focus was on economic and trade relations (Boos-Nünning & Karakasoglu, 2004, p. 73ff.). Migration of labour from Turkey on a larger scale began with the bilateral recruitment agreement in 1961. The immigration of Muslim workers is also reflected in the fact that Islam is now the third largest denomination in Germany, after Catholicism and Protestantism. In recent years, most likely intensified by the propagandistic assessments of the refugee movements in 2015, the idea of a diverse European continent seems to be threatened. Germans (without migration background) mostly feel diffuse fears of being disadvantaged vis-à-vis migrants or of losing themselves in their otherness. In a 2019 survey, 52% of Germans said that they perceived Islam as a threat, and only 36% experienced it as an enrichment. Thirteen percent of the German population advocated prohibiting Muslims from immigrating to Germany (Pickel, 2019). Many Muslims living in Germany report feeling increasingly marginalised, alienated, disadvantaged, or discriminated against (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Various studies show that individuals with a Turkish migration background have a lower socioeconomic status, higher rates of psychosomatic complaints, and reduced life satisfaction compared to Germans without migration background of the same age (Rasum, Spallek, and See, 2011; in Migration Report of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2015). Within this paper, we try to extent our knowledge about the effects of this development on young Muslims in Germany. To discuss this question, we consulted 50 young Turkish Muslims living in Germany on various questions concerning early childhood relationships and biographical information about the history of migration as well as topics on identity, religious affiliations, and the experience of (cultural and social) integration. According to participants' answers within a qualitative interview, we try to extent information from their perspective on how ambiguity tolerance is manifested. Furthermore, we try to understand which internal and external factors favour the development of high tolerance of ambiguity or, in comparison, counter-regulatory processes of low tolerance of ambiguity.

Methodology

Sample and Study Design

From summer 2018 to fall 2019, we conducted a total of 50 research interviews with Turkish Muslims between the ages of 18 and 25 in the form of a cross-sectional study. This study was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Lübeck on 10.10.2017. In order to achieve the broadest possible social stratification of the sample, we attempted to acquire our subjects both at the university and in Islamic communities, associations, and counselling centres in northern Germany. However, we encountered a clear reluctance towards our project in Islamic institutions. Only one Islamic community agreed that its members could participate in the study. For this reason, students represented the majority in our sample. Turkish Muslims participating in the study ($n=50$) were 18 to 25 years old ($M=22.32$, $SD=1.93$), in a gender distribution of 50% female subjects and 50% male subjects. Female subjects ($n=25$) were 18 to 25 years old ($M=22.24$, $SD=2.13$) and male subjects ($n=25$) were 18 to 25 years old ($M=22.40$, $SD=1.76$). Female and male subjects did not differ in age ($U=305.50$, $S=-0.14$, $P=0.89$). Three subjects were about to graduate from high school (6%), 3 subjects were vocational students (6%), 7 subjects were employed in predominantly skilled trades (14%), and 37 were students (74%). All respondents identified themselves as Muslim with regard to their religious affiliation. No further differentiation was made at this point.

A qualitative interview guide was designed to conduct the semi-structured interviews. Gläser and Laudel (2009) explain an essential structuring as well as a necessary openness to be important “for the comparability of findings” (Averbeck-Lietz & Meyen, 2016). The structure of the interview allowed an alternation between structured, explorative-observational, and psychodynamic, narrative-interpretative conversation passages. The interview questions covered various areas, e.g. early childhood relationships, traumatic experiences within the early childhood, and biographical information about the history of migration. Concerning experiences within adulthood, the interview primarily covered topics on identity, gender identity, religious affiliations, and the experience of cultural as well as social integration. We invited subjects to speak freely about themselves, their thoughts, and their world. The interviews were audio-documented, transcribed, and imported into the software program *atlas.ti*.

