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"Daham und Islam?" - An Exploration into how the First Post-War Generations of Muslims in Austria author their Identities in Oral History Interviews

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My father for his lifelong sacrifices and never ceasing to remind me of the importance of continuously seeking and imparting knowledge.
My mother for being the epitome of strength, courage and bringing life to life.
For my community who believed in me before I believed in myself.

…and for the giants that came before me on whose shoulders I stand, who touched the world with their powerful words, revolutionary research, but most importantly undeniable actions.

I am who I am because you dared to be unapologetically yourself.
I am because you were.

Abstract

This thesis examines how the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria author their identities, using oral history interviews, as well as exploring factors that foster or hinder a sense of belonging. Austria, traditionally viewed through the lens of its imperial past, possesses a rich and complex history that includes a diverse spectrum of ethnic and religious narratives, which have been frequently underrepresented or misrepresented. Among these communities, the historical presence and representation of Muslims in Austria, which spans several centuries, underscores their integral role in the nation's social, political and economic fabric. Narratives concerning Austrian Muslims frequently lack self-authored perspectives on issues of home and belonging. The belonging of Islam Muslims in Austria and Europe has been particularly scrutinized and contested by politicians and media in recent years.
This thesis adopts a qualitative approach by collecting and analyzing data from four audiovisual oral history interviews as a means of capturing individuals' narratives and memories in their own words. These narratives reveal the complex interplay between personal experiences, collective memories, and broader socio-political contexts. Several key elements emerged from the analysis that significantly impact the sense of belonging among the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria such as experiences of acceptance or exclusion, community support, policy impacts and discrimination on a personal and institutional level.

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Diese Masterarbeit untersucht, wie die ersten Nachkriegsgenerationen von Muslim*innen in Österreich ihre Identitäten durch Oral History Interviews gestalten und identifiziert Faktoren, die ein Zugehörigkeitsgefühl fördern oder behindern. Österreich, welches historisch oftmals durch die Linse der imperialen Vergangenheit betrachtet wird, besitzt eine reiche und komplexe Geschichte, die ein breites Spektrum ethnischer und religiöser Narrative umfasst. Manche dieser Narrative sind häufig unterrepräsentiert oder werden falsch dargestellt. Einer dieser Communities sind Muslim*innen in Österreich, deren historische Verwurzelung sich über mehrere Jahrhunderte erstreckt, welches wiederum ihre integrale Rolle im sozialen, politischen und wirtschaftlichen Kontext Österreichs hervorhebt. In Narrativen über österreichische Muslim*innen fehlen häufig selbstbestimmte Perspektiven zu Themen wie Heimat und Zugehörigkeit. Besonders relevant ist diese Forschung im Kontext der von Politiker*innen und Medien in den letzten Jahren hinterfragten und umstrittenen Zugehörigkeit von Muslim*innen in Österreich und Europa. Diese Arbeit verfolgt einen qualitativen Ansatz, indem sie Daten aus vier audiovisuellen Oral History Interviews zusammenträgt und analysiert, um die Erzählungen und Erinnerungen dieser Individuen in ihren eigenen Worten einzufangen. Diese Narrative enthüllen das komplexe Zusammenspiel zwischen persönlichen Erfahrungen, kollektiven Erinnerungen und den breiteren sozialpolitischen Kontexten. Aus der Analyse gehen mehrere Schlüsselelemente hervor, die das Zugehörigkeitsgefühl unter den ersten Nachkriegsgenerationen von Muslim*innen in Österreich erheblich beeinflussen, wie Erfahrungen von Akzeptanz oder Ausschluss, Unterstützung durch Communities, Auswirkungen von politischen Maßnahmen und Diskriminierung auf persönlicher und institutioneller Ebene.

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"It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder"

- W.E.B. Du Bois (1903)

Introduction

Austria, a nation often viewed from the perspective of its imperial past, has a rich and multifaceted history that encompasses a diverse array of ethnic and religious narratives which have been historically under- or misrepresented. The stories of marginalized and minoritized communities are often recounted from an external or what writer Toni Morrison called a *White Gaze* perspective.[1] Among these is the historical presence and the representation of Muslims in Austria, which dates back several centuries, making them an integral part of the Austrian social, political, and economic fabric. Narratives about Austrian Muslims often lack self-authored perspectives on questions of home and belonging. Moreover, the relevance of scholarly inquiry into questions of the belonging of Austrian Muslims is heightened by ongoing debates about identity, secularism, and pluralism. Specifically, the belonging of Islam and Muslims in Austria and Europe has been questioned and debated by politicians and media outlets in recent years.

This thesis acknowledges that discourses surrounding Muslims in Austria are not a recent phenomenon ignited by globalization or 20th and 21st century migrations; rather, it is a complex conversation that has evolved over hundreds of years. Academic discourse, thus, must be recognized as a significant and influential element in the nation's cultural and historical panorama, offering insights into how these longstanding Muslim communities have been perceived, defined, and engaged with over time. As a way of diversifying and reclaiming narratives on Muslims in Austria this thesis is based on a series of oral history interviews with various Austrians that identify as Muslim. Finally, this thesis is of great empirical relevance as there are hardly any comparable projects in Austria that center voices of Muslim individuals.

The aim of this work is to unravel the ways in which academic and public discourses have mirrored, influenced, and sometimes reshaped the societal ethos concerning Muslims in Austria.

[1] *CultureContent* [@culturecontent0], Toni Morrison refuses to privilege white people in her novels (1998, March). In: Public Broadcasting Service, 20.06.2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4vIGvKpT1c (07.11.2023).

In doing so, the thesis aspires to explore how the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria author their identities through oral history interviews.

The interplay between the political landscape and media representations has significant implications for the social integration of Muslims in Austria. Policy responses and public discourses can often become intertwined, with media narratives influencing political agendas and vice versa. This dynamic, in turn, affects day-to-day realities for Austrian Muslims, from shaping integration policies to impacting social cohesion.

In addition, in November 2020, Austria undertook one of its most extensive counter-terrorism operations with "Operation Luxor". The operation, which involved more than 900 police officers raiding homes and community spaces across the country, was ostensibly aimed at rooting out what was described as "political Islam". The raids targeted individuals and organizations within the Muslim community, drawing significant criticism from human rights observers and community leaders who voiced concerns about the stigmatization of Muslims and the potential erosion of trust between the community and state institutions.

The impact of "Operation Luxor" on the Muslim communities in Austria was multifaceted. While the government defended it as a necessary measure to protect national security and proclaimed it as a mission to "cut off the roots of political Islam"[2], an Austrian court ruled in 2021 that these raids were unlawful[3]. It sent shockwaves through civil society, exacerbating feelings of vulnerability and marginalization. Human rights groups such as Amnesty International criticized the operation and categorized it as an action that "struck scholars and aid workers"[4]. Operations like these tend to further entrench the "suspect community-narrative", wherein Muslims are collectively viewed through the prism of security risks rather than as individual citizens with diverse backgrounds and contributions to Austrian society. This incident has subsequently fueled academic inquiries into the repercussions of counter-terrorism measures on social cohesion, civil liberties, and the integration process.

[2] *Die Volkspartei,* VP-Generalsekretär Melchior: „Innenminister Nehammer geht entschieden gegen politischen Islam in Österreich vor*!"* In: OTS.at (09.11.2020), https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20201109_OTS0094/vp-generalsekretaer-melchior-innenminister-nehammer-geht-entschieden-gegen-politischen-islam-in-oesterreich-vor (28.05.2024).

[3]*Bridge Initiative Team*, Factsheet: Operation Luxor. In: bridge.georgetown.edu (08/01/2024), https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-operation-luxor/#:~:text=The%20lawyer%20Richard%20Soyer%20criticized,Zerbes%2C%20said%20that%20Operation%20Luxor (26.05.2024).

[4] *Bridge Initiative*, Factsheet: Operation Luxor.

In summary, public discourses on Muslims in Austria within the political and media context reflect an intricate web of historical legacies, policy developments, media representation, and community agency. The continued securitization and monolithic depiction of Muslims and Islam demands a diversification of discourse and reflects a need for self-representation.

State of Research

Around 2014, coinciding with the start of discussions surrounding the amendment of the Islam Law of 1912, the political and media discourses surrounding Muslims in Austria became an area of heightened academic interest, reflecting broader continental trends concerning the representation and integration of Muslim populations in European societies. This scholarly focus revealed intricate layers of interaction between public perception, policy-making, and the lived experiences of Muslim communities.

Peter Scholten, Fleur Baggerman, Linda Dellouche, Venja Kampen, Julia Wolf and Rick Ypma provided a comparative analysis of integration policies across Europe, noting that Austria has pursued a distinctive approach characterized by a blend of multiculturalist and assimilationist strategies.[5] They observe that Austria's historical interaction with the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent settlement of Muslims imbued contemporary policies with a unique legacy. This juxtaposition is echoed in the work of Didier Ruedin and Sieglinde Rosenberger, who explored how the guest worker programs of the 1960s and 1970s transitioned into more permanent forms of settlement, challenging the notion of a temporary Muslim presence in Austria.[6]

Media representation also plays a crucial role in shaping public discourses on Muslims in Austria. Farid Hafez has scrutinized Austrian media content, revealing a tendency towards framing Muslims through a lens of cultural difference and security concerns, which can perpetuate stereotypes and foster a sense of *Otherness*.[7] Elsewhere, Michal Krzyżanowski and Ruth Wodak have dissected the media portrayal of Muslim communities, arguing that the securitization of Islam

[5] Peter *Scholten*, Fleur *Baggerman*, Linda *Dellouche*, Venja *Kampen*, Julia *Wolf* and Rick *Ypma*, Policy Innovation in Refugee Integration - A comparative analysis of innovation policy strategies toward refugee integration in Europe (Rotterdam 2018) 14.
[6] Sieglinde *Rosenberger* and Didier *Ruedin*, The Politicization of Asylum Seekers and Other Immigrant Groups in a Comparative Perspective. In: Franz *Merli*a. Magdalena *Pöschl* (eds.), Das Asylrecht als Experimentierfeld - Eine Analyse seiner Besonderheiten aus vergleichender Sicht (Vienna 2017) 13–26.
[7] Farid *Hafez*, Shifting borders: Islam and Muslims in the media in Austria. In: Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs 34, Farid *Hafez*, Shifting borders: Islamophobia as common ground for building pan-European right-wing unity. In: Patterns of Prejudice 48 (2014) 479–499.

has become a common theme, often linking Muslims with issues of terrorism and radicalization in the public imagination.[8]

The political arena in Austria has also been a source of significant discourse about Muslims. Researchers like Reinhard Heinisch and Kristina Hauser have documented the rise of right-wing populism and its impact on Muslim populations, noting how parties like the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) have instrumentalized fears around Muslim immigration to gain electoral support.[9] Such political movements typically cast Muslims as a monolithic group at odds with so-called 'traditional Austrian values'. Counter-discourses, however, have emerged within Muslim communities themselves, with efforts to reclaim narratives and assert a pluralistic Austrian Muslim identity.[10] Through community organizations and participation in political discourse, Austrian Muslims are actively engaging in what can be described as "identity authoring", a process of reshaping their collective image in the face of external pressures and stereotypes.

The current state of research on Muslims in Austria covers a broad spectrum of topics, including historical contexts, social integration, religious practices, and the legal recognition of Islam in Austria. This study aims at establishing a new and community-based perspective on Muslims/Islam in Austria by evaluating autobiographical accounts of Austrian Muslims. In contrast to previous research this thesis does not specifically focus on the social integration of Muslims in Austria or the migration process but rather highlights questions of identities and belonging by amplifying stories of Muslims from diverse backgrounds in Austria. This is accomplished by drawing on numerous previous works on historical contexts of migration in Austria, histories of Austrian *Gastarbeiter,* social integration of Muslim migrants, legal frameworks as well as challenges, including Islamophobia and discrimination, faced by Muslims in Austria. These works support the contextualization of accounts shared by participants.
However, there are only a few projects that have previously used oral history as a qualitative research method to explore questions of identities and belonging of Muslims in Austria. These projects include Georg Traska's socio-anthropological and cultural study at Viennese middle

[8] Michał *Krzyżanowski* and Ruth *Wodak*, The politics of exclusion: Debating migration in Austria (New York 2009).
[9] Reinhard *Heinisch* and Karin *Hauser*, The Mainstreaming of the Austrian Freedom Party: The More Things Change… In: Tjitske *Akkerman*, Sarah *de Lange* and Matthijs Rooduijn. (eds.), Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream? (London 2016) 73–93.
[10] Astrid *Mattes*, "Wenn wir nichts verändern, wer macht's denn dann?" Zivilgesellschaftliche Teilhabe in religiösen Vereinen am Beispiel Muslimische Jugend Österreichs. In: Farid *Hafez*, Regina *Polak*, Raoul *Kneucker* (eds.), Jung, muslimisch, österreichisch: Einblicke in 20 Jahre Muslimische Jugend Österreich (Vienna 2016) 77–95.

schools titled "Young Muslims and Muslimas".[11] This initiative focuses on how Muslim youths practice or do not practice Islam in everyday life, examines the intercultural coexistence of Muslim and non-Muslim pupils in and outside of schools and questions them about the national and international portrayal of Muslims in the media.

Historical accounts of labor migration to Austria from Turkey and Tunisia in the 1970s were also researched by Anne Unterwurzacher. This research was based on *guest workers'* experiences working at the Glanzstoff-Fabrik in St. Pölten from 1962 to 1975 and how they, despite the existence of asymmetries of power, made use of social norms, appropriated Austrian culture or refused to do so.[12] Another researcher examined the experiences of a group of Muslims from Bosnia-Herzegovina, previously under Austrian-Hungarian rule, performing Hajj (Islamic pilgrimage) from 1878-1914.[13]

A critical difference between the projects mentioned before and the project "Muslims in Austria", which this thesis uses as a primary data source, is that the researchers are mainly from within these communities. This centers an emic perspective and therefore impacted the research method design, questions asked and the dynamic during the oral history interviews. The deliberate decentering of normative Whiteness throughout the research process and the use of the lens of critical theory in the design and conduct of the interviews is what differentiates the data provided in this thesis from previous research in this field.

A fundamental basis for my understanding of the diversity of Muslim life in Austria comes from my own lived experience as a child of Muslim Palestinian migrants along with my professional experiences working with diverse Muslim youth and their communities for more than a decade.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This thesis identifies two research questions: One, **how do the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria author their identities through oral history interviews?** To explore this question, this thesis will delve into narratives crafted by oral history participants and identify

[11] Georg *Traska*, Junge Musliminnen und Muslime. In: Sparklingscience.at (01.11.2017-30.11.2019), https://www.sparklingscience.at/de/show.html?--typo3_neos_nodetypes-page[id]=1258 (28.05.2024).

[12] Anne *Unterwurzacher*,"'The Other Colleagues': Labor Migration at the Glanzstoff-Fabrik in St. Pölten from 1962 to 1975." In: Günter *Bischof* and Dirk *Rupnow* (eds.), Migration in Austria(Contemporary Austrian Studies 26, New Orleans 2017) 139–160.

[13] Valeria *Heuberger*, Die Pilgerfahrt nach Mekka von Muslimen aus Bosnien-Herzegowina unter österreichisch-ungarischer Herrschaft (1878-1914). In: Clemens *Ruthner* and Tamara *Scheer* (eds.), Bosnien-Herzegowina und Österreich-Ungarn 1878-1918. Annäherungen an eine Kolonie (Tübingen 2018) 193–210.

common themes. Participants were selected on the basis of self-identifying as Muslims, regardless of their level of religiosity or viewing it as a cultural marker. “First post-war generations of Muslims in Austria” categorizes senior Muslims, largely born pre-1964, therefore, post Second World War. They are either first-generation immigrants to Austria, some of whom can be categorized as so-called *Gastarbeiter,* or they were born and raised in Austria, having converted to Islam later. The focus on oral history allows for a profound understanding of personal and collective identities as recounted by the individuals themselves, providing a rich tapestry of lived experiences and self-perceptions of Muslims in the context of a post-war European nation undergoing rapid transformation.

The hypothesis for the first research question is that the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria constructed their identities through a narrative framework that emphasizes resilience, cultural adaptation or a fusion of their national and religious identities. Oral history interviews are likely to reveal that these individuals author their identities by fusing elements of Austrian culture while simultaneously maintaining core aspects of their Islamic and cultural heritage. This dual narrative allows for the preservation of a distinct Muslim identity within a broader Austrian cultural context.

Two**,** what are the elements, experiences and socio-political realities elicited from the interviews that foster or hinder a sense of belonging and how have Austria’s immigration and integration policies affected the self-identification processes of these post-war Muslim generations? This analysis will be contextualized by time periods marked by policy changes affecting Muslims in Austria such as the long term institutional and legal consequences of the Islam Law 1912 and the Amendment to Islam Law 2015 and 2022 followed by political changes.

The hypothesis for the second research question is that elements such as (religious) community, family, civic engagement and public visibility of Islamic practices emerge from the interviews as key factors that foster a sense of belonging among the first post-war Muslim generations in Austria. Conversely, experiences of social exclusion, discrimination, and political discourse that frames Muslims as the Other are hypothesized to hinder their sense of belonging. Austria’s evolving immigration and integration policies are expected to have a complex impact on processes of self-identification, with more inclusive policies enhancing a sense of dual identity, while restrictive policies exacerbate feelings of alienation and a stronger clinging to an either exclusively Muslim or Muslim-ethnic identity.

Definition of Terms

Identities

The concept of identity has been extensively debated and conceptualized across various disciplines. Identity can be viewed as the way individuals and groups define themselves in relation to both their personal self-conceptions and their social statuses within a broader community. It is not a static entity but a dynamic process of self-understanding and social interaction. This thesis leans on Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper's understanding and definition of identity which suggests that identity is not a singular, coherent, and stable essence but rather a category of practice that can be multiple, fluid, and constructed through social processes.[14] They argue for moving beyond the notion of identity as a singular, bounded entity and instead consider how identities are enacted and negotiated in specific contexts.

Stuart Hall emphasizes the importance of representation in evaluating the positions from which we speak or write.[15] He suggests thinking of the concept of *identity* as a production, which is "never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation" instead of "an already accomplished fact".[16] This master thesis focuses mainly on stories told by people of the *diaspora,* referring to individuals and communities that originated from a specific geographical area but live outside of it.[17] Therefore, consideration of Hall's concept of "cultural identity" becomes essential in understanding, interpreting and contextualizing participants' responses. "Cultural identity" considers a past of colonialism, slavery and migration and recognizes a potential of "loss of identity" throughout history therefore acknowledging that one experience or one identity as such does not exist. "Cultural identity [...] is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'".[18] Hall reminds us of the profound impact of colonialism and the urgent need to adopt a perspective on *identity* that recognizes the deep–seated trauma inflicted by colonial experiences.

The way in which marginalized groups and their experiences are depicted in dominant narratives reflects a deliberate exercise of cultural dominance and standardization. According to Edward

[14] Rogers *Brubaker* and Frederick *Cooper*, Beyond "Identity". In: Theory and Society 29 (2000) 1–47.
[15] Stuart *Hall,* Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In: Jonathan *Rutherford* (ed.), Identity: Community, Culture, Difference (London 1990) 222–237.
[16] *Hall,* Cultural Identity and Diaspora, 222.
[17] Kevin *Kenny,* Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford 2013).
[18] *Hall,* Cultural Identity and Diaspora, 225.

Said's concept of *Orientalism* these narratives not only categorized people of the diaspora as fundamentally different and Othered within Western knowledge systems but also wielded the power to shape the self-perception of colonized people as the "Other".[19] The process of representation is inherently linked to power dynamics, as emphasized by Michel Foucault's notion of the inseparable relationship between *power/knowledge*.[20]

Lastly, Frantz Fanon highlights the significant difference between merely labeling a group as the "Other" and indoctrinating them with this perception through coercive and subtle means, leading to a form of self-recognition that aligns with these imposed standards.[21] This thesis adopts a critical theory lens grounded in the post- and decolonial understandings of Hall and Said when examining participants' understanding and perception of self and their cultural identities.

Belonging

Belonging is a related but distinct concept that encompasses the experience of being part of a community or environment in a meaningful way. It is a state where individuals feel acceptance, inclusion, and recognition within a group or space. The sense of belonging is shaped by social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. While identity can be seen as who we are, belonging relates more to our relationships with others and our place within social structures. Academic discussions detailed below highlight the complexities of belonging, noting that it involves a negotiation of personal and collective identities within given power structures and cultural expectations.

Nira Yuval-Davis describes belonging as a complex and multifaceted construct that encompasses personal, social, and political dimensions. She articulates that belonging involves emotional attachment, social connections, and the construction of identities within specific socio-political contexts.[22] Marco Antonsich however, explores belonging in the spatial context, considering it as a sense of place and an individual's feeling of being "at home" within a particular geographical or social setting.[23] This understanding of belonging is linked to how connected people feel to certain places and the different aspects of identity and recognition that come with those particular spaces. The definition of belonging that used in this thesis includes personal, social, political and spatial

[19] Edward *Said*, Orientalism (New York 1978).
[20] Michel *Foucault*, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings by Michel Foucault 1972–1977 edited by Colin Gordon (New York 1980).
[21] Frantz *Fanon*, Black Skin, White Masks (London 1952).
[22] Nira *Yuval-Davis*, Belonging and the politics of belonging. In: Patterns of Prejudice 40 (2006) 197–214.
[23] Marco *Antonsich*, Searching for Belonging – An Analytical Framework. In: Geography Compass 4 (2010) 644–659.

dimensions in its analysis. Moreover, the same factors are also reflected in the line of questioning and the answers found in the oral history interviews. It can thus be generally stated that identity refers to the individual and collective understanding of self, whereas belonging signifies an emotional and practical engagement with broader social entities. Both are continuously shaped, reshaped and influenced by personal experience, social interaction as well as political and media discourse.

Culture

The broad term *culture* in this paper is defined as a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, practices and material traits that characterize a group or society. It encompasses the social behavior, norms, knowledge, beliefs, art, laws, customs, capabilities and habits of individuals within these groups. *Culture* is transmitted through language, material objects, rituals, institutions, and art. *Culture*, similarly to the term *identity*, is viewed as something constantly evolving and not limited to the ethnicity or nationality of a person or group.[24]

Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis offers a comprehensive exploration of the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria, using oral history interviews to author their identities. This thesis gives insight into the historical and legal rootedness of Islam's status in Austria but also underscores the significance of personal narratives in understanding the complex interplay between identities, society, and policy.

The introduction lays the foundation by establishing the relevance of the study, clarifying the research questions, and stating the hypotheses. This section is vital in setting out the context for the readers and explicating the political milieu within which the study is situated. It is then followed by an argument for the necessity of this methodological approach by highlighting its value in giving voice to marginalized perspectives. This chapter also provides a comparative lens to analyze how Muslims have been studied in Western countries through oral history, drawing parallels and distinctions that enrich the discourse on identity authorship.

[24] Helen *Spencer-Oatey*, What is Culture? In: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/globalpeople2 (2012), https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/globalpad-rip/openhouse/interculturalskills_old/core_concept_compilations/global_pad_-_what_is_culture.pdf (28/06/2024).

A historical and legal examination of Islam's rootedness in Austria is then conducted that explores the historic institutionalization of Islam in Austria and the effects this has had on Muslim communities legally, infrastructurally and socially. The historical focus stretches from the pre-Islam Law era and the prior presence of Muslim life in Austria to the official recognition of Islam as a religious community in 1912 and its legal amendments of 2015 and 2022. It sets the scene for understanding the current dynamics and challenges faced by Muslims in Austria.
The stories of individuals, the core of the oral history project "Muslims in Austria," are presented in the following chapter. The narratives of Maha A., Anas Shakfeh., Fatima O., and Dhia Sh. serve as primary sources for examining the nuanced ways in which Muslims in Austria craft their sense of self and belonging. This is followed by a detailed analysis of factors that were identified as fostering or hindering a sense of belonging with Muslims in Austria. Subsections discuss diverse topics such as experiences of acceptance, community support and policy impact as well as forms of exclusion, discrimination and policy critique that were expressed within the interviews. This in-depth look at factors fostering or hindering a sense of belonging reveals the complex fabric of personal and collective identities within Muslim communities.
The conclusion synthesizes these findings, offering a reflective outlook on the implications of the study for the understanding of Muslim identities in contemporary Austria, drawing together the threads of historical legacies, personal narratives, and political discourses to offer insights and suggest directions for future research.

Methodology - Why Oral History?

This thesis adopts a qualitative approach by collecting and analyzing data from four audiovisual oral history interviews which are also part of the oral history project *Menschenleben* by the Österreichische Mediathek. It is a means of capturing individuals' narratives and memories in their own words, offering a rich and nuanced perspective on historical phenomena.

According to Paul Thompson, the use of oral history as a scientific method is "the renaissance of memory as a historical source".[25] The Oral History Association describes oral history as "a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people,

[25] Paul *Thompson*, The Voice of the Past. Oral History (Oxford 1978) 88.

communities, and participants in past events".[26] In *The Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson cite four paradigm shifts that have decisively shaped oral history.[27] One of these paradigm shifts represents the use of memoir as a historical source in the context of World War II. However, it was the focus on social history that pushed the use of this scholarly method. "Give the voiceless a voice" became the mantra of this approach, which was based primarily on marginalized or oppressed social groups.

The interviews in this thesis were conducted with the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria, who live in different Austrian regions, in metropolitan, small town and rural settings and, if not born in Austria, immigrated from different countries to Austria. The interviews were conducted in German. The period of the interview material used extends from April 2021 to November 2022, and they were conducted alternately by myself and my two project partners Dr. Georg Traska and Omar T. Nasr. The data is analyzed using the *Grounded Theory Method (GTM)* for the first research question and the *Sentiment Analysis* and *Topic Modeling* for the second one. The *GTM* adopts a thematic approach, where the researcher identifies patterns, ideas, and concepts that recur within and across interviews.[28] Coding and categorizing these themes help to interpret the data, bringing forward complexities and contradictions within the narrative.[29] To answer and analyze the second research question two categories were created: 1) factors that created a stronger sense of and fostered and those which 2) hindered or impeded a sense of belonging. Within both those categories the data was analyzed identifying recurring topics mentioned by participants.

According to the Oral History Association, Oral History is “a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events”.[30] While this definition can be useful it does not necessarily reveal the function of the method and must be followed by studying the methodological development of Oral History. Significant historical events in Europe such as World War II and the heightened interest given to social history heavily impacted how Oral History was viewed. More attention was given to social movements of marginalized people such as the working class, women and black people.

[26] *Oral History Association*, Oral history Defined. In: oralhistory.org, https://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/ (28.05.2024).
[27] Robert *Perks* and Alistair *Thomson* (eds.), The Oral History Reader (London 2015).
[28] Donald *Ritchie*, Doing Oral History a Practical Guide (Oxford 2003).
[29] Lynn *Abrams*, Oral History Theory (London 2010).
[30] *Oral History Association*, Oral history Defined.

This qualitative research was mainly interested in amplifying voices of the oppressed and marginalized.

In addition, continued criticism of the field of anthropology grew louder while concerns of power imbalances, misrepresentations of peoples and a rootedness in colonial legacies overshadowed its methodological raison d'être, deeming Oral History a possibly more ethical alternative research method. Anthropology has historically been used in colonial enterprises where anthropologists worked in contexts of colonial domination, studying colonized societies and positioning themselves as authoritative voices over the cultures they studied. This has led to misrepresentation, oversimplification of complex societal dynamics, and has raised questions of ownership of cultural narratives and calls for a disruption of Whiteness in history research. Ethnographic works such as Bronislaw Malinowski's "Argonauts of the Western pacific", make use of the same colonized mental images of native's cultures, languages and systems like ethnographers he simultaneously criticizes for being a "disturbing element" within the "savages community".[31] Research methods typically used in social sciences in the past have been categorized by Aimé Césaire as white men annexing science and ethics all while displaying features of the "white man's burden".[32]
Decolonial approaches therefore call for a re-examination of power relations in socio-anthropological research and advocate for methodologies that empower studied communities, promote the co-production of knowledge, challenge historical injustices and emphasize reflexivity.

Oral history interviews have emerged as a powerful and invaluable research method within the realm of community-based research. As a qualitative approach, oral history interviews allow researchers to delve deep into the lived experiences, perspectives, and narratives of individuals within a community. By engaging directly with community members, this method facilitates a collaborative and participatory research process, ensuring that the voices and stories of the community are heard, documented, and preserved for future generations. Oral history interviews provide a unique opportunity to capture the richness and complexity of human experiences.

By conducting face-to-face or recorded conversations with community members, researchers gain access to unique insights, personal anecdotes, and untold stories that may not be found in traditional archival sources.[33] These interviews can unveil local histories, cultural and religious

[31] Bronislaw *Malinowski*, Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea (London 1922) 9.
[32] Aimé *Césaire* and Joan *Pinkham*, Discourse on Colonialism (New York 2000).
[33] Alessandro *Portelli*, The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History (New York 1991).

practices, and collective memories that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the community's past, present, and aspirations for the future. Furthermore, oral history interviews provide an opportunity to challenge dominant narratives and amplify marginalized voices, particularly those groups and communities that have been excluded or underrepresented in official records and accounts.

Oral history interviews offer a platform to rectify these gaps in knowledge and bring forth marginalized perspectives.[34] By including diverse voices and experiences, community-based researchers can foster a more inclusive and accurate representation of the community's history and heritage. The process of conducting oral history interviews is collaborative and respectful, emphasizing the importance of building trust and establishing rapport with interviewees. Researchers work closely with community members to co-create interview questions, ensuring that the topics discussed are relevant and meaningful to the community.[35] This collaborative approach empowers participants to actively shape the research process and facilitates a sense of ownership and pride in sharing their stories. In addition to generating valuable research data, oral history interviews also contribute to community empowerment and cohesion. According to Dunaway, the act of sharing personal narratives can strengthen social bonds, foster intergenerational connections, and promote a sense of collective identity.[36]

The nature of using open-ended and more general questions rather than closed ones minimizes the possibility of bias in research and actively de-centers Whiteness in the research process, and in public discourses later on. In particular, when it comes to the public discourses surrounding Muslims in Austria quantitative studies with a very specific context and target group have been used by politicians to criminalize Muslims and make generalizations about them. Therefore, Oral History, if used with a *power-with* rather than *power-over*-approach, has the methodological prerequisites needed to disrupt dominant discourses that homogenize Muslims in Austria. Additionally, it can be used to give power to those communities, critically reflect on the power dynamics at play and use researchers' academic privilege to highlight their voices.

[34] *Thompson*, Voice of the Past.
[35] *Ritchie*, Doing Oral History, 34–35, 227.
[36] David K. *Dunaway*, Oral history and the study of communities: Problems, paradoxes and possibilities. In: Journal of American History 78 (1991), 596–606.

Power, Privilege & Positionality

Researchers need to critically reflect on their epistemology, identities and positionality in the work they do. This includes thinking about questions such as: what are your identities? What privileges might you hold compared to your participants? How do you know what you know? What is your position on the research that you are investigating? Why have you chosen this research? Who is your audience? Michael Muhammed et al. emphasize how the necessity of critically reflecting our relationship as researchers with or within communities becomes clearer when we understand social determinants and power structures i.e., poverty, status hierarchies, racism, and corporate-industrial policies, among others.[37]

Relationships between academics and communities are very much entangled. "Researcher identity and positionality reflect statuses (in part) derived from dominant group social academic institutions, and which may have an impact on the valuation of community knowledge and outcomes. Dominant culture systems have been used historically to oppress or disadvantage subordinate groups, through political, economic, educational, and knowledge system means".[38] Marginalized communities of color are often not given the space and platform to speak about what is important to them. The narrative is often controlled by researchers' views embedded in the dominant culture which in many ways can center this idea of *Damage Centered Research*[39] sharing only the narratives that show the harm that has been placed on communities as compared to the knowledge and resilience these communities have built in resistance to colonial/oppressive/dominant structures.

Study of Muslims in Muslim Minority Countries

Oral History, according to Paul Thompson, can contribute to distinguishing between beliefs and practices of average followers of a religion from those of their leaders.[40]
This is particularly relevant to the history of Muslims in Muslim minority countries since the ethnic diversity of Muslims in these countries is accompanied by a diversity of understandings of Islam

[37] Michael *Muhammad*, Nina *Wallerstein*, Andrew J. *Sussman*, Magdalena *Avila*, Lorenda *Belone* and Bonnie *Duran*, Reflections on researcher Identity and Power: the Impact of Positionality on Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Processes and Outcomes. In: Critical Sociology 41 (2015) 1045–1063.
[38] Leisy *Abrego*, Research as Accompaniment: Reflections on objectivity, ethics and emotions. In: Lynette *Chua* and Mark Fathi *Massoud* (eds.), Out of Place. Fieldwork and Positionality in Law and Society (Cambridge Studies in Law and Society, Cambridge 2021), 36–56.
[39] Eve *Tuck*, Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities. In: Harvard Educational Review 79 (2009) 409–428.
[40] *Thompson*, Voice of the Past, 69.

and practices. These reflections led Muslims in Muslim minority countries such as the US and the UK to initiate Oral History projects such as *Muslims in Brooklyn* by the *Brooklyn Historical Society*[41] and *Everyday Muslim*[42] by the UK-based Khizra Foundation.

Muslims in Brooklyn was created in 2017 by historian Zaheer Ali with the intent to close a "gap in knowledge and understanding [...] between many non-Muslim Americans and their fellow Muslim citizens and neighbors. A gap that has led to the marginalization and erasure of Muslim histories, diversity, and experiences from our national life".[43] The project coordinators' aim is to use various media formats and experiences to create a "significant narrative shift about Muslims not only in Brooklyn but throughout the country".[44] The coordinators, along with Thompson see value in using Oral History as a method to achieve that narrative shift as it "provides [...] greater access to often marginalized or diminished voices and can be both personally empowering and collectively transformative".[45]

Similarly, the *Everyday Muslim* project seeks to build a comprehensive and unique portrayal of Muslim life that allows the community to take ownership of their own history by documenting their heritage.[46] They describe their aim in collecting and documenting the presence and contribution of Muslim life in Britain through various multimedia formats "to provide a comprehensive and unmediated portrayal of Muslim life in Britain" and concurrently "educate and empower the Muslim community in the importance of creating tangible connections between their Muslim heritage and the representation of their identity in the wider society".[47]

Both projects share commonalities in their objectives to fill a gap in their respective national histories, empower Muslim communities by taking ownership of their history and narratives and contribute to accurate representation of Muslim life. One aspect that *Muslims in Brooklyn* highlights in their objectives is the collection of testimonies from Muslim individuals who have lived through significant events, periods or social changes within a country.[48] They have interviewed over 50 people of all ages and backgrounds, including immigrants and first-generation Brooklyn Muslims from Bangladesh, Egypt, Puerto Rico as well as Brooklyn. These narrators also commented on or were asked to comment by the interviewer on certain periods and events during

[41] *Brooklyn Historical Society*, Muslims in Brooklyn. In: Brooklynhistory.org (July 2020), https://muslims.brooklynhistory.org/ (28.05.2024).
[42] *Khizra Foundation.* Everyday Muslim. In: https://www.everydaymuslim.org/ (28.05.2024).
[43] *Brooklyn Historical Society*, Muslims in Brooklyn, https://muslims.brooklynhistory.org/
[44] *Brooklyn Historical Society*, Muslims in Brooklyn, https://muslims.brooklynhistory.org/
[45] *Brooklyn Historical Society*, Muslims in Brooklyn, https://muslims.brooklynhistory.org/
[46] *Khizra Foundation*, Everyday Muslim, https://www.everydaymuslim.org/about/the-project/
[47] *Khizra Foundation*, Everyday Muslim, https://www.everydaymuslim.org/about/the-project/
[48] *Brooklyn Historical Society*, Muslims in Brooklyn, https://muslims.brooklynhistory.org/

their interviews. The following shows an example from an interview with Imam Siraj Wahhaj, who was interviewed by Zaheer Ali, of how testimonies on significant historical events can function as a corrective and supplement to existing sources.[49] The interviewer intervened and asked the interviewee how he experienced the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968:

> WAHHAJ: Sixty-eight. I graduated from -- from High School of Music & Art in '68 it was.
> ALI: Okay, 1968 was a big year --
> WAHHAJ: A big year.
> ALI: -- in this country.
> WAHHAJ: Major.
> ALI: On April 4th, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.
> WAHHAJ: My favorite person. I loved Martin Luther King Jr. more than you can ever imagine.
> ALI: Tell me where you were when you heard about this news and -- and how you responded.
> WAHHAJ: Of course, I would have to be playing basketball. I was at the St. -- St. John's Recreational Center, a center on Schenectady Avenue in Brooklyn about seven blocks from my house, playing basketball. And they made an announcement that Martin Luther King Jr. was just now assassinated. And they closed the gym. And I remember crying. I went home crying. Because this was the man. This was the man that we respected, my parents respected. My parents went to Washington DC, the March on Washington. So he was -- Martin Luther King Jr. was loved and respected in our -- in our household. Of course, I'm a Christian at that time. And he was my favorite.
> ALI: And how -- how did you -- how did that impact you in -- in -- in [inaudible].
> WAHHAJ: I remember saying I believed in -- in the philosophy of Malcolm. In Martin Luther King, nonviolence and all of that. But I -- I remember becoming a little bit bitter. And when we found out that he was assassinated by a White man, I kind of said, "Well, listen, man. That's not -- that's not the direction we need to go to. We need to be more militant." And I said to my -- I remember saying to myself, "I'm going to either be a Black Muslim or a Black Panther."