Methodology of Qualitative Data Analysis

First, we conducted a sample coding of the first ten interviews. Based on these coding, a codebook was created, which served as the basis for coding all interviews. Structural codes of ambiguity were derived from psychoanalytic or cultural studies theory. Inductive open codes derived from the subjects' utterances were then developed during data analysis of the first ten interviews. All codes were described in a codebook with a definition and anchor examples. The additional 40 interviews were

coded using this codebook. Using memo writing, all ideas, associations, and mini-theories were recorded in atlas.ti during the coding process (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Furthermore, the simultaneous occurrence of structural and open codes was examined on the basis of a co-occurrence analysis. Within the analysis, co-occurrences will present the structural code of (high/low) ambiguity tolerance with three open codes occurring most frequently together. Hence, we tried to combine participants' statements about ambiguity with biographical information as well as their current state of mind in a qualitative practice. Interrater reliability (agreement between two raters) was calculated using the statistical measure "Krippendorff's alpha". In the present study, all codes showed excellent interrater agreement ($\text{cu-}\alpha=0.99$). In the following section, we show the results on ambiguity tolerance as well as intolerance and elaborate on them using four case histories that embed individual statements in the overall context of a biography. The case descriptions were designed in such a way that the subjects are not personally identifiable.

Qualitative Results and Case Reports

During this section, we will first present some typical results from qualitative data analysis showing selected codes of ambiguity tolerance and co-occurrence with other codes. In a second step, we present some casuistics on the topic of ambiguity tolerance. This procedure will be conducted for high ambiguity tolerance as well as low ambiguity tolerance.

High Ambiguity Tolerance

Data Analysis: High Ambiguity Tolerance

Utterances indicating *high ambiguity tolerance* ($n=135$) are significantly more frequent compared to utterances with *low ambiguity tolerance* ($n=13$). The *high tolerance of ambiguity* occurs primarily with the themes of *ambivalence* ($n=16$), *appreciation* ($n=15$), and *stigmatisation* ($n=14$). For example, one respondent describes *ambivalence* as follows:

It was always a back-and-forth with me. I really never felt German, at any time in my youth, childhood, not at all! I never felt Turkish either. So I felt Turkish, but not like the Turks in Turkey, that's a big difference.

Here are two examples of *appreciation* that show that a third, distinct culture can form from competing cultures:

I think both cultures are kind of respectfully seen and also recognised. You can kind of be proud of both sides, and it shouldn't be seen as opposing each other.

It's actually a blessing. So really. You grow as a person. Because, you're given two things, two cultures in your life. You can be much, much more. You can experience a lot more. That's why it's a blessing. You can decide for yourself what to take in more, where to gain more experience. You can achieve more.

You can make your own culture, I say (laughs). You can draw something from both cultures, I say. That's what I want to have, that's not what I want to have. I want to take that and use it this way. It's really a blessing to me.

From a tolerance of ambiguity, it seems possible to better confront and even dissolve *stigmatisation*, even if this act often involves a great deal of effort:

I work in a pharmacy and someone comes into the pharmacy who has prejudices, perhaps against girls who wear headscarves. Then I advise this person really well and he is so positively surprised by me that I remain in his memory. For me, that is already a trace that I want to leave behind. And thus, prejudices can also be combated.

Casuistic Presentations: High Ambiguity Tolerance

Mrs D—Adaptation to Competing Norms.

Mrs D says that her mother comes from a Kurdish family and her father from a Turkish family. She grew up in rural Turkey for the first seven years of her life and describes her childhood as very sheltered. However, her parents' bicultural relationship was strongly criticised and opposed by both families, Turkish and Kurdish. The parents stuck together despite this criticism. Their solution was to emigrate to Germany. Mrs D experienced both in her childhood: the low ambiguity tolerance of the extended families, who experienced the ethnic affiliations as irreconcilable opposites, and the ambiguity tolerance of her own parents, who paid for this tolerance with the loss of their homeland. Both parents pursued academic careers in Germany.

Mrs D was the oldest of a total of six siblings. She had always been involved in the care of her younger siblings. One may assume that she formed a strong superego, but also a distinct, very achievement-oriented ideal ego. She learned to function well in triadic relationships (father–mother–child) as well as in the collective of the family. After graduating from high school, she embarked on an academic career herself.

On the other hand, religion plays a major role in the family's everyday life, and it also plays a very important role in Mrs D's life. She wears a headscarf and has already tried to represent this choice to others at school. Every day she performs all the essential "deeds", i.e. the religious rituals:

I have to do my deeds consciously. Normally, one is required to behave in a morally correct manner in order to comply with the law. Or even the social norms. But I behave in a morally correct or conscientious way because I am convinced that I am being forced by a listening power, which always sounds so funny, but I don't know how to explain it any other way. So, being held accountable throughout. So, in my behaviour, I'm not correct, I'm not a super-human, but I make an effort to renounce the bad habits.

On the one hand, Ms D understands Islam as a set of rules that provides advice on how to lead a life, but also offers the opportunity for meditative self-reflection:

Islam means for me, so it's a habit of life for me, for self-reflection. So, to have something different from the everyday, the mundane. Quasi something

that you can't explain. That is everything for me. And Islam has many commandments. For example, how shall I say, rules that permeate my life. And to hold on to them or to shimmy along them, so to speak, on a daily basis, that is my purpose in life. And one of the needs of me personally, a basic need, is to get back to myself. And contact with a higher power, if you want to translate it that way.

However, within ambiguity tolerance, competing norms and cultural aspects can also be brought into a functional relationship with each other: For example, in Mrs D's case, religiosity typically serves as reparation for her emancipation as a daughter. Professional success can be understood as delegated wish fulfilment on her parents. It seems to us that it is precisely the differences within the ambiguity tolerance that make such a balancing of interests possible. Mrs D's family lives in a big city neighbourhood with a rather German population. But it is not a problem either for the parents or for Mrs D herself to maintain good relations with the neighbours and to engage in conversation about the different cultures. Here, embedded in an extended family and following the academic ambitions of her parents, Mrs D can live an ambiguity tolerance:

My father taught me, never forget where you come from and always say from where you come, because that is the special thing, you are two-sided. You have the German side and you have our Kurdish culture despite all that.

Thus, headscarf, meditation, and following the rituals are one side in the life of Mrs D; another side is the Western career as an emancipated woman. It is noticeable, however, that Turkish and German cultures tend to have a competing or, as we will suggest in the discussion, metonymic relationship. We have the impression that, due to the (unconscious) triadic relations, Mrs D has managed to develop a high tolerance for ambiguity. It is possible for her to keep different aspects of reality in balance. Superego and ego-ideal simultaneously cause a strong pressure to adapt to the respective competing cultures.

One could speak of advanced metaphorical ambiguity when competing cultures, norms, or lifestyles result in a new and ambiguous identity (cf. Bhabha, 2004). For example, Mrs D wears a headscarf and is academically very successful. The headscarf therefore not only has a religious meaning, but also stands for professional emancipation. The signifiers of the traditional-religious and of Western liberality are superimposed on each other, thus making the object appear ambiguous: It stands for both religiosity and emancipation. Possibly this form of ambiguity resonates when Mrs D talks about her identity that she mediates between conflicts (e.g. as a translator). Her self-image is determined by emotional calm and mental reflection. It is like a metaphor that arises from the different, opposing cultures.

Mr E—Mitigation of Competing Standards .