[49] *Thompson*, Doing Oral History 66.

> Which is interesting, that movie about the Black Panther just came out. So that was my thinking. That was my mentality at that moment.
> ALI: What had you known about the Black Muslims or Muslims in general at that point in time?
> WAHHAJ: You know, we kind of hear about it a little bit. I didn't know it -- about it in detail. But I -- I began to learn, then, more about Malcolm X. And I remember after the death of Martin Luther King Jr., I started studying Malcolm X. And be-- I got every record album. All the speeches. And I was running around the house imitating Ma-- Malcolm X. And so that was the beginning of my moving toward becoming more militant. As you know, now I'm 18 years old. And I'm -- I'm beginning -- I'm beginning to change my attitude[50]

This example shows how oral testimonies can be important in filling gaps in historical records or can challenge official narratives as well as widely held perceptions about national history. This interview shows how the collective memory of historical events, such as the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., tell us more about how social movements like the Black Panthers and others gained a following. The uproar within the Black communities after finding out that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated by a White man, who was speculated to have been a scapegoat of the U.S. government, increased the distrust in the police and governmental institutions and energized the Black Power Movement. Wahhaj's testimony contextualizes these events by giving us insights into the societal dynamics that followed and adds personal dimensions to the understanding of the past, highlighting the importance of memory in shaping historical narratives.

While *Muslims in Brooklyn* focuses on intentionally placing participants' testimonies alongside key periods in (Muslim) American history such as "Early Congregations 1900-1930", "Migrations and Growth 1930-1950", "Civil Rights and Muslim Life 1950-1970" or "Organizing for Change 2010-2019", *Everyday Muslim* has various projects that exist independently, with each one focusing on either a historical event ("Remembering Partition", "Britain's first purpose built Mosque"), specific Muslim communities during a certain period of time ("We weren't expecting to stay") or to highlight the diversity of specific Muslim communities ("Exploring the diversity of Black British Muslim heritage in London"). One aspect that is frequently highlighted and criticized

[50] Oral history interview with Siraj Wahhaj, February 19, 2018, Brooklyn ; for "Muslims in Brooklyn" oral history project; Interviewer: Zaheer Ali, accessed: https://oralhistory.brooklynhistory.org/interviews/wahhaj-siraj-20180219/# (04.03.2024). (min ~7-9).

in Austrian public discourses surrounding Muslims is their religious practice and how they navigate it.[51] It is essential to highlight that most of the opinions and criticism that are shared do not come from within the community but are rather external observations. Therefore, it is interesting how oral history has been used to showcase intricacies of religious life and multifaceted experiences of faith and community. *Everyday Muslim* created a Ramadan Archive and interviewed one of its participants about their experiences fasting during Ramadan as a child in the UK:

> INTERVIEWER: "When did you first start fasting?"
>
> INTERVIEWEE: "Um, wow, I was probably about ten or eleven years old. I always remember Ramadan growing up because the whole neighborhood would just, you know, um, swap food. So, like my mum would give me like a, like a, plate covered with a kitchen roll napkin and she'll point me towards which doors to go to and say: 'OK you need to go to that one and come back with the plate and then go to that one.' And vice versa, it was awesome".[52]

These testimonies conducted in Muslim minority countries about historical events, religious practices and shared national heritage can therefore not only fill gaps and embed Muslim communities into national history but also showcase religious diversity and pluralism within these communities. Furthermore, these contributions capture the lives and experiences of people often excluded from traditional historical narratives.[53] The publication and dissemination of these testimonies is key in accomplishing objectives of community empowerment, challenging dominant historical narratives, preserving cultural and social histories and contributing more broadly to social justice. Thompson stresses how oral history can contribute to social justice efforts by bringing stories of oppression, resistance, and resilience to light and therefore inform contemporary struggles for rights and recognition. Projects like these serve as historical records

[51] Birgit *Seiser*, Fasten während des Ramadans: Immer wieder Probleme an Schulen. In: Kurier.at (26.05.18), https://www.vienna.at/oevp-will-fastenverbot-waehrend-des-ramadans-fuer-schulkinder/5823755 (28.05.2024).
[52] Oral history interview with Nadeem Javid, March 2014; for "Everyday Muslim" project; Interviewer: Sadiya Ahmed, accessed https://www.everydaymuslim.org/we-werent-expecting-to-stay-interviews/my-childhood-ramadan-memory/ (28.05.2024).
[53] *Thompson*, Doing Oral History, 88.

and democratize the writing of history by making it a more equitable and representative understanding of the past.

Ill. 1: Photo of Interviewee's family (1989, UK)

Historical and Legal Rootedness of Islam in Austria

While the study of Muslims and Islam in Europe is currently a fast-growing field of research, many publications and handbooks demonstrate a certain bias. Many publications of the 21st century entertain popular debates about the hijab (headscarf), the politicization of Islam, questions of security, cultural conflict, and social integration. Simultaneously, research on Islamophobia and the securitization and domestication of Islam has gained ground. However, it soon becomes evident that there is a fundamental gap and academic neglect in historicizing the everyday life, religious practices, and knowledge production amongst Muslims. Manfred Sing notes that due to the contemporary "concern" at the presence of Muslims in European societies, many politicians, especially those from the right-wing, justify their anti-Muslim stance by referencing historical events in which "Islam plays the role of the 'Other', the negative counterpart to everything European".[54]

Sing goes on to argue that such an understanding of history only becomes possible when memory gaps exist and "Europe" as a concept is approached as a "static entity in spite of its historically

[54] Manfred *Sing*, Against all Odds: How to Re-Inscribe Islam into European History. In: Simone *Derix* and Margareth *Lanziger* (eds.), Housing Capital: Resource and Representation (European History Yearbook 18, Berlin and Boston 2017) 129–162.

changing form, inner diversity, and politically or ideally constructed character".[55] This concept has become acceptable due to the century-long efforts of historians and theologians to constitute "Europe" and "European Identity" by directly opposing it to a cultural, religious, and political Other, making "Europe" a homogeneous idea.[56]

The historical depiction of "Europe" as a representation of Christianity that survived attacks from Arabs and Turks is, according to Sing, a myth that was created retroactively and is present in dates like 732 (battles at Tours and Poitiers), 1453 (the fall of Constantinople), 1529 and 1683 (sieges of Vienna). Therefore, depicting the diverse and continuous story of Islam in Europe re-negotiates this "European Identity" and consequently creates a more inclusive historiography of Islam that questions "the social, religious, spatial, cultural, legal and political conceptualizations of both 'European' and 'Islamic' history".[57]

This chapter is an attempt to trace this history by considering the presence of Islam back to the Habsburg Empire, and the subsequent nation state, Austria, marked by historical encounters, migrations and the legal recognition of Islam in Austria in 1912. All these events have shaped and continue to shape the lived experiences of Muslims in Austria. This chapter explores the multifaceted journey of Islam and Muslims in Austria and Europe, tracing their historical roots, their impact on national history and the legal frameworks that influenced their status, migrations and the status quo.

The Gastarbeiter-narrative

One of the most common associations when tracing back the presence of Muslim life in Austria, is the arrival of *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) from Turkey and former Yugoslavia to Austria after World War II. However, recent research has shown that the Muslim populations in the region date back as far as the ninth century.[58] Therefore, the presence of Muslims "significantly predates not only the modern "nations" in the regions, but even the nebulous "Ostarrichi document" of 996, on the basis of which a new Austrian "national" identity was invented after 1945".[59] Omar Nasr and

[55] *Sing*, Against All Odds, 132.
[56] *Sing*, Against All Odds, 133.
[57] *Sing*, Against All Odds, 135.
[58] Smail *Balić*, Zur Geschichte der Muslime in Österreich I: Lebensräume und Konfliktfelder. In: Susanne *Heine* (ed.), Islam zwischen Selbstbild und Klischee: Eine Religion im österreichischen Schulbuch (Kölner Veröffentlichungen Zur Religionsgeschichte 26, Cologne 1995) 23–35.
[59] Omar T. *Nasr* and Tim *Corbett*, Diversifying Modern Austrian History: Exploring Parallels and Intersections between Jewish and Muslim Histories in Austria. In: PaRDeS: Journal of the Association for Jewish Studies in Germany (Forthcoming) 2–3.

Tim Corbett argue that even though both Muslim and Jewish populations demographically and culturally formed a fundamental part of Austrian history, the myth of a solely Christian culture and - after the Holocaust - an extended "Judeo-Christian" culture in Central Europe remains widespread.[60] According to records from the Medical Faculty of the University of Vienna an increasing number of Muslims from Egypt came to Austria for study from 1848-1960[61], in addition to people migrating to Austria from the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire.

Following the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Habsburg Empire in 1878, and subsequent annexation, the Muslim population rose to over half a million.[62] This laid the legal and social groundwork for the landmark moment of the Islam Law of 1912, granting official legal status to Islam and its adherents. To date, this law is a pioneering recognition of Islam by a European state. The Islam Law of 1912 allowed for the practice of Muslim religious life, the establishment of mosques, and the organization of Muslim communities under the Habsburg Empire. From 1888 onward many Bosnian Muslim soldiers were stationed in Vienna, having had prayer rooms within barracks and a military imam from 1891 onwards.[63]

Ill. 2: First k.u.k Bosnian-Herzegovinian Regiment in Graz

[60] *Nasr and Corbett*, Diversifying Modern Austrian History, 3.
[61] Marcel *Chahrour*, The 'Mecca of Medicine.' Students from the Arab world at the Medical Faculty of the University of Vienna 1848-1960. In: Daniela *Angetter*, Birgit *Nemec*, Herbert *Posch*, Christiane *Druml* and Paul *Weindling* (eds.), Strukturen und Netzwerke: Medizin und Wissenschaft in Wien 1848-1955 (Göttingen 2018) 487–509.
[62] *Nasr and Corbett*, Diversifying Modern Austrian History, 4.
[63] Omar T. *Nasr*, Muslims in Interwar Vienna: The Making and Failing of a Community. In: Contemporary European History (Forthcoming).

Ill. 3: Second k.u.k. Bosnian-Herz. Regiment in Vienna

Dautović's recent research found that Muslim students founded the association *Zvijezda* in Vienna in 1904, the first known civil Muslim association in Austria and first Bosnian association in the diaspora. Disputes within the association led to the founding of another association, *Svijest*, in 1907 and the "Club of Muslim Academics from Bosnia-Herzegovina in Vienna" in 1914.[64]

Ill. 4: Bosnian "progressives" meeting the Emperor (Nov. 1908)

Reichsgesetzblatt

für die

im Reichsrate vertretenen Königreiche und Länder.

LXVI. Stück. — Ausgegeben und versendet am 9. August 1912.

159.

Gesetz vom 15. Juli 1912,

betreffend die Anerkennung der Anhänger des Islams nach hanefitischem Ritus als Religionsgesellschaft.

Ill. 5: Law Gazette of legal recognition of Islam in 1912

[64] Rijad *Dautović*, Islamitisch Akademischer Verein "Zvijezda": Über Den 1904 Gegründeten Ersten Muslimischen Verein. In: Österreich Geschichtsblätter 74 (2019) 398–402.

The most significant achievement of *Svijest* was the creation of an *Action committee to enforce the legal recognition of Islam in Austria* which eventually led to their recognition as a religious society (*Religionsgesellschaft)* rather than continuing to see them as non-denominational. This recognition was accompanied by specific benefits, such as the freedom to worship publicly and access to Islamic religious education funded by the state. However, due to the absence of an officially approved local religious community (*Kultusgemeinde*) Muslims were not able to access these privileges. Soon after, World War I started and the Habsburg Monarchy collapsed, leaving Muslims unable to establish such a religious community.[65]

While the legal representative body of Muslims in Austria, *Islamische Kultusgemeinde,* wasn't established until 1979, Muslims had already settled in Austria and formed cultural and religious associations decades before. Many Bosnians had left Austria after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, changing the demographic of Muslims migrating to Austria. This now encompassed students, diplomats and merchants from various Arab countries.[66] These Muslims formed intellectual, political and religious organizations in interwar Vienna and partook in Viennese cultural life.[67]

Muslims, during the Second World War, were organized in various associations, most notably the *Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien* (Islamic Community in Vienna), which according to Rijad Dautović was only able to operate under the strict supervision and control of the Nazis.[68] While some members of the association backed the regime, primarily due to political motivations such as opposition to colonialism and Soviet aspirations, others assisted in rescuing Jews by offering them membership in their associations, thus disguising them as Muslims.[69] However there was a group of Muslim academics that had previously founded the first faith association for all Muslims in Austria, known as *Islamischer Kulturbund Wien* (Islamic Cultural Federation Vienna) in 1932, a predecessor to the current *Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich* (Islamic Religious Authority in Austria).

[65] *Nasr*, Muslims in Interwar Vienna, 6.
[66] *Nasr*, Muslims in Interwar Vienna, 6.
[67] *Nasr*, Muslims in Interwar Vienna, 5.
[68] Rijad *Dautović*, 40 Jahre seit der Wiederherstellung der IRG-Wien: Warum die Islamische Religionsgemeinde Wien nicht erst 1979 gegründet wurde. In: Farid *Hafez* and Rijad *Dautović* (eds.), Die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich, 1909–1979–2019: Beiträge zu einem neuen Blick auf ihre Geschichte und Entwicklung (Vienna 2019) 99–124.
[69] Rijad *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (1942-1945). Unpublished paper presented at the annual conference of the Austrian Studies Association. 2022, New Orleans.

Muslims in Interwar Austria

The first attempt at forming a unified Muslim community in Austria was undertaken by a small group of intellectuals in Vienna in 1932. The Egyptian Dr. Zaki Ali, an Austrian convert to Islam Baron Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels, Syrian-born Mohammed Ali Binni and others established the first Muslim faith association for Muslims in Austria, dreaming of a "bright future of Islam in Europe"[70] and according to Nasr "aiming at rooting Muslims in Austrian society and making it their new spiritual home".[71] The existence of these records contests common homogenous public and academic discourses and historical narratives, rather positioning Muslims in Austria and Europe as active and influential denominators in its national and global history.

Ill. 6: Letterhead of *Islamischer Kulturbund*

Ill. 7: Official logo of *Islamischer Kulturbund*

The Egyptian Zaki Ali was sent on an educational mission to Europe by the Egyptian government, arriving in Vienna at the end of 1931. In an interview conducted with him when he reached the age of 85, he shared memories of inquiring about Muslims living in Vienna and later proposed the founding of an Islamic association to leading members of the multiethnic *Orientbund*, a cultural association established in 1931 with a designated *Moslemische Sektion* ("Muslim section"). The goal was to create an explicitly Muslim space with the aim of catering to the needs of the Muslim community in Austria.

The main task of the association was "the support, gathering and organization of all cultural affairs of Muslims of the West and especially those of Austria and the East".[72] They, Muslim men and women, held weekly meetings, in the heart of Viennese coffee houses, discussing topics of faith, announcing conversions and handling religious affairs.[73] The *Moslemische Revue* published a copy of Ali's speech at an Eid-Ul-Fitr [the festival that marks end of Ramadan] celebration in Vienna in 1933 where he addresses a congregation of Muslims and non-Muslims, ending the speech with

[70] Zaki *Ali*, Islam in the World (Lahore 1938) 167.
[71] *Nasr*, Muslims in Interwar Vienna, 1.
[72] OeStA VB, 'XIV 1144, Islamischer Kulturbund in Wien', 1932.
[73] *Nasr*, Muslims in Interwar Vienna, 16.

the words: “At the end I want to express the wish that this evening aims to contribute, on a modest scale, to a greater understanding of the East and strengthen amicable relations between East and West”.[74] This speech highlights multiple aspects that help us understand Muslim life in interwar Vienna. It paints a picture in which Muslims publicly celebrated Islamic holidays, alongside non-Muslims establishing interfaith dialogue efforts early on.

One of the main goals pursued by founding members of the *Islamischer Kulturbund*, the driving force being Dr. Zaki Ali, was to build the first mosque. This project however failed due to a lack of financial commitment from Muslim communities in Austria. When Ali’s own financial instability became an issue, he left Austria for Geneva taking a job organizing the first European Muslim congress taking place in September 1935. With his move to Geneva the association stopped organizing events which eventually led to the dissolution of *Islamischer Kulturbund.* The idea of organizing a Muslim congress has been present since the 1880s, inspired by the Ottoman caliph's desire to create a platform uniting Muslims all over the world. Previously there had been international Muslim congresses in Cairo, and Jerusalem, and also in Moscow, Zara and Mecca in 1924. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and eventual abolition of the caliphate by Atatürk in 1924 was an essential factor for the establishment of the Muslim European congress.[75] The congress was viewed as a vehicle by many to unify Islam and Muslims amongst all the loss of control that was experienced after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and in the face of fascist movements sweeping over European states such as Italy and Austria.

Ill. 8: First European Muslim Congress (Genève 1935) with almost all participants

[74] Zaki *Ali*, Islamischer Kulturbund Wien. In: Moslemische Revue (April 1933) 12-14. Accessed: https://berlin.ahmadiyya.org/m-rev/apr33.pdf (15.06.2024).
[75] William L. *Cleveland*, review of: Martin Kramer, Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses (New York 1986). In: The International History Review 8 (1986), 659.

Muslim Presence during World War II

In 1937, Zaki Ali was still optimistic about the "bright future for Islam in Europe" and had planned to return to Vienna to continue his work in the association; his return however was prevented, amongst other reasons, by the *Anschluss* in 1938 and the consequential rise of Nazism and xenophobia in the German Reich. Austrian convert and co-creator of *Islamischer Kulturbund* took on an anti-fascist-stance and was regularly invited to give speeches at anti-fascist events. His anti-Nazi stance forced him to flee Austria and seek political refuge in India because he was on the Nazis' blacklist. [76] While the *Islamischer Kulturbund* witnessed its own dissolution under these precarious circumstances, another Muslim community arrived in Austria after the Second World War which consisted mostly of Yugoslavs and Turks- the *Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien* (registered name: *Islamische Gemeinschaft zu Wien*).