Mr E speaks of a childhood that he experienced as intact. His father was born in Germany as the son of Turkish immigrants. He got to know the mother, who comes from Turkey, while on vacation. The mother was born in Turkey and then migrated to Germany at the age of 25. Mr E describes the marriage of his parents as a loving partnership that radiates calm and warmth for him. To this day, there is an open exchange

in the family. Aspirations for autonomy, e.g. after graduating from high school, were supported and advocated. The parents are also well integrated in German society. However, there has always been a strong bond with Turkey, mediated by the maternal grandmother, who came to Germany for several months a year and brought Turkish culture with her. Above all, the mother had a longing for the warm extended family in her home country. In terms of religion, Mr E was raised secularly. He himself feels a belief in “something greater”, but this feeling is independent of any specific religion. He has always had friendships, both with Germans and with Turks. Nevertheless, Mr E has often experienced everyday racism. In the past, as a Turkish child, he was discriminated against in a very concrete way, for example at school. Today, he experiences racism more diffusely, for example in the form of negative remarks about Islam. He has the impression that Islam today serves as a kind of projection screen for originally racist attitudes. But on the whole, anti-Islamic remarks would not affect him much—although, as Mr E says on the other hand, individual remarks could certainly hurt. Despite these problems, Mr E manages to accept both worlds, Turkish and German, in the form of a typical tolerance of ambiguity. He speaks of a parallel solution (regarding competing cultures):

It’s important to embrace this culture here. Because this is the culture you live in. So, you should try to solve it in parallel somehow.

In order to arrive at his own cultural identity, Mr E focuses on his own person and how he feels, while the respective culture or nationality lose importance for him. In contrast to Mrs D, an adaptation to clearly profiled competing norms, styles, and identification offers plays less of a role. Rather, a “defusing” takes place in that their meaning is depotentiated. Mr E is under less pressure from the superego to adapt to the respective culture; the specifications of the “Big Other” (i.e. the culture or the respective norms) seem to be milder:

When I look in the mirror, I don’t know, I’ve really never defined myself by my origin or my nationality. When I look in the mirror, I first see myself and how I feel. In that sense, it has little to do with me culturally or nationally.

Here, too, a metaphorical ambiguity emerges. Mr E, however, chooses a different strategy by defusing competing signifiers than, for example, a respondent who creates a new, transnational identity in which he feels both Turkish and German and calls himself a “German Turk”. Overall, however, it is striking that this metaphorisation of ambiguity is disrupted by the feedback of the respective culture, both German and Turkish, in which young Muslims are defined as Turks in Germany and as Germans in Turkey.

Low Ambiguity Tolerance

Data Analysis: Low Ambiguity Tolerance

References to *low tolerance of ambiguity* (e.g. in the form of religious radicalisation) occur comparatively rarely in the interviews ($n=13$ vs. $n=135$). *Lack of support* ($n=7$), *religious issues* ($n=4$), and *interpersonal conflicts* ($n=3$) occurred most frequently together with the structural code of low ambiguity tolerance. Thus, one respondent speaks about an inner emptiness (or a *lack of support*) in interpersonal relationships, but also in his relationship with God:

I have felt so empty in interpersonal relationships and empty toward God.

On the other hand, a low tolerance of ambiguity is often accompanied by a turn to *religious themes*:

I took that religious template because I thought that was the right thing to do.

Typically, negative effects such as anger and feelings of revenge arise as a result of *interpersonal conflicts*:

I don't want to talk too much about the fact that if it happened to me, how I would act then, I don't know, and nobody knows. I can understand that somewhere: to have a rage that brings one to such thoughts. And I think that feeling of revenge is also to get back at those responsible, that's the biggest motivation.

Casuistic Representation: Low Ambiguity Tolerance

Mr A—Stabilisation Through Unambiguity.

Mr A reports the feeling of “not belonging” very early in life. Here, he differs strongly from the first two subjects, who both describe a triadically structured collective in which they felt comfortable. Being excluded turned Mr A into a kind of self-chosen withdrawal:

But mostly it is also the case that I prefer to be alone, maybe also because I don't always feel involved in the community, everyone here in communities in the city is very torn here and I don't have anywhere I always go, where I really feel connected.