One of the most notable leaders of that community is Dr. Smail Balić, a Bosnian historian, who came to Vienna as a student in the 1940s and eventually founded the *Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien*. Unbeknownst to most, this organization "shaped the history of Islamic institutionalization in post-war Austria", laying the groundwork for what will later become the *Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich* (Islamic Religious Community in Austria) - the current legal representation of all Muslims in Austria.[77] Dautović calls it "the first explicit establishment of an Islamic *Kultusgemeinde* in Austria".[78] It was founded in 1943 as an association with its headquarters in the first district of Vienna and Salih Hadžialić as chairman. Dautović's publication *Die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich. 1909-1979-2019* contains the most comprehensive account of the history of this association, focusing mainly on legal aspects.[79]

In his most recent publication[80] Dautović shares more sources primarily gathered through archival material from the Vienna City and State Archives, Arolsen Archives, the German Federal Archives, the NDH secret police, obtained from the Archives of the Serbian Armed Forces and finally an oral history interview with Nurko Gazija (who participated in the community

[76] Omar Rolf *Von Ehrenfels*, '"Brief Memorandum on My Flight & Internment 1938 till 1968" in: Roya C. *Bates* (Kurt Bauchwitz) Papers (1890-2006), Ehrenfels, Baron Umar Rolf & Mireille Abeille von. Correspondence with Roy C. Bates (1939-1974).' (M.E. Grenander Collections, University at Albany).
[77] Rijad *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (est. 1942) Muslims in Vienna between Collaboration and Protection of Jews during the Second World War. In: Casopis za Interdisciplinarne Studije 10 (2023), 112.
[78] *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (est. 1942), 112.
[79] *Dautović*, 40 Jahre seit Wiederherstellung der IRG-Wien, 99–123.
[80] *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (est. 1942), 112.

meetings).[81] According to Dautović, the main reason for the migration of Bosnian students at that time was the establishment of the *Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska* (NDH) , the Independent State of Croatia in 1941, and subsequently the attempt to avoid compulsory military service in fascist Croatia.[82]

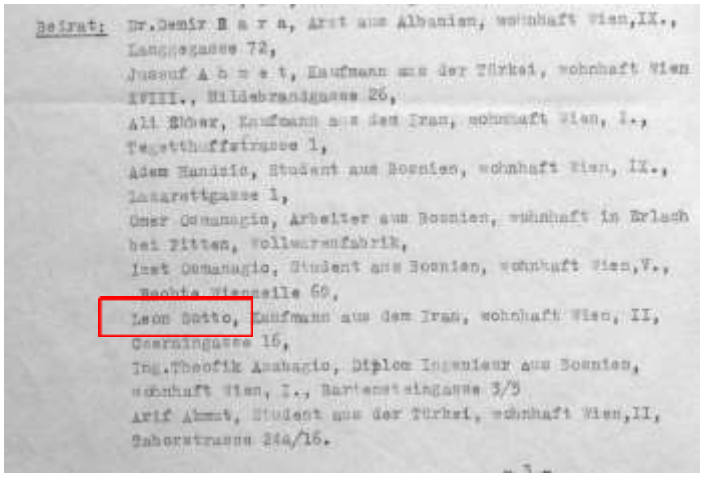
One of the main steps in establishing this community seems to have been the occasion of an Eid celebration, which similarly to *Islamischer Kulturbund* shows that the ability to publicly and freely practice religion was a key motivator of the early institutionalization of Islam in Austria.[83] According to the records of the first assembly of the association Muslims of different nations were present, especially Croatian soldiers, workers, students, merchants as well as representatives of other professions from Turkey, Persia, Arab-speaking countries and other neighboring countries.[84] Eventually, the military imam of the *Prinz-Eugen-Caserne* in Stockerau Nurija Sinanović was unanimously voted imam of this association.[85] The available minutes of the meetings show that even though the driving force behind founding the association were students from former Yugoslavia, other ethnicities were not only present at the meeting but also invested in institutionalizing Islam in Austria.

This Eid celebration was organized with the consent and help of municipal official Maximilian Hölzel and the Reichspropagandaamt. According to a memorandum, dated February 18, 1943, the Reichsstatthalterei had reservations about the establishment of such an association. However, the Gestapo which was set to review their endeavors had no objections to the plan to establish an Islamic religious community.[86] Nonetheless, in a letter to the Reichstatthalterei dated April 6, 1943, it was noted "that the activities of the aforementioned association must be limited solely to cultural and scientific matters"[87], likely intended to exclude political activities. A few weeks later, the head of the association, Muhiddin Hećimović, attempted to establish another organization: the *Islamischer Akademischer Verein*, a student organization for Muslims.[88] Hölzel caught wind of

[81] *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (est. 1942), 115.
[82] Oral History Interview with Nurko Gazija, 08 December 2019 in Chicago; Interviewer: Rijad Dautović, 00:26:48 (00:08:00). In: Dautović, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (est. 1942), 115.
[83] Hećimović et al to Reichsstatthalterei Wien, 8 February 1943, WStLA, M.Abt. 119.A32, 196/1943, sheet 2. In: Dautović, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (est. 1942), 124.
[84] "Protokoll aufgenommen am 23. Dezember 1942" [Minutes taken on 23 December 1942], WStLA, M.Abt. 119.A32, 196/1943, sheets 3-4. In: *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (est. 1942), 124.
[85] *Dautović*, 40 Jahre seit der Wiederherstellung der IRG-Wien, 104.
[86] Memorandum February 18, 1943 (Reichstatthalterei in Vienna), WStLA, M.Abt. 119, A32, 196/43, 1.
[87] Writing of GESTAPO State police station Vienna to Reichstatthalter in Vienna from April 6, 1943, WStLA, M.Abt. 119, A32, 196/43, 6.
[88] *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (1942-1945).

this new attempt and intervened with a letter on June 21 claiming that there was no need for an academic organization since the *Islamische Gemeinschaft zu Wien* was already serving that purpose.[89]

At this point anti-Jewish sentiments were growing and Jews, especially those in the public eye, were prosecuted. The *Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien* also served as a sanctuary for Jews by giving them Muslim cover identities, declaring them to be members of the community and letting them participate in their meetings. Dautović was able to identify two of them, the Sarajevo-born, former vice president of the Austrian Economic Chamber, Paul Urban who was given the Muslim name "Jusuf" - as a cover.[90] According to the Nürnberg race laws Urban was categorized as a "Geltungsjude", since his mother was registered as a member of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien. Urban kept his Muslim name as a second name his whole life and engaged in Bosnian-Austrian relations and cultivating the memory of Muslim soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian army. The other was Leon Sotto, who according to the records of the association was declared an Iranian merchant, who was also listed as a member of the advisory body of the community.[91] He was actually a Romanian Jew, who married in Vienna, and later lived in Haifa for decades and returned to Vienna with his wife late in his life. Both men are buried at the Jewish quarter of Vienna's Central Cemetery.


Beirat:
Dr.Demir B a r a, Arzt aus Albanien, wohnhaft Wien,IX.,
Langegasse 72,
Jusuf A h m e t, Kaufmann aus der Türkei, wohnhaft Wien
XVIII., Hildebrandgasse 26,
Ali Ekber, Kaufmann aus dem Iran, wohnhaft Wien, I.,
Tegetthoffstrasse 1,
Adem Handzic, Student aus Bosnien, wohnhaft Wien, IX.,
Lazarettgasse 1,
Omer Osmanagic, Arbeiter aus Bosnien, wohnhaft in Erlach
bei Pitten, Wollwarenfabrik,
Izet Osmanagic, Student aus Bosnien, wohnhaft Wien,V.,
Rechte Wienzeile 69,
Leon Sotto, Kaufmann aus dem Iran, wohnhaft Wien, II,
Czerningasse 16,
Ing.Theofik Asabagic, Diplom Ingenieur aus Bosnien,
wohnhaft Wien, I., Bartensteingasse 3/5
Arif Ahmet, Student aus der Türkei, wohnhaft Wien,II,
Taborstrasse 24a/16.

Ill. 9: Official notification of election meeting October 31, 1943

Ill. 10: Paul "Jusuf" Urban (1911-2010)

[89] *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (1942-1945).
[90] *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (1942-1945).
[91] *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (1942-1945).

Gazija and other detainees managed to escape the camp in Oberlanzendorf, a labor education camp, around the same time that the Red Army advanced into Vienna. Most of the students prepared to leave Vienna for Salzburg or Carinthia. During the postwar years many of these students were involved in the reorganization of the community, after its dissolution in the spring of 1945, with new Muslim refugees in Salzburg, Upper Austria and Carinthia under US and British protection. By the beginning of the 1950s almost all of the founding members of the *Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien* left Austria for other countries, especially Chicago and the Great Lakes region in the USA. One of the remaining members of the core group was Smail Balić who stayed in Vienna and started the decade-long endeavor to rebuild the Muslim community in Austria.[92]

The *Moslemische Sozialdienst* (Muslim Social Service)

The *Moslemische Sozialdienst* (MSS) was founded on September 15, 1962, by Muslim intellectuals of Bosnian descent, particularly the aforementioned Dr. Smail Balić - its first president. The organization's main tasks were of a charitable nature, primarily serving Muslim refugees and Muslims with disabilities. MSS, according to their own records, wanted to support its members in fulfilling the social, charitable and cultural practices of Islam and additionally raise the necessary funds to provide for the material and spiritual needs of Muslims. Moreover, they set out to incorporate an interfaith and intercultural dialogue aspect in their work, strengthening understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims.[93]

Ill. 11: Dr. Smail Balić in the Münzgasse 3, March 1974

[92] *Dautović*, Islamische Gemeinde zu Wien (1942-1945).
[93] Salim A. *Hadžić*, Der Moslemische Sozialdienst als Träger der Konstituierung der Islamischen Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich. In: Farid *Hafez* and Rijad *Dautović* (eds.), Die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich, 1909 – 1979 – 2019 : Beiträge zu einem neuen Blick auf ihre Geschichte und Entwicklung (Vienna and Hamburg 2019) 125–133.

Their work went beyond offering social services for the Muslim community. Initiatives included language classes, job training programs, cultural exchanges and interfaith events aimed at fostering understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. At that time the funds to organize various events for the community were mainly provided by the socio-economically weaker members of the community consisting of Turkish and Yugoslav workers and students. In May 1974, they wanted to rent the Stadthalle in Vienna and contacted the *Wiener Zuwandererfonds* to ask for financial support to offer prayer spaces and rent an office space for the organization. The *Zuwandererfonds* reacted positively and supported their efforts with 100 000 Schilling which allowed them to rent out a space in the first district in Vienna. Eventually costs ran higher and they decided to turn to the ambassadors of Islamic countries to Austria to ask for additional financial support. In their letter they asked for an additional 10 000 dollars so that "the 40 000 Muslims in Austria get out of this shameful situation"[94] referring to the dire financial and infrastructural situation for Muslims in Austria.

In their appeal to represent Islamic countries they recounted their many initiatives including but not limited to (a) defending Islamic cultural heritage in the media and public authorities, (b) offering regular Djum'a- (Friday-) prayers in Vienna, (c) financially supporting Muslims worldwide (Turkey, Pakistan, Yugoslavia, Egypt and Palestine) affected by natural disasters or those orphaned or widowed, (d) taking care of the Islamic cemetery in Vienna and (e) financially providing for a community imam that supports Muslims with births, wedding ceremonies, funerals as well as religious education classes.[95]

These correspondences not only give us an estimate of how many Muslims lived in Austria at that time but also tell us more about the state of institutionalization of Islam in Austria as well as the infrastructure (Islamic cemeteries, prayer spaces, religious education classes etc.) available to them in 1970s. They eventually received a donation of 400 000 Schilling from a Libyan Islamic organization. In general, MSS was very well connected internationally and regularly hosted religious personalities from Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia. Additionally, they had branches in FRG and Italy offering similar services for the local Muslim communities. Salim Hadzic expressed that the organization's representatives felt pressured also to represent and

[94] *Hadžić*, Der Moslemische Sozialdienst, 134.
[95] *Hadžić*, Der Moslemische Sozialdienst, 134–135.

educate the public on Islamic matters publicly: “Let us not forget, if we like it or not, we are a mirror of the broader world community”.[96]

In 1964, the MSS-committee, especially Smail Balić and Ahmad Abdel Rahimsai, worked hard to get approval to constitute the *Islamische Kultusgemeinde,* an entity that would be considered the legal representation of all Muslims in Austria and Islamic matters. After five years of lobbying for this cause and preparing all the legal documents necessary, they officially submitted the request in 1971. Their request received recognition and support from Austrian public figures such as Cardinal Franz König, FPÖ club chairman Wilfried Gredler and the Austrian Ambassador to Bonn. Eventually, they received word from the Federal Ministry for Education and Art that their request had been granted, leading to the establishment of the first *Islamische Religionsgemeinde* and, in accordance with the Islam Law of 1912, the foundation of the *Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft* based in Vienna. The first president of the *Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich* (Islamic Religious Community in Austria) was Ahmad Abdel Rahimsai.[97]

Ill. 12: MSS Delegation after talks with Ministry of Education & Culture 1975: l. to r.: Hikmet Ćatić, Smail Balić, Ibrahim Selmanović, Salim A. Hadžić und Sadudin Osmić. In f.: Ahmad Abdel Rahimsai.

[96] *Hadžić*, Der Moslemische Sozialdienst, 139.
[97] *Hadžić*, Der Moslemische Sozialdienst, 147–151.

Demographic Changes and Arrival of Gastarbeiter after World War II

Muslims living in Austria after the Second World War arrived there partially because of wartime migrations. Some of them were formerly imprisoned in labor and concentration camps and others were soldiers from different armies. A considerable number of immigrants started settling down in Austria in the 1960s at a time when Austria needed a workforce to help boost the economy. This constitutes the arrival of the *Gastarbeiter*, many of whom were Muslims from Yugoslavia, Turkey and Egypt. They were mainly recruited for work in textile, paper, heavy industries and seasonal construction work.[98]

The social scientist Anne Unterwurzacher explored the labor migration from Turkey and Tunisia for the *Glanzstoff Fabrik* in St. Pölten and the impact of their labor experiences on their daily experience in Austria. In the case of the *Glanzstoff Fabrik,* the company chose the official route through the Federal Economic Chamber to recruit 1,020 Turkish and 140 Tunisian workers from 1964 to 1994.[99] Most of these *Gastarbeiter* eventually decided to stay in Austria or move to other European countries and bring family members along with them to Austria, therefore, making Austria a more permanent home. At the same time some workers, mainly from Yugoslavia, arrived in Vienna first with a tourist visa and then sought employment in person. Austrian companies favored recruiting people from Turkey because they were deemed more "low-maintenance" immigrants according to Unterwurzacher.[100]

A study published in 1973 about social partnerships at that time claimed "that Turks in many respects seem to adapt easier to the Austrian way of life. It is to their advantage that they tend more towards subordination, are more immune to excessive alcohol consumption, and due to their custom of ritual washing find it easier to achieve a high level of personal hygiene".[101] Stereotypes like these about Turkish Gastarbeiter being subordinate, "low-maintenance" and obedient, are important to consider when exploring processes of self-identification and what societal factors shape them. In the case of the *Glanzstoff Fabrik* they actually did protest against working conditions because unlike what had been agreed they were placed in departments that were

[98] Agata Skowron *Nalborczyk*, A Century of the Official Legal Status of Islam in Austria: Between the Law on Islam of 1912 and the Law on Islam of 2015. In: Robert *Mason* (ed.), Muslim Minority-State Relations (New York 2016) 61–82.
[99] *Unterwurzacher*, The Other Colleagues, 146.
[100] *Unterwurzacher*, The Other Colleagues, 146.
[101] Arbeitskreis für Ökonomische und Soziologische Studien, ed., Gastarbeiter: wirtschaftliche und soziale Herausforderung (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1973) 56.

considered to be more hazardous to their health.[102] However, many of these Gastarbeiter's work permits were bound to their specific workplace meaning it was extremely difficult to change workplaces even under dangerous, precarious or discriminatory working conditions. This gave employees not only the ability to exert pressure but also immense power over Gastarbeiters' livelihoods and their future in this country.

Furthermore, Austria stayed an attractive destination to study and receive higher education for many from Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Afghanistan. Many of them, my father amongst them, found a community in the Afro-Asiatische Institut (AAI), which was established by Cardinal Franz König in 1959 in Vienna. This was created with the intention of providing a meeting place for people, mainly students, of different faiths and nationalities. It eventually developed into a center for integration and education with an intercultural and interreligious focus. According to AAI, their mission has been to give people from "countries of the global south" the opportunity to represent themselves, their cultures, country and way of life to then step into "a dialogue on eye-level".[103] In addition to a chapel, they also had one of the first Islamic prayer rooms and a Hindu prayer space while also running a cafeteria that was considerate of students' religious dietary restrictions. This was a place where immigrant students "danced, sang, cooked, discussed, philosophized under the motto 'For a culture of peace in a world of diversity'".[104] The AAI highlights that it was a place where "Christians didn't give lectures on Islam, but Muslims did" emphasizing the importance of giving narrative agency to individuals by letting them speak about their own faith, convictions and perspectives. Thereby they played a crucial role in the 1960s by providing a platform of dialogue that helped minimize the reproduction of stereotypes and prejudices against people of a certain ethnicity or religion.

Another factor that played a crucial role in changes to Austrian demographics was the targeted genocide against Muslims in Bosnia from 1992-1995. As a result, more than 100 000 Muslims fled to Austria and between 1991 to 2001 the number doubled from 159 000 to 339 000.[105] Even after the end of the war many Bosnians stayed and reunited with their families in Austria leading to an increase of Muslim migrants by the end of the millennium.[106]

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[102] *Unterwurzacher*, The Other Colleagues, 146.
[103] *Erzdiözese Wien*, Ein Haus mit Geschichte. In: https://www.erzdioezese-wien.at/T3, https://www.erzdioezese-wien.at/unit/aai_tuerkenstrasze/haus_mit_geschichte (16.06.2024).
[104] *Erzdiözese Wien*, Ein Haus mit Geschichte.
[105] Farid *Hafez*, Kleiner Verein oder Vertretung einer Mehrheit? Wer ist die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich? In: Jasmina *Rupp* (ed.), Der (Alb)Traum vom Kalifat (Internationale Sicherheit und Konfliktmanagement 9 Vienna 2016) 339.
[106] *Nalborcyzk*, A Century of Official Legal Status, 64.