Mr A describes a family that was characterised by abruptness, ambivalence, and rejection, especially on his father's side. The father was depressed and had lived between worlds as a “suitcase child” (cf. Karatza-Meents, 2014). Basically, he had never arrived in Germany. The mother seems conspicuously pale in the descriptions. Mr A had already experienced “bullying” in kindergarten because he was a Turkish child, and then, in adolescence often suffered from depression, sleep, and learning disorders. The turning point came when he was 20, thanks to religion (although his parents were “not very religious”). His role models became the prophets of Islam and other strong men: It was as if he found contact with living, good, and powerful primary objects. Mr A had not initially sought

a connection to an Islamic community. Rather, he found most of the information on the Internet. He was close to God and now felt fresher and more focused. However, his behaviour became more and more strict: strict praying, cutting off contact, not listening to music, changing his appearance, all this was part of his “rebirth”. Then, he joined an “orthodox” group; some members had already gone to Syria. He describes that this path seemed “clear and well thought-out” to him. There was no longer any unnecessary balancing; he felt no ambivalences. He had now clearly committed himself, belonged to a group, and the feeling of being excluded had dissolved as a result. He felt better, more balanced, and more stable:

So, for me as a Muslim, that means this balance, I had a phase where I was very balanced, but in other things I went to the extreme, where I felt even closer to God. So, if you’re more established in your religion, or you do more deeds, then I think Muslims can be more balanced. As if they leave it out completely, this spiritual thing is very important. I think that also brings a lot of exuberance in the end in everyday life.

But then, the tide turned again: Mr A met his current partner, got married, and became a father. These experiences, but especially his own parenting and the responsibility he felt, made him emotionally “softer” and “more open”, he reports, and he began to think critically about his religious behaviour. Step by step, his life has become more colourful and diverse:

The more I got responsibility through my own apartment, work, child, etc., I started to look at some things differently. I understood more how to deal with responsibility, how to deal with different groups of people and then this only orthodox, it’s not wrong what these people do, but it’s very hard to implement here in this society, at least some things.

Mr A took distance from a non-ambiguous view of the world without giving up his faith. In the following quotation, he first talks about the Western, rational “way of looking at things”, in order to then come to the faith, which he continues to keep despite the distance to the practice:

And it’s like this, I had even completed this other way of looking at things, that one seeks a judgment through various methods and instruments, but then I saw that these methods and instruments are not there for nothing, they are there to find a solution for a certain situation, and that’s how it changed, that is, through everyday life, through various people with whom one had dealings. Sometimes my wife feels that we let religion slide. She feels that in some situations we don’t practice religion as much as we used to because of this change in me, that I see some things more relatively, but she also sees some things much more relatively, she’s much more open-minded about it. But I believe more than she does.

Mrs B—Security in the Unambiguous.

Ms B’s parents live “very traditionally” and “secluded” from German society. The mother spoke almost no German, so that Ms B had to translate already as

a child: Linguistically, she learned a culture of ambiguity early on, albeit in the context of parentification. She also had to assume responsibility for younger siblings at an early age (e.g. attending parent-teacher conferences). Mrs B describes her relationship with her parents as tense and ambivalent. The mother sees in her daughter's life a mirror of her own missed opportunities. This repeatedly leads to entanglements, envy, and lack of understanding. Within the family, Mrs B sees herself forced into a narrowly defined role, for example when she has to serve tea for hours when neighbours visit. These family demands are at odds with the Western liberal lifestyle, especially in the context of university studies. Already since childhood, Ms B has suffered from psychosomatic symptoms, especially nausea and dizziness, which occur in situations of pressure. In adolescence, Ms B then found not only support and a certain security in an Islamic community, but above all the possibility of an intellectual exchange, e.g. about the values of Islam. In a friendship with a somewhat older woman, whom she experienced as a "mentor", she felt better reflected and understood than at home. She began teaching religion to children herself and lost more and more contacts outside the community. In retrospect, she feels that she was absorbed by this community, both socially and intellectually. Her mentor then suggested that she move to Norway to realise her dream of studying architecture. But when she arrived in Norway, there was no more talk of the promised study of architecture. Instead, she was now told, "We are the chosen ones, we must teach Islam". The plan was to go to the Middle East as a teacher to help build Islamic schools there. Only now did Mrs B realise that she was to be used exclusively for the purposes of this Islamic group:

I really thought I was immune to it, but that sense of cohesion, we belong together and we're something; nothing special, but we're a unit, that binds. And by also being in the community for ten years or so, I didn't realise that until, like I said, it was my own turn. And yes, so in retrospect I also realise that I overlooked a lot of things that I shouldn't have.