First Legal Representation: Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich (IGGiÖ)

The IGGiÖ serves as the principal representative body for Muslims in Austria and plays a crucial role in facilitating religious practices, community engagement, and dialogue. Since its inception the *Islamic Religious Community in Austria* has had the status of a *Körperschaft öffentlichen Rechts* (Privileged Corporation of Public Law*)*. According to the IGGiÖ's mission statement, their aim is to provide a unified platform for Muslims in Austria by regulating internal affairs, representing their interests, fostering religious education and promoting integration within Austrian society. Some of their accomplishments include advocacy for Muslims in Austria, including the provision of halal food, the recognition of Islamic holidays as well as the establishment of mosques and Islamic educational institutions.[107] The IGGiÖ was modeled after the Protestant and Jewish *Kultusgemeinde.* Because it is a recognized religious institution, it has the right to establish denominational schools and receives state subsidies for its charitable activities.

The latest available official calculation of the number of Muslim citizens was made in 2009 and show a further growth to 6.2 percent of the total Austrian population.[108] These developments made the IGGiÖ's role as an agent between Muslims residing in Austria and state authorities all the more important. At the same time education facilities for teachers of Islamic religion in public schools were established in 1982 and a regularly taught course of study followed in 1998.[109] To this day the IGGiÖ is in charge of appointing and overseeing the deployment of teachers of Islamic religion in public schools.

Another sector that is currently overseen by the IGGiÖ is Islamic spiritual welfare in prisons. In comparison with Catholic, Protestant and Jewish spiritual welfare, Islamic spiritual welfare was a service only provided by volunteers and wasn't legally regulated. Until 2010, the handling of religious needs was regulated by prison authorities.[110] Only then did the IGGiÖ and the Ministry of Justice reach an agreement by setting certain standards for Muslim ministers' visits to prisoners and providing financial compensation to the IGGiÖ.[111]

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[107] *Die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*, IGGiÖ Die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich. In: https://www.derislam.at/, https://www.derislam.at/iggoe/ (16.05.2024).
[108] Alexander *Janda* and Mathias *Vogl* (eds.), Islam in Österreich (Vienna 2010).
[109] Susanne *Heine*, Rüdiger *Lohlker*, Richard *Potz*, Muslime in Österreich: Geschichte, Lebenswelt, Religion: Grundlagen für den Dialog (Innsbruck 2012).
[110] Astrid *Mattes* and Sieglinde *Rosenberger*, Islam and Muslims in Austria. In: Marian *Burchardt* and Ines *Michalowski* (eds.), After Integration. Islam, Conviviality and Contentious Politics in Europe (Wiesbaden 2015) 135.
[111] *Die Presse*, Dialogforum Islam: Studium Für Imame Kommt 2015 (04.12.2012). In: Die Presse.com, https://www.diepresse.com/1319704/dialogforum-islam-studium-fuer-imame-kommt-2015 (16.06.2024).

In the 1990s, Muslim associations based on ethnicity were established, within which religious life such as gatherings, prayers, social activities etc. still take place today. In general, three big associations, coordinating religious, social, and cultural activities, with a Turkish background dominate the organizational landscape to this day (1) *ATIB* [Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Collaboration in Austria], (2) *Islamische Föderation (IF)* [Islamic Federation] and (3) *Union Islamischer Kulturzentren (UICC)* [Union of Islamic Cultural Centres]. ATIB was founded in 1991 and is considered the official organization of the Turkish government office for religious affairs, *Diyanet.* It has 62 branches across Austria, mainly concentrated in Vienna and Vorarlberg, and is the strongest association in Austria in terms of membership (roughly 100 000 members according to its records).[112] *Islamische Föderation* is considered the Austrian section of the explicitly party-political movement *Millî Görüş.* Lastly, the UICC is an apolitical movement of the Turkish *Süleymancılar*, following mystic Sufi traditions.[113]

Furthermore, there are associations for Muslims from the Balkans united under two umbrella organizations the *Dachverband der bosniakisch-islamischer Vereine in Österreich (IZBA)* [Union of Bosniak Islamic Associations in Austria], founded in 1995, and the *Dachverband der albanischen Muslime in Österreich* [Union of Albanian Muslims in Austria] which was established in 2008.[114] Finally, there are Arab associations, the smallest group in terms of membership, with people mainly of Egyptian descent. However, they have been successful in acquiring funds for various infrastructure projects such as the construction of the first visible mosque in Vienna - the *Islamic Centre of Vienna*.[115] Prior to the amendment of the Islam Law in 2015 the Arab associations were not organized under one umbrella organization, but rather in single organizations.

All the associations mentioned above self-identify as Sunni associations. Nonetheless, Shiites make up between 12-15 percent of the Austrian Muslim population, comprising predominantly people of Iranian, Afghan, Turkish and Iraqi ancestry.[116] In 1992, the Islamische Vereinigung Ahl-ul-Bayt [Islamic Association Ahl-ul-Bayt] was established as an umbrella organization for Shiite associations mainly located in Vienna. In 2013, the *Islamische-Schiitische Glaubensgemeinschaft*

[112] *ATIB Union*, Über Uns. In: https://atib.at/, https://atib.at/uber-uns/ (16.06.2024).
[113] *Hafez*, Kleiner Verein, 339.
[114] *Mattes and Rosenberger*, Islam and Muslims in Austria, 139.
[115] *Mattes and Rosenberger*, Islam and Muslims in Austria, 140.
[116] *Heine and Lohlker*, Muslime in Österreich, 77.

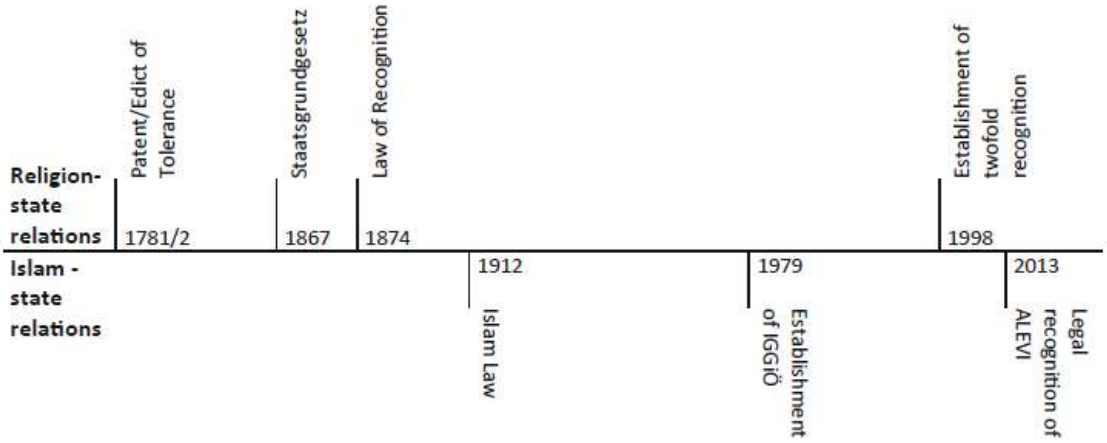
in Österreich (ISGÖ) [Islamic-Shiite Religious Community in Austria] was established, legally and institutionally separating the organization of Sunni and Shia life in Austria.[117]

In 1996, the first German-speaking multiethnic youth organization *Muslimische Jugend Österreich* [Muslim Youth Austria] was founded in Linz, Upper Austria. Until 2012 it had the status of the official IGGiÖ youth organization. It mainly serves second and third-generation Muslim youth that self-identify as Austrian Muslims, explicitly rejecting divisions by ethnicity and centering what they call "an Austrian-Muslim-Identity". They view the two identities of being Austrian and Muslim as not being contradictory or mutually exclusive but rather concurrent. Today they are the biggest (around 30 000 members), nation-wide, German-speaking organization with the aim to offer young people spaces for self-development and participation, strengthening democratic structures and human rights as well as working towards a peaceful future for all Austrians.[118] Illustration 13 below gives an overview of the relationships between the State, Islam and other religions, beginning with the Patent of Tolerance in 1781/2 and ending with the legal recognition of the ALEVI religious community in 2013.

When it comes to the inclusion of marginalized voices in national history it is vital to not only draw information from archives and state records but also to use other forms of evidence such as oral history interviews, articles in foreign-language journals, and foreign archives etc. Diversity in sources helps us paint a more complete picture of the lives of the diverse communities being researched. The rich history of the Muslim presence in Austria preceding the arrival of Gastarbeiter is only one of many examples of the rootedness of Islam and Muslims in Austria. It also demonstrates how the academic and discursive focus on reproducing the Gastarbeiter-narrative when talking about Muslim life in Austria can be detrimental to creating a sense of belonging. Such a narrative implies that Muslims are historically *Gäste* [guests], something temporary, foreign, who will eventually leave again, and not fully part of society, the Other. It begs the question of who profits from upholding this narrative and what its impact is on the construction of identities.

[117] *Die Islamische-Schiitische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*, Über Uns. In: https://schia.at/ (2021), https://schia.at/uber-uns/ (16.06.2024).
[118] *Die Muslimische Jugend Österreich*, Über Uns. In: https://mjoe.at/ (2024), https://mjoe.at/ueber-uns (16.06.2024).

The construction of identities and the impact on establishing a sense of belonging is further influenced by the socio-political climate. The following section focuses on highlighting amendments made to the Islam Law in 2015 and 2022 and how they affected Muslim communities and individuals. It further describes the political context in which such developments were enabled and legitimized.



Ill. 13: Timeline of Religion/Islam-state relations from 1781-2013

Political Changes & its Effects on Muslims in Austria

Around 2012, discussions about amendments to the Islam Law of 1912 became more prominent. At this point the Islam Law had been in effect for 100 years and religious practices and the institutionalization of Islam were regulated rather flexibly, after the Islam Law went into effect, given that none of the aforementioned associations or the IGGiÖ had yet been established. In 2012, the "Dialogforum Islam" was founded after the model of the German Conference on Islam *[Deutsche Islamkonferenz]* initially to facilitate contact between federal authorities and the IGGiÖ with the intent to establish an academic education for imams at the University of Vienna and initiate other changes. The legislative work however was only concluded in the spring of 2015, when the Austrian parliament passed the new Islam Law which attracted much criticism from Muslim organizations and representatives of the IGGiÖ.

Some of the changes to the Islam Law 2015 include the following[119]:

- To be recognized as a legally registered Islamic religious community it has to have "a positive attitude toward the Austrian society and state" (Art. 4, Section 3).
- Illegal disturbances in the attitude toward other recognized churches and religious organizations are forbidden (Art. 4, Section 4).
- The processes of acquiring status as a legal entity and other legal issues must be approved by the acting federal chancellor instead of the relevant federal minister, unlike the case of Jewish religious communities.
- Islamic religious organizations are not allowed to get financial support from abroad and must acquire funds from within the country (Art. 6, Section 2), again unlike the Law on adherents of Judaism.
- Only persons that have received their religious education in Austria and speak German can be hired as religious spiritual personnel in prisons, hospitals etc. thus prohibiting bringing imams from abroad (Art. 11, Section 2).
- The Islamic Alevi Religious Community in Austria was guaranteed the same rights and privileges as the IGGiÖ.
- The establishment of a higher education study program for Islamic theological studies was agreed.
- Authorities are authorized to prohibit gatherings and events for religious purposes that pose an immediate threat to the interests of public safety, order or health and national security as well as the rights and freedoms of others (Art. 27), the addition of "national security" being new.
- Pre-existing associations whose purpose is the dissemination of religious education and practices are to be dissolved by decision of the Federal Minister of the Interior by March 2016 if the purpose of the association has not been adapted to the requirements of the new Islam Act.

After the first drafts of these amendments were presented by the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the People's Party (ÖVP) in October 2014 there was a wave of criticism from Muslim organizations as well as legal experts and representatives of other religious communities. Initially

[119] Bundesgesetz über die äußeren Rechtsverhältnisse islamischer Religionsgesellschaften – Islamgesetz 2015 StF: BGBl. I Nr. 39/2015 (NR: GP XXV RV 446 AB 469 S. 61. BR: 9324 AB 9326 S. 839.). In: ris.bka.gv.at, https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20009124 (25.05.2024).

the Islam Law of 1912 was modeled after the Israelite Law of 1890 in which the state legally recognized churches and religious associations and didn't interfere in their internal affairs thereby staying neutral. However, many of the amendments to the Islam Law in 2015 were criticized in that they do not meet constitutional principles. The explicit emphasis on supremacy of the Austrian state over religion (Art. 4, Section 3), the inclusion of aspects of national securitization in a religious law (Art. 27), the legal religious body, the IGGiÖ not having full control over the curriculum for academic programs for imams as well as the demand of a "depiction of religious doctrine" are only some of the criticized changes that were made.

The Muslim Youth Austria (MJÖ) was one of the first voices that publicly criticized and opposed these amendments citing that this would make Muslims into "second-class citizens" and put all Muslims under "general suspicion" because it is self-evident that Muslims, like all citizens, must adhere to the constitution and legal regulations. However, the explicit mention of it multiple times in the legal texts according to MJÖ would only further the alienation that Muslims are experiencing.[120]

Richard Potz, a legal expert with a focus on religious communities, criticized the lack of distinction between a religious law and a security police law and the clear mistrust and general suspicious undertone that is used only for Muslims. "For example, it says something that is self-evident, that state law must take precedence over the law of the religious community. Of course, this applies to all religious communities, it's not in any other law, it's only in the case of Muslims".[121] Dudu Kücükgöl, then chairwoman of MJÖ, additionally emphasized the discriminatory regulation that prohibits the acquisition of funds or financial support from outside Austria only applied to Islamic religious associations and the IGGiÖ while Protestant, Catholic and Jewish associations do not have this legally binding restriction.[122] ATIB, one of the strongest Turkish Islamic associations, welcomed the suggestions to adapt the Islam Law to address the needs of Muslims of the 21st century. Backing the IGGiÖ's concerns about wanting to nationalize Islam and thereby disregarding the religious pluralism and diversity of Muslim communities, they too denounced the attempt to make "the Islam Law into a security law".[123]

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[120] *Kurier*, Kritik am neuen Islamgesetz reißt nicht ab. In: kurier.at (08.10.2014), https://kurier.at/politik/inland/kritik-am-neuen-islamgesetz-reisst-nicht-ab/90.000.960 (16.06.24).

[121] Stefan *May*, Sicherheitspolitisches Denken gehört nicht ins Islamgesetz. In: https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/ (28.06.2016), https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/oesterreich-sicherheitspolitisches-denken-gehoert-nicht-ins-100.html (16.06.2024).

[122] *Kurier*, Kritik am neuen Islamgesetz reißt nicht ab. In: kurier.at (08.10.2014).

[123] *ATIB*, Presseerklärung zum Islamgesetz 2015. In OTS.at (25.02.2015), https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20150225_OTS0010/presseerklaerung-zum-islamgesetz-2015 (16.06.2024).

To contextualize these developments, it is essential to acknowledge that these amendments did not happen in a vacuum. A look into the national and European political context at that time period shows ongoing political and media debates about the compatibility of Islam with European values and "Muslims' ability and willingness to accept the rule of law and the separation of religion and the public sphere".[124] Post- 9/11, populist right-wing parties throughout Europe have used fear and the fabrication of a growing Muslim population posing national and security threats to further their agenda. Calls for the naturalization of "moderate" religious practices, the banning or restricting of religious symbols and clothing (e.g. the hijab, calls for banning minarets etc.) in public settings as well as the ongoing securitization of Muslims have become louder. Jonathan Laurence mentions witnessing a dual movement in the 21st century, a simultaneous expansion of religious liberty and increasing control exerted over religion. According to Laurence, "Europe also illustrates the dangers of unresolved tension between individual and collective rights. This is reflected in the preoccupation that communities must effectively sacrifice their distinctiveness and collective identity in the name of legal and political equality, compounded by the sinking fear that they may never entirely escape suspicion and persecution".[125]

This general suspicion against Muslim citizens became evident again during the time Sebastian Kurz was the Austrian chancellor from 2017-2019 and again 2020-2021, and while his party, the ÖVP, was in a government coalition with the far-right Freedom Party Austria (FPÖ). The FPÖ has been known to instrumentalize and reproduce racist stereotypes about migrants, refugees and Muslims/Islam in their electoral campaigns and policies.[126] After changes to the *Fremdengesetz* [Aliens Act] in 1993 which set a new per annus quota for immigrants, the FPÖ co-opted the topic of new migration to initiate an anti-foreigner people's referendum under the motto "Austria First". Since then, they have only gained more attention and more voters with anti-immigrant, anti-refugee and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Their stance led to the publication of, amongst others, political posters reading "Home instead of Islam" [Daham statt Islam] or "Stop the Islamization". This rhetoric has led to an increase in anti-Muslim hatred and attacks on visible Muslims, especially women wearing the hijab, by making anti-Muslim racism politically and socially acceptable. The consistent anti-Muslim stance of FPÖ therefore was no surprise, however People's Party (ÖVP) member Sebastian Kurz, whose first national position was State Secretary for Integration,

[124] Jonathan *Laurence*, The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims: The State's Role in Minority Integration (Princeton 2012) 6.
[125] *Laurence*, The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims, 7.
[126] *ORF.at*, Tirol: Aufregung um FPÖ-Wahlplakate. In: oe1.orf.at (08.04.2017), https://oe1.orf.at/artikel/301798/Tirol-Aufregung-um-FPOe-Wahlplakate (16.06.2024).

gradually took over FPÖ's stance on migration and Islam in a development unforeseen by political experts.

Multiple books and articles have been published on Sebastian Kurz's reformation of the ÖVP while serving as Foreign Minister (2013-2017). His new agenda and rather far-right stance won him the national council elections in 2017 with 31.5 percent of all votes (an increase of 7.5 percent).[127] These elections secured him his place as the youngest Chancellor of Austria. The national council elections of 2017 also showed a 5.5 percent increase of votes for the FPÖ, leading to them securing 26 percent of all votes and building a coalition with the ÖVP. These election results led to discussions from both parties about a hijab-ban for teachers, courses on "Austrian values" for immigrants, a tougher Islam Law and the closure of mosques.