Despite a whole series of threats, Ms B managed to break off her stay in Norway and return to Germany. Ms B let the plane ticket to the Middle East lapse, broke off contact with the community and the "mentor", and moved back in with her parents. A short time later, she graduated from high school. To this day, she is concerned that her search or desire for security, friendship, reflection, understanding, and stimulation had led her to the point of religious radicalisation.

Discussion

Ambiguity tolerance describes the toleration of ambiguity and vagueness. Ambiguity tolerance was a typical feature of Islamic culture, and today's low ambiguity tolerance in Islam is basically less tradition-oriented than an ideological neologism modelled on the West (Bauer, 2011, p. 52). From this perspective, tolerance of ambiguity has fallen into disrepute in both Western and Islamic culture: an excess of imposed ambiguity might be answered with the complete absence of ambiguity tolerance (leading to xenophobia) on the one hand and Islamic radicalisation on the

other. In our study, which primarily examined socially well-integrated young Muslims due to the social bias, we were able to observe these processes in detail and in the atmosphere of a certain everydayness (i.e. neither in prison nor in war, cf. Morel, 2017; Jaccard & Tiscini, 2021).

High Ambiguity Tolerance

The participants of our study expressed themselves ten times more frequently on *high ambiguity tolerance* ($n=135$) than on *low ambiguity tolerance* ($n=13$). The first two casuistics show a socialisation of Turkish Muslims living in Germany within the collective of a triadically structured family. By adopting a depressive position (Klein, 1961), Mrs D and Mr E were able to develop high tolerance of ambiguity. Different cultures, norms, and lifestyles can be brought together and—as the co-occurrence analysis in the total sample shows—valued. From the depressive (or ambiguity-tolerant) position, xenophobic or Islamophobic discrimination can also be tolerated better despite its potential for injury. However, it is also possible that an ambivalent attitude is taken towards the divergent cultures, i.e. that preferences and reservations exist towards both Turkish and German culture. Typical for Mrs D is that she adapts to the demands of the different, contradictory cultures in each case without combining them for herself (religion, profession). It is her strong superego, which goes hand in hand with a high performance ideal, that makes this adaptation possible or even forces it. A more mature tolerance of ambiguity becomes apparent when Mrs D tries to mediate from the position of an independent identity. Mr E also reports a biography characterised by high tolerance of ambiguity within his family. Here, it becomes particularly clear that the primary relationships experienced as loving make it possible to tolerate diversity. Mr E does not feel any pressure to assimilate. Rather, he succeeds in defusing the different cultures and their demands, so that their competition is experienced as less oppressive.

Thus, different phenomenon of ambiguity can be found: First, there is tolerance of ambiguity that concerns competing and diverging cultures. The individual tolerates these tendencies, but without connecting them in his identity, that is, in his “identitary response” (cf. Morel, 2017, p. 271) to these ambiguous tendencies. It is the ambiguity of the one-after-the-other: The individual arranges himself, depending on the situation, first with the Turkish, then with the German, by adapting to the respective culture. If one understands the culture (or the respective norms or lifestyles) as signifiers, one could speak of a metonymic-competing ambiguity. Lacan understood metonymy to mean that within a chain of signifiers, one signifier follows another signifier (Evans, 1998, p. 190 ff). Thus, Mrs D arranges her life in such a way that one thing comes after another: the signifier that stands for the profession is followed by the competing signifier of religious tradition, and Mrs D tries to fit in as well as possible. To be distinguished from this is the metaphorical-confounding high tolerance of ambiguity: as in plate tectonics, cultural signifiers push over each other and form high ambiguity tolerance that brings about a newly created identity (Evans, 1998, p. 186 ff) which is expressed by the statements of Mr E. We have the

impression that such metaphorical tectonics underlie the self-image of an ego that is peaceable, open, and tolerant.