During the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition from 2017-2019 one political scandal followed the next. In May 2019 the infamous Ibiza-scandal happened after *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Der Spiegel* published a video that showed then Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache and his fellow party member Johann Gudenus in conversation with an alleged Russian oligarch's niece. The footage was recorded secretly in Ibiza, Spain in the summer of 2017. Strache promised to award profitable contracts, for example in road construction, to those who would ensure their party's electoral success by buying media outlets. Furthermore, talks about making donations to the party that bypass the control of the Court of Audit were recorded.[128] Following the publication of this compromising video Vice-Chancellor Strache resigned from his position, followed by a motion of no confidence in parliament that passed with a majority vote by social-democrats, the SPÖ and the far-right FPÖ.

This led to new elections a few months later, resulting in a win for the ÖVP with Sebastian Kurz on top and a coalition between the ÖVP and the Green Party in 2019. In the ÖVP's coalition with the Green Party they authorized the biggest police operation of the Second Austrian Republic, Operation Luxor, and in light of this operation the introduction of a criminal offense act against "political Islam" in 2022. According to journalist Anna Thalhammer, the securitization and criminalization of Muslims helped secure Sebastian Kurz votes from the far-right.[129]

[127] BM.I *Bundesministerium für Inneres*, 2017: Stimmenstärkste Partei pro Bundesland. In: https://bundeswahlen.gv.at/2017/ (16.06.2024).
[128] Monika *Sommer*, 2019: Ibiza-Affäre. In: https://hdgoe.at/ (2019), https://hdgoe.at/ibiza_affaere (16.06.2024).
[129] Anna *Thalhammer*, Operation Luxor: Nehammers Debakel. In: https://www.profil.at/ (02.04.2023), https://www.profil.at/oesterreich/operation-luxor-nehammers-debakel/402385727 (16.06.2024).

Even though the FPÖ was not part of the government anymore there were still many FPÖ-affiliated officials in various ministries, especially in the Ministry of Interior, which is in charge of national security, surveillance and the police force. Operation Luxor was initiated by far-right FPÖ-officials in the Ministry of Interior in 2019 and was later authorized and executed by the ÖVP-led Ministry of Interior in 2020. Operation Luxor was a police operation approved by then Minister of Interior Karl Nehammer that targeted around 116 Muslim individuals and Muslim-owned-businesses on November 9th, 2020. In the name of "fighting against political Islam"[130] 1,100 police officers stormed those individuals' houses in the middle of the night, citing charges of terrorism, financing of terrorism and ties to criminal organizations like Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. One of the accusations was that these individuals wanted to indoctrinate society to establish Islamic enclaves in Europe. A week prior to the raids, a religiously-motivated terrorist attack was carried out in Vienna's city center claiming five lives, including the perpetrator's, who was an ISIS supporter. Following the terrorist attack, Muslim Youth Austria and the Jewish Student Union (JÖH) organized an interreligious vigil for the victims and brought together over thousands of Austrians under the motto "Together against Hate".[131] Despite the proximity of the terrorist attack and the police raids, both events were unrelated.

However, a few weeks after the terrorist attack a special report by the Austrian Ombudsman institution accused the Ministry of the Interior and the then Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism (BVT) of having had sufficient information in advance about the plans for the terrorist attack to have prevented it. The previously convicted terrorist was flagged by Europol while trying to purchase ammunition in neighboring countries and this information was shared with the Ministry of the Interior. However, no criminal police report was made to the judiciary and no further steps were taken to prevent the danger.[132] According to a commission of inquiry in 2021 the Ministry of the Interior and Constitutional Protection officers

[130] Farid *Hafez*, Die Operation Luxor – ein Skandal ohne Konsequenzen. In: https://www.derstandard.at/ (09.11.2023), https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000194392/die-operation-luxor-ein-skandal-ohne-konsequenzen (16.06.2024).
[131] *MJÖ*, Zusammenhalt gegen Gewalt und Extremismus: Den Plan der Extremisten vereiteln. In: OTS.at: (03.11.2020), https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20201103_OTS0089/zusammenhalt-gegen-gewalt-und-extremismus-den-plan-der-extremisten-vereiteln (16.06.2024).
[132] *Parlament, Österreich*, Volksanwaltschaftsausschuss beschäftigte sich mit behördlichen Abläufen im Vorfeld des Terroranschlags in Wien. In: https://www.parlament.gv.at/ (14.03.2023), https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr_2023/pk0277 (16.06.2024).

[Verfassungschutz] had no resources to follow up on concrete indications of an imminent terrorist attack because they had been planning this operation for weeks.[133]

Yet a few months after the raids the Higher Regional Court (OLG) ruled that there was no initial suspicion to legitimize the raids in the first place. In the following months, charges were dropped, surveillance measures were deemed unlawful and media outlets described the operation as having "crumbling investigations"[134], and being a "classic turquoise (Austrian People's Party) show operation with zero criminal result so far"[135], a "gigantic flop"[136] and the "currently largest and probably most controversial trial in Austria".[137] To date the victims of the operation, which includes children as young as a few days old, have not received reparations nor have the responsible political parties been held accountable. The brutality used during the operation against Muslim children and adults was heavily criticized from various NGOs and lawyers that suspect that the traumatization associated with the operation constitutes a violation of acting in the best interest of the child (Article 3, CRC). Furthermore, unlike other police operations the Austrian Ombudsman Board nor any other supervisory body was present during the operation to monitor or witness the raids.[138]

The aftermath of Operation Luxor not only struck individuals and businesses directly affected but also had a chilling effect within the wider Muslim communities. The fact that an operation on this scale, mainly against active members of Muslim communities and academics who were actively talking about the continued dehumanization of Muslims in Austria and rising Islamophobia, was authorized by the government was very concerning to Muslims, human rights organizations and legal experts. The fact that the line of police questioning was mainly centered around religious practices and Islamophobic stereotypes such as "how many times a day do you pray?", "Do you

[133] Ralf *Leonhard*, Ein Fehlschlag namens Luxor. In: Taz.de (11.01.2021), https://taz.de/Politischer-Islam-in-Oesterreich/!5908371/ (16.06.2024).
[134] Hans *Rauscher*, "Operation Luxor": Entscheidender (Fehl-)Schlag. In: derstandard.at (20.09.2022), https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000139261364/operation-luxor-entscheidender-fehlschlag (16.06.2024).
[135] *Rauscher*, "Operation Luxor".
[136] Hans *Rauscher*, Staatsversagen bei Extremisten. In: derstandard.at(02.08.2022),https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000137980235/staatsversagen-bei-extremisten (16.06.2024).
[137] Jan Michael *Marchart*, Die ungewöhnliche Vendetta der Staatsanwaltschaft in der Operation Luxor. In: derstanard.at (07.05.2022), https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000135448814/die-ungewoehnliche-vendetta-der-staatsanwaltschaft-in-der-operation-luxor.
[138] *Assisting Children Traumatised by Police (ACT-P)*, Offener Brief wirft Minister Nehammer grobe Verstöße gegen Kinderrechte während der Operation Luxor vor. In: OTS.at (15.03.2021), https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20210315_OTS0051/offener-brief-wirft-minister-nehammer-grobe-verstoesse-gegen-kinderrechte-waehrend-der-operation-luxor-vor (16.06.2024).

let your wife go grocery shopping on her own" or "would you allow your child to marry outside your religion?"[139] with the aim of trying to establish ties to terrorism, shows a clear intent to criminalize Muslims. Azfar Safi, CAGE researcher and co-author of a thorough report on Operation Luxor, categorizes this operation as an "opening shot in an ongoing campaign of repression by the Austrian state against Muslims, in the name of combating 'Political Islam'".[140] Members of other civil society organizations call it "a forever stain on Austria's history" and "state-sponsored terror against innocent Muslims.[141]

The momentum of the police operation and the terror attack in Vienna was further used by the ÖVP to introduce anti-terror legislation in 2021. The Minister for Integration Susanne Raab declared that Islamists and extremists are a danger to fundamental rights and religious freedom and therefore the government needed to do everything in their power "to protect religious freedom and religious communities that are endangered by Islamism".[142] Even though Raab claimed that these criminal code amendments were not targeting any specific religious community the draft legislation on religiously motivated extremist connections was introduced together with amendments to the Islam Law and the Association Law [Vereinsgesetz]. Legal experts, IGGiÖ, representatives of Muslim communities and Amnesty International Austria criticized the discriminatory nature of the draft legislation that contains stricter powers to dissolve mosques, submission of so-called "imam lists", disclosure of finances and drastic fines.[143] Even though many criticized the symbolic political nature of the law, it was still passed in 2022. Members of Muslim communities cited fear of Muslims preventively restricting "their religious practices, community

[139] obtained through personal conversations with victims of Operation Luxor in 2021
[140] *CAGE* and *ACT-P*, Austria: Targeting of Muslims in country's largest-ever Police raid analysed in new report. In: statewatch.org (11.11.2021), https://www.statewatch.org/news/2021/november/austria-targeting-of-muslims-in-country-s-largest-ever-police-raid-analysed-in-new-report/ (16.06.2024).
[141] *CAGE* and *ACT-P*, Austria: Targeting of Muslims in country's largest-ever Police raid analysed in new report. In: statewatch.org (11.11.2021), https://www.statewatch.org/news/2021/november/austria-targeting-of-muslims-in-country-s-largest-ever-police-raid-analysed-in-new-report/ (16.06.2024).
[142] *ORF.at*, IGGÖ lehnt Entwurf zu Anti-Terror-Paket ab. In: news.ORF.at (08.05.2021), https://orf.at/stories/3212298/ (16.06.2024).
[143] *Amnesty International*, Regierung verpasst Chance für Verbesserungen beim Anti-Terror-Paket. In: amnesty.at (07.05.2021),https://www.amnesty.at/presse/regierung-verpasst-chance-fuer-verbesserungen-beim-anti-terror-paket/ (16.06.2024).
Daniela *Pisoiu*, Zu viel Symbolpolitik im Anti-Terror-Gesetz. In: oiip.ac.at (12.05.2021), https://www.oiip.ac.at/publikation/zu-viel-symbolpolitik-im-anti-terror-gesetz/ (16.06.2024).
ORF.at, Reichlich Kritik an Anti-Terror-Paket. In: news.ORF.at (02.02.2021), https://orf.at/stories/3199907/ (16.06.2024).
MJÖ, Nein zur Kriminalisierung von Musliminnen. In: OTS.at (12.05.2021), https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20210512_OTS0021/nein-zur-kriminalisierung-von-musliminnen (16.06.2024).

organization and civic engagement for fear of criminal prosecution"[144] while also highlighting the documented rise of anti-Muslim racism in Austria (2020: 1402 reported cases; 2021: 1061 cases; 2022: 1324 cases).[145]

The historical, legal and socio-political context provided above is essential in understanding and contextualizing the oral history interviews that follow. It will also enable us to understand the immediate context and political climate in which these interviews were conducted and help the reader understand certain references made by interviewees.

Stories of First Post-War Generations of Muslims in Austria

At the core of this thesis are biographical narrations of Muslims in Austria who each bring different lived experiences to this study. This section discusses the oral history project "Muslims in Austria", instituted by me, among others, the reasoning behind its inception and focuses on four Muslim individuals' perspectives on their life stories, which for the most part includes one of migration. These stories are first told in a descriptive manner and followed by an analysis of how elements of home and belonging as well as external and internal identification processes can be seen through their narratives. The second part of this analysis focuses on identifying common themes within the identification processes of interviewees and connecting them to the larger historical and Austrian political context. Lastly, factors that are shown to foster, hinder or refute a sense of belonging are analyzed at the end.

Oral History Project "Muslims in Austria"

The project was initiated in 2021 by Omar T. Nasr, Dr. Georg Traska and me who have an academic background in the broader field of History as well as a shared interest in ethnographic storytelling. Dr. Georg Traska is an Art Historian and curates exhibitions and remembrance projects. His research focuses on oral history, video documentation, memorial culture and Italian painting and literature of the Late Middle Ages. From 2017 to 2019 he curated an exhibition in the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art called Young Muslims in Austria where he interviewed Muslim pupils on their relationship with Islam and Islamic practices in their everyday

[144] *MJÖ,* Anti-Terror Paket entgegen Warnungen von Expert Innen im Nationalrat beschlossen. In: OTS.at (07.07.2021), https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20210707_OTS0186/anti-terror-paket-entgegen-warnungen-von-expertinnen-im-nationalrat-beschlossen (16.06.2024).

[145] *Dokustelle.at,* Antimulsimischer Rassimus Report 2022. In: dokustelle.at (2022), https://dokustelle.at/reports/dokustelle-report-2022 (16.06.2024).

lives. Omar T. Nasr is a Historian and is currently a PhD candidate in International History at the LSE. His research focuses on the British Empire and Islam in the Second World War, considering also Modern Europe and the Middle East, Muslims in the West, social, intellectual as well as oral history.
I have a background in Secondary Teacher Education with a focus on History and English and my current research focuses on culturally sustaining education. My research mainly uses qualitative research methods and focuses on racialized and marginalized communities of Color, the portrayal of marginalized communities in popular culture, media, political discourses and identity research.

With this project we set out to accomplish multiple goals, one of the most important being the establishment of a more diverse representation of Muslims but also giving agency of representation back to communities. It sought to destabilize common power dynamics in storytelling, especially with Communities of Color, and aimed to deconstruct common misconceptions and misrepresentation of Muslim communities in Austria. This urgency was felt due to increasing incidents of racist, biased and homogenizing media portrayals of Muslims and Islam. The increased political discussions surrounding the question of whether Islam belongs to Austria, Germany and Europe have additionally ignited a desire to give community members themselves the opportunity to answer these questions. The project was also initiated as a means of creating counter-narratives, humanizing and diversifying Muslims in a time where anti-Muslim racism has reached an all-time high and a continued legal and political crackdown on Muslims and Islamic religious practice was noticeable. The goal was to amplify Muslim voices from different communities and simultaneously start the process of systematically documenting and archiving stories of Muslims in Austria

The project was carried out in cooperation with and financed by the Österreichische Mediathek [Austrian Archive for Sound Recordings and Videos on Cultural and Contemporary History] and part of the umbrella project *MenschenLeben*.[146] It encompasses 15 audiovisual oral history interviews with male and female participants but focused on the age group of 70–90-year-olds. Participants were selected on the basis of self-identifying as Muslims, regardless of their level of religiosity or viewing it as a cultural marker.

[146] Isabelle *Engels*, Michael *Meier*, Tina *Plasil-Laschober* and Johanna *Zechner*, MenschenLeben: Eine Sammlung lebensgeschichtlicher Erzählungen. In: mediathek.at, (https://www.mediathek.at/forschen-und-lernen/aktuelle-projekte/menschenleben/ (28.06.2024).

"First post-war generations of Muslims in Austria" categorizes senior Muslims, largely born pre-1964, therefore, post Second World War. They are either first-generation immigrants to Austria, some of whom can be categorized as so-called *Gastarbeiter,* or they were born and raised in Austria, having converted to Islam later. All participants were living in Austria at the time of the interviews, hailing from both cities and small towns and with different ethnic backgrounds.

The selection process consisted of two routes. On the one hand, the team used their personal networks within the Muslim communities to establish connections with potential candidates which created a snowball effect. On the other hand, the search for participants was also spread on digital platforms which allowed for a wider audience and securing participants outside of the team's networks ensuring greater diversity. While reactions to this project were mainly positive, during the participant search some fears from potential candidates were addressed such as political or legal repercussions, negative impacts on their families or fear of becoming a target of anti-Muslim hate. One potential participant expressed the following fear after they were approached by me: "I would really like to contribute to your project but would only do so if I'd be able to freely say everything I want to say. However, unfortunately, the current Islamophobic political climate prohibits me from being able to tell my whole truth and therefore I must decline".[147] This testimony gives us an insight into how the political and social climate was perceived from an inner-Muslim perspective at the time of the project. However, other participants felt inclined to accept our request to interview them especially because of the fears expressed above.

Out of the 15 interviews conducted, this thesis focuses on four stories that were selected based on diversity in ethnicity, gender and their personal relationship with being Muslim. Another factor that influenced the selection of these four candidates was that they do not represent the "classic" *Gastarbeiter* narrative of working-class Muslims, but instead represent the academic, intellectual and educated middle class. In current public and political discourses Muslims are rarely depicted as educated, intellectual or as socio-economically superior. Therefore, this display of diversity within individual story lines is essential firstly, to accomplish the goal of de-homogenizing Muslims in public discourses and secondly, establish what factors (social, individual, collective, political, economic, religious etc.) predominate in defining the relationship between the self and other entities such as a nation state, its society and other communities.

[147] Personal conversation with Muslim individual who would like to remain anonymous.

Each audiovisual interview is accompanied by a narrative transcription, a detailed description of the interview setting, location of the interview, other parties present, how the interviewee was perceived based on their emotional, physical and psychological state at the time of the interview and an evaluation of the quality of the interview. For the project team it was important to include interviewees in the decision-making process around the interview setting (location, language, present parties etc.) to make them feel as comfortable as possible and establish trust and security.

We conducted all interviews in German except for some interviewees who used a few words or phrases in their first language. The questions asked were mainly open-ended except for moments when participants mentioned a memory but did not further elaborate or jumped back and forth within the chronological timeline or the interviewer asked follow-up questions when it felt necessary for the context of the project. However, questions were slightly adapted depending on information received during the first point of contact and pre-existing knowledge about the individual, their role within Muslim communities or their occupation. One of the four participants for example was a former president of IGGiÖ, therefore a public figure within Austrian and Muslim societies which impacted the additional questions that were asked connected to his occupation and role in the institutionalization of Islam in Austria. A string of narrative focal points was established and reflected in all interviews. These included:

1) **Childhood** (family, neighborhood, school, parents, education, friends, country of origin and connections)
2) **Personal Community** (mosques, religious and personal networks, religious authorities, marriage and children)
3) **Religion** (religious education, personal relationship with Islam, religious practices, religious festivals, traditions, food, clothing etc.)
4) **Politics** (political events in country of origin, migration background, war & refuge, Austrian political climate, political activism, media etc.)
5) **Personal Development** (student life, adulthood, occupation, activism)
6) **Society** (racism, personal experiences with discrimination, societal climate, civic engagement, COVID)
7) **Arts & Culture(s)** (cultural events, interreligious or intercultural dialogue, music, art etc.)
8) **Identities** (home, belonging, "being Muslim", sense of identity, self-definition, hybrid identities)

After conducting the formal part of the interview, interviewees were asked to prepare memorabilia to support their narrative which included pictures, letters, art pieces, and poems. During each of the four interviews, except one, two of the three project team members were present. One person oversaw the technical execution, and the other person conducted the interview. In all four cases only the person interviewed was present in the room where the interview was conducted. However, as most interviews took place in the interviewees' homes, other parties such as spouses, children or grandchildren were present in the building.

The following oral history interviews are analyzed according to the *Grounded Theory Method (GTM)* which requires the screening of the qualitative data followed by the establishment of general codes based on recurring patterns. The interview analysis is then structured along these codes to help make sense and conceptualize how participants are authoring their identities. The following **five themes** and associated questions have been used for the analysis of these four interviews:

1. Self-Description: - How do participants describe their identity?
   - What terms or phrases do participants use to define themselves?
   - How do participant's descriptions of their identity change over time?
2. Cultural/Religious Heritage: - How do participants talk about their cultural or religious heritage?
   - What role does their heritage play in their self-identification
3. Interactions with Austrian Society: - How do participants describe their interactions with non-Muslims in Austria?
   - How do these interactions influence their sense of identity?
4. Family and Community Influence: - What role does family and the Muslim community play in shaping their identity?
   - How do generational differences within the family impact identity construction?
5. Narrative Structure: - How do participants structure their life stories?
   - What significant life events do they highlight in their narratives?

Maha A. - From Damascus to Vienna[148]

Maha A.*[149]* was born in 1949 in Damascus, Syria to lawyer father, and a stay-at-home mother. Her mother died when she was nine and she is the youngest of six children. She was active in the student union and often attended assemblies or organized various activities which led to her principal asking her father to school to discuss her activities. He didn't necessarily like that she was politically active but also didn't prohibit her from continuing her work in the union. After graduation from grammar school, she attended university to study Arabic Literature and Pedagogy to become a teacher. After her studies it was expected of her to get married, and she eventually met her current husband who was studying in Austria at the time. She moved to Austria in 1972 and married him the same year at the age of 23. After her arrival in Linz, she became pregnant a year later and delivered the baby in Damascus. Shortly after the Yom-Kippur-War[150] started, and she decided to return to her husband who then lived in Salzburg. In 1975 they left Salzburg for Algeria because of her husband's job, and subsequently moved to Kuwait in 1979 for the same reasons. She has three sons, multiple grand-children and has resided in Vienna from 1982 until today. She has worked multiple jobs, from being a teacher in Damascus and Algeria, a bookkeeper in Linz, to being an Arabic Language Teacher in Vienna. She has started multiple dialogue platforms and women's circles to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue and empower Arab women.

1. Self-Description

She starts the interview talking about how she had many dreams as a young girl growing up in Damascus and always asked herself why there were certain things boys were allowed to do and girls weren't. The interviewer asked her if she would describe herself as a feminist or a fighter for women's rights. "Yes, yes. I am all for women getting their rights and also fighting for them,

[148] Oral History Interview with Maha A., 15.07.2021 in Vienna, Interview for Österreichische Mediathek's Project *MenschenLeben* (forthcoming); Interviewer: Georg Traska, Recordings in possession of Österreichische Mediathek, Gumpendorferstraße 95, 1060 Vienna; Transcription in possession of Österreichische Mediathek; Interviewer asked for the most part open-ended questions, Quality of sound and video is very good.

[149] To ensure anonymity, the last names of participants are not disclosed in this thesis and participants are only referred to by their first name and the first initial of their last name. One exception is made in the case of a public figure whose public nature is relevant to situating them into the broader political and social context.

[150] Between October 6 and October 25, 1973 the Yom-Kippur/Ramadan-War broke out when Arab States led by Egypt and Syria, advanced into the Sinai Peninsula, which had been occupied by Israel since 1967, and attacked them. As retaliation Israel launched a four-day intensive offensive into the outskirts of Damascus. On October 22 a ceasefire was negotiated by the United Nations and the war ended.

because rights are not gifted, one has to work for them".[151] Leisure activities like roller skating or riding a bicycle weren't allowed for girls but because her father was a lawyer, she narrated, he was righteous and allowed his daughters to practice these activities on the roof of their home. Maha A. was always curious especially when it came to traveling and exploring other countries. She always wanted to travel more because she expected other countries to be more open to women and have more opportunities for them. After moving to Europe and having to restart her life she also mentions moments of feeling lonely because her husband was traveling regularly for work. Before marrying her husband, she clearly told him: "I can't just be a stay-at-home wife, if you are okay with that, I will marry you".[152] She saw herself as an individual first, whose identity is not directly attached or absorbed by her husband's.

Throughout the interview Maha A. highlights that she is a very social person and loves to meet new people with different ethnic or religious backgrounds. It starts with her describing that she grew up in a religiously diverse neighborhood in Damascus where interreligious coexistence was self-evident. "Sometimes she didn't know if this person was Christian or Muslim, but they were still friends" because "it didn't play any role if they were Christian or Muslim".[153] While reflecting on her various work endeavors she met people from all walks of life and was always open-minded about learning new things from them and courageous in trying her hand at various projects and initiatives, especially in the context of establishing Arab language classes, Arab cuisine inspired cooking classes and other seminars on Arab culture for non-Arab women.

She credits her time at the university with helping her to become more conscious and changing her mindset because she was exposed to new people, gender mixed settings and new knowledge through the classes she attended. While narrating her life-story leaving Syria and her family and friends behind, becoming a mother to three children, while her husband was absent a lot, forced her to become more independent. She highlighted multiple times throughout the interview that friends and acquaintances in Austria made her transition from Syria to Austria not just easier but also more enjoyable.

[151] Interview Maha A., (18).
[152] Interview Maha A., (5).
[153] Interview Maha A., (3).

Finally, Maha uses words such as "religious" and "practicing"[154] to describe her relationship with Islam in Syria, Austria and all other countries she lived in. She highlights that, regardless of where she was in the world, Islam was a type of moral compass and spiritual guide that has always been part of her. With age she has found a new appreciation for nature and enjoys writing and reading. Additionally, she identifies strongly with her role as a (grand-) mother, a socialite and functioning as a bridge between her Arab culture and Austrian society.

2. Cultural/Religious Heritage

One of the aspects she highlights early in the interview is that the society she was living in in Damascus was very religiously diverse and but also rather close-minded. Nonetheless, she was raised to respect and accept everyone's differences. Part of the societal etiquette in Damascus was the limited interaction between men and women before entering university, which Maha A. didn't like. She enjoyed spending time in gender mixed environments because she learned a lot from the people around her and thus associated "open-ness" with a gender mixed society.

Art and culture were an essential part of her identity in her teenage years. She enjoyed going to parties, the cinema, the theater and continued her artistic pursuits in Vienna by organizing cultural seminars on Arab beauty secrets, Arabic cuisine and Arab language classes for non-Arab women. Later she attended events by *Arabisch-österreichisches Haus für Kunst und Kultur* [Arab-Austrian House for Art and Culture] and at the time of the interview she was in charge of the women's committee. She organized multiple events on 'traditional and modern society', 'development of the woman in Austria', 'strengthening family bonds' without financial compensation. Therefore, cultural events have always had a central role in her teenage and adult life.
She credits her oldest sister with the interest in arts and women's empowerment because she grew up seeing her sister defy social norms by refusing to wear the hijab even though, from what can be elicited from the interview, it was frowned upon for girls not to wear it if they had reached a certain age. "My older sister opened the door for my three younger sisters to not wear the hijab".[155] An aspect that her sister too "fought for"[156] was the process of finding a husband. Maha very clearly pointed out that she was not interested in getting to know a potential husband the "classical"

[154] Interview Maha A., (13).
[155] Interview Maha A., (12).
[156] Interview Maha A., (12).

way, which was "the girl comes in and the family of the groom-to-be takes a look".[157] She mentions that the "time of marriage" usually came once a woman finished her university studies.

In terms of her religiosity, she describes herself as being a practicing Muslim. However, she mentions how her oldest sister paved the way for her not to have to wear the hijab, which hadn't changed at the time of the interview. However, Maha A. performed Hajj (pilgrimage) and felt a sense of community and spirituality. After Hajj she wanted to start wearing the hijab, however, her husband did not want her to. As a compromise she wore a hat, to cover her hair, for nine years. Due to negative experiences in public and a sense of judgment she felt from fellow Arab women she spent time with for not wearing a headscarf that covered her neck and other parts, she eventually took it off.

Religion is a moral compass which she tried to pass along to her children, helping them to tell right from wrong. Mosques or religious institutions did not seem to play a crucial role in her religious heritage as she mentions at one point in the interview that she didn't go to mosques during her time in Linz. She didn't feel a strong sense of religious community and expressed having felt "alone in this world"[158] because it was hard for her to follow religious practices alone. Her husband is less religious than her and her children have an ambiguous relationship with Islam, where some of them practice it more than others. Islam is a pillar for her since "she has engaged with it no matter where". For her husband however it wasn't as important. "The connection between religion and family, everything is connected".[159] In Arab countries it was easier for her to fast, since everyone was fasting, and it was more present in society. "With time you also feel it here in Austria, you feel it more than before. This togetherness, doing something together, it's a good feeling"[160], referencing following Islamic practices such as fasting.
Considering her relationship with her cultural and religious heritage it does play a significant role in her self-identification process. Even though she defied certain societal norms in Syria (e.g. finding a partner, not wearing hijab) the cultural and religious exposure she received growing up stayed an integral part of her work, education, practices, morality and parenting.

[157] Interview Maha A., (4).
[158] Interview Maha A., (13).
[159] Interview Maha A., (13).
[160] Interview Maha A., (13).

3. Interactions with Austrian Society

When asked by the interviewer if anyone in her family knew of Austria or had any perception of it before she moved there, she responded with no. They had relatives in the United States and France that went there to study to become doctors. She had only previously seen pictures and movies about Austria, and she always dreamed of leaving Syria and living abroad for a period of time. Since her husband was a student in Linz when they met, she eventually moved from Damascus to Linz.

She describes her first few months in Austria as not being easy, because she wasn't able to communicate in Arabic with anyone and didn't have a big social circle. Her first point of contact with Austrians were the wives of her husband's friends. Due to the language barrier, she started teaching them Arabic and they taught her German in return. After she became pregnant, she wanted to work, and her husband found her a position in the financial department of a Catholic church.
She didn't need to speak German for this position because she had primarily to perform calculations. The woman in charge of the office taught Maha some German during their lunch breaks and Maha made her Arab coffee and sweet treats. Because her husband was traveling a lot for work, she was alone most of the time but found friends through her workplace. Being invited to various events or to people's homes helped her find her place in Austrian society because otherwise she mentions "she couldn't have continued living in Linz".[161] Before she was able to speak German, she talked to friends in English but eventually learned German through interacting with German-speaking people on a regular basis.

The interviewer asked Maha how she experienced her environment in Linz at the beginning. She responded, making an immediate connection to how she perceives the present, by saying: "At the beginning there was no issue with foreigners. On the contrary: "You're from the Holy Land? – Welcome". Everyone was very friendly and helpful".[162] After her first pregnancy, two families helped her with raising her child because according to her she wasn't able to deal with her son properly since she was a first-time mother. Maha didn't experience a culture shock coming to Austria because everyone was very friendly and invited her to many events. The only aspect that was hard for her was the transition to becoming more independent and not having a family support

[161] Interview Maha A., (5).
[162] Interview Maha A., (5).

system. She highlighted multiple times throughout the interview that friends and acquaintances made her transition from Syria to Austria not just easier but also more enjoyable.

When asked if she wished she could have stayed in Syria, Maha narrates that after having spent time living abroad in Austria and Algeria, she felt a bit estranged and didn't want to live in Syria anymore. "The system in Austria, in Europe, is safer. Many things: health, hospitals…"[163], she describes, especially after her second oldest son had health issues. She credits the Austrian health system with saving his life. "Somewhere else they might not have been able to save him. It's much safer here".[164] Reflecting on her time living in various countries throughout her life like Syria, Algeria and Kuwait, she noticed that Austria is more open-minded and more international, which she liked.

There was a lot of interest from Austrian women to learn more about Arab culture. However, she emphasized that she was the one that sought out all these social and job opportunities, they weren't offered to her or facilitated by anyone. This self-initiative of seeking out groups, events, social interactions and being a bridge between her Arab culture and Austrian culture runs through her life like a red thread. Her work and volunteer work at *Wiener Volkshochschulen* and *Arabisch-Österreichisches Hause für Kunst und Kultur* continued for multiple years. To the question how her social life developed in Vienna she says: "At the beginning it was international. Then I found other Arabs and got to know various groups and circles. At the beginning we had a group where we cooked together. Everyone was from somewhere else, and some Austrians were also part of it. Then some Arabs joined them"[165]. However, she didn't feel comfortable only being amongst Arab women. "I felt like a lot of time was wasted with them, women meet, drink coffee and so on".[166]

She mentions moments of experiencing racism such as an instance where children in her son's school dressed up as a belly dancer or a Sheikh for Fasching which she felt was culturally insensitive and displayed elements of Arab culture as laughable characters. Nonetheless she feels that with time that Austria has become her home. She has not been to Syria in eleven years due to the ongoing political instability, and Austria is her home now because "this injustice in Syria is something I do not want to live through".[167]

[163] Interview Maha A., (6).
[164] Interview Maha A., (6).
[165] Interview Maha A., (8).
[166] Interview Maha A., (8).
[167] Interview Maha A., (18).

The Austrian environment is also something she feels very attached to and helped in feeling more at home. “I really like living in Vienna, I am at home here. Thank God. And I am scared that something is going to go wrong in Austria or Vienna. Please don’t let that be! Let it be peaceful and beautiful just like it is”.[168] At one point she said: “It was more open, and we tried to understand each other more. Now everything is more close-minded. It’s different now. But not everyone, there are still people that think positively. Cooperation between the parties needs to change. You can’t do much from the outside, but you can from the inside. Hopefully things will change. It was much better”.[169]

This last quote implies that she has witnessed the socio-political climate change into a more negative direction while simultaneously insinuating that she has experienced her time in Austria in the past to have been generally peaceful. It becomes clear that she credits her German language skills, and therefore her entry into Austrian society in a sense, to the many social and work-related interactions she had with Austrians. They actively engaged with her by teaching her German, supporting her and her family in times of difficulty and additionally the “Austrian System” made her feel safe in a way that her country of migration, Syria, couldn’t anymore.

4. Family and Community Influence

Family plays a crucial role in Maha’s life. She started the interview by speaking about her father and the sense of justice that he had, and also instilled in her and her siblings and the life-long impact of her mother’s death at a young age, which continues to evoke a sense of emptiness and loneliness in her. Simultaneously, she ended the interview by sharing the loss of her eldest sister, which she looked up to in many aspects, and her second-oldest brother. Both died in Syriaduring the recent civil war, but from unrelated causes, while she was in Austria. “My oldest sister was like a mother and a role-model to me, she was even more organized than me and led a women's committee in Damascus. She was very active in the field of culture and art”.[170] She very much associated mid-war Syria with the loss of her siblings which didn’t make her want to travel back again. The fact that “you don’t have a mother, no father and the siblings have become less or passed away” makes her sad. [171]

[168] Interview Maha A., (18).
[169] Interview Maha A., (9–10).
[170] Interview Maha A., (18).
[171] Interview Maha A., (18).

Her husband and children also take up much space in her life story. She not only reflects on how she met her husband but also how due to his occupation their life plans, thus her life plans, were heavily impacted. Even though her husband gave her the freedom to do whatever she wanted to, she felt lonely most of the times because he was often traveling, and she spent much of that time alone with the children. Maha raised her children with a lot of freedom, but it was still important for her to instill a foundation in them which included knowing from where they hail, being proud, learning their mother tongue "so they don't feel ashamed of speaking another language".[172]

She gave them the freedom to choose their friends and the people they wanted to marry but it was essential for her to instill in them a sense of right and wrong that was based in Islamic values. "You can't play with religious things, I tried to get them to pray or fast. But I mainly didn't want them to lie to me, doing one thing at home and then another outside. They should do it voluntarily, but unfortunately it didn't quite turn out that way".[173] Muslim communities as such do not seem to have impacted Maha's identification process heavily. At one point she mentions how the Hajj she performed was special because of the group she did it with. Having that sense of spiritual community made performing this religious pillar easier for her. Furthermore, she stressed that it was important for her that her children have a connection with Syria. They spent every summer in Syria, for at least a month, because she wanted her sons to learn the language and get to know her relatives and community.

An element that seems to have impacted her identity construction as a mother and wife is dialogue. Her entire life story is marked by moments of dialogue, getting to know people from various backgrounds, learning from them, asking questions and shifting perspectives. However, when it comes to her own family she feels a lack of conversation. "Conversations need an occasion, a good relationship. My sons are very busy with their families. My husband [...] talks very little to everyone. These conversations are missing".[174] Though it seems that she was successful in starting a lot of conversations in external circles, a sense of regret is noticeable in not having accomplished the same for her own family.

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[172] Interview Maha A., (10).
[173] Interview Maha A., (14).
[174] Interview Maha A., (17).

5. Narrative Structure

Maha structures her story by taking us through the different stages in her life in an almost chronological order. It starts with her early years growing up in Damascus, Syria, attending school, her political activism and her time at university. Her marriage to her husband functions as a transition point and geographical movement from Syria to Austria. The next phase is marked by movement from Linz to Algeria, to Salzburg, to Kuwait and then finally Vienna. In between these many moves she becomes a mother of three.

After settling in Vienna, she started building her social network through various social and cultural events, some self-initiated, some just in attendance. A narrative transition was apparent when she moved from talking about the external work she does to the internal work - her family. The next part is spent talking about how she raised her children, family dynamics, her religious journey, anti-Muslim racism she experienced and touching on societal values she deems important for a multicultural world. Her story begins and ends with family. She briefly touches on the impact of the Syrian civil war and the death of family members has had on her relationship with Syria and her sense of home and belonging.