Low Ambiguity Tolerance

In the two case histories that present subjects with a low tolerance of ambiguity, at least at times, the biographies are rather difficult, fraught with fractures and problems. The relationship with parents is conflictual, the family climate chilly, accompanied by emotional neglect. These reports are consistent with previous literature indicating a high prevalence of early traumatic experiences among radicalised individuals (including Campelo et al., 2018; Jaccard & Tiscini, 2021). Thus, the motives of a *lack of support* and *interpersonal conflicts* occurred particularly frequently together with low tolerance of ambiguity. Fundamental to radicalisation is the desire for belonging and recognition. The radical Muslim community, which forms a mystical homogeneity, becomes a “good object” that serves as a substitute for the emotional lack in childhood. Khosrokhavar (2017) refers to such a community as a “neo-Umma”. Furthermore, Žižek (2015, p. 10) describes these essentially fundamentalist processes as a “triumph of ideology” that unites a community against a common enemy. It is supposed to help escaping Western society, which is experienced as hostile and in which the feeling of not belonging is experienced with constant *stigmatisations*. Žižek (2015) further describes the Western society to be combined with concepts of capitalism, ratio, satiety, and market seduction in opposition to the “Umma” which is associated with concepts of transcendence, passion, and divine devotion. Through the, under certain circumstances, dyadic connection to God, support is sought in order to calm the inner-psychic tensions. Accordingly, *religious themes* frequently occurred together with a low tolerance of ambiguity, and religion also played an important role in both casuistics. It becomes clear that ambiguity is exclusively metonymic-competitive, and the divergence of signifiers or the weakness of ambiguity tolerance might cause radicalisation. Metaphorisation of ambiguity is not possible.

In Mr A’s case, it is easy to imagine that he did not have the emotional capacity to cope with the subjective ambiguity surplus in the context of a depressive, i.e. mature, position in adolescence due to early experiences of deficiency. Thus, with the turn to religion and radicalisation, a counter-regulatory disambiguation occurred. The more intensively Mr A engaged in theology, the clearer it became that he had found a new spiritual home. In addition, the feeling of loneliness and exclusion receded as a result of his acceptance into the Salafist group, but also as a result of the idea of being a member of the neo-Umma. But then, with the help of his own family, he did manage to find a new balance of Western lifestyle and faith (without contact with the radicalised group).

The biography of the fourth respondent, Ms B, is closely interwoven with religious socialisation. She has had a great deal of culturally specific knowledge about Islam since childhood. But at the same time, Ms B feels both excluded and exploited within her family. In a community, she finds social cohesion and the feeling of being a good believer. Ms B sees herself as a “good Muslim” who practices the right

“deeds”. The disambiguation takes a course she herself is hardly aware of until its consequence is drastically brought to her attention (with the request to travel to a Middle Eastern state as an Islamic teacher). But now, in this new crisis, her own family, especially her mother, helps her to stop the disambiguation.

This shows that the development of a low tolerance for ambiguity (in the form of religious radicalisation) must always be viewed from multiple perspectives. A specific emotional experience of deficiency in early biography, the experience of frustrations in the social outside world, and the real availability of radical networks can provide an entry point for radical thought and action. Here, ambiguity tolerance is clearly determined by a metonymy of signifiers. The greater the divergence of the individual signifiers, and the less the individual has the capacity to connect what is different, the greater the danger that contradictory signifiers will either be evaluated negatively (as an enemy image, e.g. by rejecting or fighting the West) or detach themselves entirely from the—thus monochromatic—chain (as *quantité négligeable*, e.g. by the West no longer playing a role).

What Does “Foreign Territory” Feel Like?

In a certain sense, Freud understands psychoanalysis as a confrontation with the other, with the “foreign territory”. Reality is regarded—from the perspective of the ego—as the “outer foreign territory”; the repressed is the “inner foreign territory” (Freud, 1933, p. 56). This is how Freud opens the 31st lecture on the introduction to psychoanalysis:

Ladies and gentlemen! I know you are aware in regard to your own relations, whether with people or things, of the importance of your starting-point. This was also the case with psycho-analysis. It has not been a matter of indifference for the course of its development or for the reception it met with that it began its work on what is, of all the contents of the mind, most foreign to the ego—on symptoms. Symptoms are derived from the repressed, they are, as it were, its representatives before the ego; but the repressed is foreign territory to the ego - internal foreign territory - just as reality (if you will forgive the unusual expression) is external foreign territory. (Freud, 1933, p. 56).

A year earlier, in “The Ego and the Id”, Freud described the id as the “external psychic” (Freud, 1923, p. 23). Already within this passage, the idea exists of the other, otherness, the foreign, the alien, or alterity. We have already referred to the refugee biography of Else Frenkel-Brunswik. In Freud’s case, too, not only his biography, but already the history of his ancestors, was marked by racism, flight, migration, and exile. Freud’s family was originally at home in the Rhineland. At the end of the fourteenth century, the family had to flee to Eastern Europe because of pogroms. Freud’s father, in turn, migrated with his family first to Leipzig. Rejected there because of their Jewish origins, the family moved to the comparatively liberal Vienna (Alt, 2016, p. 20 ff.). Certainly, these experiences of flight, exclusion, and assimilation shaped Freud’s fascination with the “abroad”, which could mean both promise and salvation, but also the risk of renewed rejection and hatred. Through

the Lacanian splitting of the subject (into a “su-jet barré”), this becomes ambiguous, allowing a basic structure of ambiguity to be realised. But the ego is also surrounded by foreignness. Then, the question is how strong is the tolerance of ambiguity towards the foreign, for example the id or the unconscious. Thus, high tolerance of ambiguity means that the ego recognises both the external, social, and the internal, repressed, or unconscious reality, and is willing to bear its multiplicity, diversity, and contradictoriness. The ego is intolerant of ambiguity when it cannot bear this multiformity. It then tries to reduce ambiguity to the extent of hybridity and to a monolithic lifestyle.

Limitations of the Study

A major limitation of the study is the selection of our subjects. Despite our efforts to create a social stratification, there is still a social bias (almost three-quarters of the subjects come from an academic collective). These difficulties in attracting subjects from less socially integrated backgrounds to participate in the study are described as typical (cf. Rau et al., 2020). Our results are therefore limited to a group of young, rather educated migrants, who predominantly come from classic triadic family structures. Furthermore, our study did not differentiate other social positions such as race, gender, and class which might have influenced our results.

Conclusion

Despite the explained social bias, we were able to gain key insights into the dynamics of ambiguity. In German society, an image of Islam has emerged that is incapable of heterogeneity and hostile to plurality. Contrary to all historical facts, this constructed image of the enemy hides the inner-Islamic plurality and high tolerance of ambiguity, which reflected a diverse Muslim reality of life over many centuries. Our conversations with 50 young Turkish Muslims living in Germany provide an important insight into the difficulties of experiencing exclusion and struggling for tolerance of ambiguity. People differ essentially in their ability to tolerate ambiguity, which recognises its origin in loving, consistent, and gratifying early relationship experiences. In case the environment allows this early relationship experience, the otherness of the “foreigner” might be tolerated and not exploited as a negative projection surface. Instead, it might be recognised as a source for inspiration and for one’s own further development. In this context, the development and maintenance of a curiosity to discover the foreign seems essential, also because a small part of ourselves is always reflected in it. If cultures understand themselves accordingly as variants that do not produce superordinate structures, the acceptance of the “subject as multiplicity” (Nietzsche, 1999 [1885], p. 650) can possibly succeed in the future.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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