Life events that have had a lasting and significant impact on Maha are the loss of her mother and the associated feeling of emptiness as well as her accomplishments in functioning as a mediator between cultures by bringing especially women of different faiths and ethnicities together to learn from each other. Finally, even such things were typically mentioned incidentally, her story is marked by moments of resilience, courage, loneliness, spiritual grounding and a sense of having done the best she could with what she had. While the life stories of migrants are oftentimes characterized by loss, fear, loneliness and trial, they are also shaped by acts of kindness, acceptance, inclusion and fusion. However, because moments of resilience tend to move to the background, the following experience of Maha's is shared to humanize the oftentimes idealized and romanticized perception about migrants:

> "I wanted to write my own life story [in book-format], I already started with it. I think I also have a lot of sad experiences that I haven't mentioned yet. For example, one time my husband was gone for travels, and I was new in Salzburg or Linz. My little baby had a fever, I wanted to go to the doctor, I

> didn't have boots yet and it was Winter. I went outside with my normal shoes, with my baby and its fever to find a doctor in this new city I was in. This was an experience. When I found the doctor, they had to hold me because I was totally frozen by the cold. There were many experiences like that, it's sad. But I made it".[175]

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Anas Shakfeh - President of the IGGiÖ[176]

Anas Shakfeh was born in Hama, Syria in 1943 to a middle-class family during the Second World War. His father was a military official in the Osman army and then became a salesman. His mother did not receive a traditional education but had much Islamic theological knowledge. After finishing high school in Hama, he decided to study medicine at the University of Vienna in Austria and moved there in 1964. He dropped out of his medical studies and changing to Arabic Studies and Islamic Art History in 1972 which he also did not complete. A few years later he became a court-certified interpreter for Arabic. From 1984 to 1988 Anas was a teacher for Islamic religious education while simultaneously becoming more active in the IGGiÖ, which was still in its early stages. He was eventually appointed president of the IGGiÖ and remained in this position from 1997 to 2011. In his role as president, he helped create a curriculum for Islamic religious education at school and established the first teacher academy for Islamic religious education in Austria. While serving as president he also taught Islamic Cultural History at the Islamic Religious Education Academy (IRPA) until 2012 before he retired. As president he was at the intersection between federal authorities and Muslims in Austria. In 2008 he was awarded the Golden Decoration of Honor for Services to the Republic of Austria for his interreligious efforts and his achievements in institutionalizing Islam in Austria.

1. Self-Identification

One of the most evident characteristics of this interview is its political nature. This is reflected in the way Shakfeh conducted himself, his choice of words, his clothing as well as the fact that he is

[175] Interview Maha A., (16).
[176] Oral History Interview with Anas Shakfeh., 26.07.2021 in Vienna, Interview for Österreichische Mediathek's Project *MenschenLeben* (forthcoming); Interviewer: Omar T. Nasr, Recordings in possession of Österreichische Mediathek, Gumpendorferstraße 95, 1060 Vienna; Transcription in possession of Österreichische Mediathek; Interviewer asked for the most part open-ended questions, Quality of sound and video is very good.

the only participant whose interview was not filmed at his home and therefore established a certain distance. His choice of words can oftentimes be characterized as diplomatic, weighed and careful. He mentions throughout the interview that many of his male relatives as well as his father and uncle have served in military positions or engaged in political activities in Turkey, Palestine and Syria. His first political experience was in school when he was voted student body representative. Shakfeh describes himself as an open-minded individual and as someone who received an open-minded and traditional upbringing. He considers himself to be a culturally educated individual who enjoys reading about Austrian classical musicians like Hayden, Mozart, Schubert and others. His political ambitions both as a child and later in his official role seem to be fueled by not being content with and wanting to change the status quo. While talking about his accomplishments during his presidency he mentions the establishment of an Islamic cemetery and various prayer rooms in institutions such as the AKH hospital in Vienna and says: "All this has been achieved and it can never be enough. Of course, more is needed, because there are more Muslims now, but this is what has been achieved".[177] In another instance he talked about the problems that occurred by bringing only a small number of religious education teachers from Turkey to teach in Austria and said: "All this was not enough, that's why I had the wish to create an academy for religious education teachers"[178] On multiple occasions during the interview he clearly stated that he considers himself a *Freigeist* [free thinker] and not bound to anyone's opinion or doctrine, rather he chooses to oppose them and is a free spirit. "I was never one of those who went to some mosque to listen to some scholar. I was never a firm supporter of a spiritual scholar. [...] I never had any tendency to get involved with anyone".[179] Due to the diplomatic and political nature of his work within the IGGiÖ he talks about several events in which heated arguments broke out amongst leaders of the IGGiÖ where he tried to find compromises and be solution-oriented.

Religion and religious-based values are essential to him as he makes clear that "for my personality, because I make an effort to practice, religion is important" and "regardless of how religious one is, religion and religious values are always formative".[180] The interviewer asked him why he embraced a representative "religious" role if he emphasized earlier that he was involved in culture-related activities. He unequivocally states: "religion and culture cannot be separated" and "his cultural interests led him to religious interest".[181] Therefore his self-identification was first heavily

[177] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (17).
[178] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (11).
[179] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (3–4).
[180] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (19).
[181] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (11).

influenced by his cultural exposure and eventually turned into an interrelated interest in religious matters as well.

2. Cultural/Religious Heritage

Shakfeh and his friend-group in school enjoyed classical and modern Arabic literature. He describes in detail that "there is the new and the traditional poetry. We were universally interested. We read philosophical, psychological books [...] we knew a lot about the world".[182] According to him he had a traditional upbringing which, in his context, meant that the mother teaches the children about religion before they enter school, and his father took them with him to Friday prayers at the mosque every now and then. Traditionally the role of the mother was to teach her children right from wrong, good from bad and how to behave. Shakfeh mentions that in his city of Hama women, which were called "shaykha", taught children some verses from the Quran before they entered elementary school and then they were taught Islamic religious education in school too. "There were many different orientations: Sufism, Salafists [...] but the Salafis in Syria were never radical" Shakfeh mentioned while at the same time clearly stating that he never felt any connection with these orientations.[183]

After moving to Austria in 1964, befriending intellectuals from the Muslim community in Vienna, such as Ahmad Abdelrahimsai (first president of IGGiÖ) he had a vested interest in helping establish and institutionalize Islam in Austria. From an academy for religious education teachers, an Islamic cemetery to establishing the first Islamic grammar school he is one of the main agents in building and continuing Islamic religious heritage in Austria.

As Shakfeh was raised in a religious household he sought something resembling his upbringing in Austria but didn't find it. Being used to going to the weekly Friday prayer in Syria, he came to Austria with a similar expectation of finding the necessary infrastructure to practice his religion. "I tried practicing in Austria. That's why we rented the union hall for the Friday prayer, because the Friday prayer is part of life".[184] His upbringing in Syria also taught him the importance and open-mindedness needed to live in an interreligious society because "Christianity as we know it today was born in Syria. Life was lived community-based. We knew Christians not from afar or

[182] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (3).
[183] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (4).
[184] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (11).

books but from real life and that's why we were always open-minded".[185] The religious and cultural heritage he experienced in Syria helped him understand and respect the Austrian society he was entering: "[...] no matter how many Muslims there are in Austria, Germany etc., cultural life, traditional life will stay Christian, in Austria and South Germany Catholic. Nobody should think of replacing one society with another or ousting them".[186]

3. Interactions with Austrian Society

When describing his relationship and interactions with Austrian society, Shakfeh solely goes into detail about his interactions with political leaders or key figures in his time as president of the IGGiÖ. This again shows how through the entirety of the interview the viewer doesn't really get to know Anas, but rather former president Mr. Shakfeh. As mentioned, he came to Austria in 1964 to study medicine and lived in Wolfsberg. After some time, he moved to student dorms in the Afro-Asian Institute in Vienna. Since there were many Arab students in Vienna at that time, they wanted to find a proper prayer space and started negotiating with representatives of the University of Vienna, but their request was denied. They offered them the opportunity to pray in the sports locker rooms opposite the Auditorium Maximum but the students didn't consider this to be the appropriate space to pray in a dignified manner.

Even though he spent quite some time studying and living in Austria he only spoke of his interactions with Austrian institutions or leaders, not about their Austrian neighbors, work colleagues or friends like other participants. He emphasizes that it was always important to him to have good relations with the Austrian authorities. There were various events he was invited to where he met with city councilors and provincial governors. "With the various federal chancellors that came from Schüssel, to Gusenbauer, Faymann, Proll as vice-chancellor and so on the relationship was good. With Schüssel I still have an amicable relationship to this day. With Fischer [former Austrian president] I am also still in friendly solidarity. With the Kardinal, the bishop of the Protestant church too".[187] He also goes so far as to say that without the bishop of the Protestant church in Austria the establishment of the Academy for Religious Education Teachers wouldn't have been possible. All these interactions influenced his sense of identity because the relationships he fostered with many of these political personalities were the reason for his accomplishments in

[185] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (11).
[186] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (11).
[187] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (17).

organizing religious life for Austrian Muslims thus indirectly gained him his standing and credit in Muslim communities.

4. Family and Community Influence

Shakfeh generally revealed more information about his family members. He indicates how he was evacuated from his home at two years old due to the ongoing revolution against the French mandate, during which his uncle died. His oldest brother was a cadet in the military academy in Homs and said farewell before going to war in Palestine in 1948. "My consciousness was developed in Damascus [where he attended middle and grammar school]. Lasting friendships were formed in Damascus and still exist today".[188] He also remembers all the political events that were happening at that time because his family was very interested in politics. Due to the critical time and place he was born in and his family members' roles in the military, he experienced many of the uprisings, revolutions and political conflicts in Syria and surrounding middle eastern countries up close. While still in school he traded classical music and vinyl records with his friends and eventually even founded a cultural association. They bought cultural magazines and books from Egypt, Syria and Lebanon and went on trips together. His mother was an important role model and a spiritual teacher to him while his father and grandfather increased his interest in socio-political realities.

His first point of contact with Muslim society in Austria was the *Moslemische Sozialdienst (MSD)*, more specifically Dr. Smail Balić who was working at the National Library in 1966. "There practically was no Islamic religious life in Vienna at that time. There were no mosques. No associations. The only association that existed was MSD".[189] As a student he also found community with fellow Syrian, Persian and Arab students. One of the elements that brought them together was their search for and desire to create a community and establish spaces to live out religious and cultural practice as they knew it from their countries of migration. Smail Balić however seems to have been a key person for Shakfeh to enter the organized and active Muslim community in Austria.

Shakfeh however, mainly credits Turkish migrants with creating the necessary religious infrastructure to organize Muslim life in Austria. "Austria owes its real religious life to Turks and

[188] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (1).
[189] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (4).

nobody else".[190] It also seems as though, most likely due to his own socio-economic background, he mainly sought out communities based on their intellectual standing. "There were a few members [of MSD] who were not Bosniaks, such as Abdelrahimsai, an Afghan. He was a police officer who also studied law and was sent to Vienna to obtain his doctorate and attended the police academy here. [...] He was an intellectual, so to speak. The members, however, were all simple guest workers. A few intellectuals were always in charge: Dr. Balić, as a historian, Dr. Abdelrahimsai and there was also a third person, Tewfiq Velagic, an engineer. These three were the leaders".[191] These comments are an indicator for how Shakfeh not only categorized the members of Muslim communities but also for whose accomplishments he appreciated.

5. Narrative Structure

Shakfeh starts his oral history interview by talking about his upbringing in Syria which is marked by many political events in which some of his family members played an active role. His cultural and religious education took place in school, through his family and community. With his move to Austria Shakfeh's narration is very strongly built around the small community he found and the transformation the Muslim Austrian society, especially the representative body of Muslims in Austria – the IGGiÖ- underwent. He depicts many situations and encounters in his journey to becoming president of the IGGiÖ focusing on Islamic institutions that were established, inner-community struggles, interreligious and political partnerships and the turning point for Islamic politics in Austria with the amended Islam Law in 2015. The last part of the interview focuses mainly on the state of religious life post-presidency and after the new Islam Law, which was accompanied by noticeable Islamophobic and anti-Muslim sentiments after Sebastian Kurz became the head of the People's Party.

Some of the significant life events highlighted in the interview include his relationship and friendship with Smail Balić, conflicts between him and first president of the IGGiÖ, Abdelrahimsai, and the difficulties of following religious practices upon his arrival in Austria due to the lack of religious institutions. He describes in detail the many attempts at organizing a prayer space while he was a student at the University of Vienna. The establishment of a curriculum for religious education at schools followed by the academy to train religious education teachers also

[190] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (8).
[191] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (8).

took up much space in his narration as an accomplishment he is proud of. One element he barely mentioned and went into detail about is his wife, children and he also did not delve into emotions and personal challenges he encountered.

Fatima O. - A journey to finding Islam[192]

Fatima O., formerly named Christine, was born in Upper Austria in 1950 to a farmer family and was one of eight children. After finishing elementary school, she did an apprenticeship to become a seamstress, which she completed in 1964. She continued to work as a seamstress in Linz until 1980 before owning her own store as a dressmaker in St. Georgen. She got married to a Muslim Egyptian in 1976 and had two sons, one of whom had passed away in 2010. With her marriage to a Muslim, she eventually decided to convert to Islam herself shortly after the wedding. She worked in Upper Austria until her retirement in 2015 and moved to Vienna to live closer to her family and grandchildren where she still resided at the time of the interview.

1. Self-Identification

Fatima O. describes herself as having had a safe and protected upbringing. She is a very family-centered person who was not just very close to her own family, because they lived and worked together on the farm, but also to her husband's family, her children and grandchildren. While taking the interviewer through the various stages of her life it becomes evident that she is a very environmentally conscious person, trying to act and think in an environmentally-friendly way wherever the opportunity presented itself.

When talking about her activism she mentions that "for me it was very important to not leave behind too much trash that is why I went to flea markets and bought tons of dishes [instead of using plastic]".[193] During multiple moments in the interviews she mentions how important Islam has become in her life after converting and that that is the one thing in her life that she is most thankful for because it has become an integral part of her identity and life. Therefore, the biggest

[192] Oral History Interview with Fatima O., 18.12.2021 in Vienna, Interview for Österreichische Mediathek's Project *MenschenLeben* (forthcoming); Interviewer: Nesrin El-Isa, Recordings in possession of Österreichische Mediathek, Gumpendorferstraße 95, 1060 Vienna; Transcription in possession of Österreichische Mediathek; Interviewer asked for the most part open-ended questions, Quality of sound and video is very clear.
[193] Interview Fatima O., (10).

change in the description of her identity is the time before and after her conversation. Some elements of Islam such as the hijab and her husband's cultural and ethnic background were new and somewhat foreign to her. She also had some preconceived notions during her first visit to Egypt and meeting her husband's family however that changed over time, and she learned to appreciate the sense of community and strong family bonds.

2. Influence of Cultural/Religious Heritage

Fatima grew up in a Catholic household going to church every Sunday, fasting during Easter and was active in the Catholic Youth. Even in school the most important grade for her parents was religious education. On the importance of religion in her life she says: "Religion always played an important role in my childhood, my youth with the Catholic youth, after her conversion and it still plays an important role for her and her whole family and environment. I love the topic of religion, talking about it. I love praying five times a day and always being connected to God. The fact that you can never move away from or forget what role it plays to believe in God, standing in front of Allah during prayer you keep being reminded of how small and insignificant the human is".[194] It becomes very clear that religion was a guiding source and a resource throughout her life. In her childhood she went to church every Friday morning for her first communion because it was important to her parents, and it seemed logical to her because everyone in her town was at the church service too.

She also describes Easter to be a time where the whole family gathered, and they tried to take the religious practice of fasting or abstaining from something seriously. The time around Advent was also a special time for her family because during that time they prayed every day and went to church more than usual. As a family they always ate together and said a prayer before and after every meal, even their maids joined in. During her youth it was frowned upon to go to night clubs or parties without male company. She attended several balls and took part in a lot of cultural events in her town. Because her town was rather small it was a very tight-knit community where everybody knew each other and looked out for one another.

Her family was very religious therefore, they wanted her to marry in the church. Her husband was Muslim, so they needed an official permission from the bishop to be able to get married in

[194] Interview Fatima O., (8).

church, which she received with the condition that her husband had to promise to not force her to convert to Islam. He promised the bishop that he would never do that. In the process of getting married she had a conversation with her husband about Islam that eventually ended with her accepting Islam and converting. He asked her if she believed in God and she said: "Yes, I believe in God, we are a Catholic family, my uncle is a priest, everyone is religious". She continues to narrate "Then he asked me: 'Do you believe that God created earth and the universe and everything that one can see and not see?' I confirmed and he continued to ask me if I believed that there are multiple Gods, that God has a family, a son, a mother or a father? I replied that God is God and he doesn't need a family. That's where he said: 'Well then you can become a Muslim' and I responded with: 'Why not'. And that is how my conversion came about".[195] In the interview she emphasizes that she was never forced to convert in any way but that she did it out of free will.

Religion played a major role in her self-identification because it finds a place in every phase of her life. "I was fully convinced that that [the conversation] was the right thing for me. I knew nothing about Islam, but my husband told me a lot about Islam and showed me the sources".[196] She often saw her husband praying and the way he prayed was very foreign to her. She didn't start praying right away but eventually started with practicing Islam. Another aspect of her identity that changed after her conversation was her name. She changed her name from Christine to Fatima after one of her family visits in Egypt where her sister-in-law asked her if she wanted to have a Muslim name, but she wasn't aware that that was an option.

In the interview she makes multiple comparisons between her Catholic upbringing and the ways she lived as a Muslim. One of the comparisons she made was about how much more present Islam is in her conversations compared to Catholicism in her childhood. When asked if something changed after her conversion to Islam she responds with: "Of course a lot changed, marriage, own apartment, kids, much had changed. It was a new phase in my life. The best decision I ever made was accepting Islam, this was a big and important decision even though it wasn't that obvious to me at the time of my conversion because everything is clear. You can read the Quran or the Sunnah, everything is just very clear. I didn't like the Priest's sermons and obviously it depends on the Priest".[197] After performing Hajj she felt reborn and was more conscious and intentional about everything she did for herself and especially others.

[195] Interview Fatima O., (4–5).
[196] Interview Fatima O., (5).
[197] Interview Fatima O., (8-9).

3. Interactions with Austrian Society

As Fatima was born in Austria, unlike the other interviewees, she doesn't narrate her interactions with non-Muslim Austrians as entering something new or foreign. She was part of that society and grew up in it. She spent a lot of time in the Catholic Youth and was part of the religious community in her town. The friends she made at the dressmaker she worked at in Linz are still her friends to this day. "We really looked out for each other in the neighborhood and helped each other. It was a good feeling to know everyone, nobody was foreign".[198]

However, what she does detail is her introduction to her husband's culture. The day she met her husband she was on an outing with her friend, and he randomly sat at their table. She describes that in that moment she thought to herself: "Who is that foreigner that just sat next to us", admitting that she had preconceived notions about foreigners. During her first visit to Egypt, she was overwhelmed with all the differences in the quality of life and the discrepancy in comfort she felt in Austria which she didn't in Egypt. "I didn't understand some of the customs at the market in Egypt, and there is a difference in mentality as well, I wasn't used to all this, the sense of comfort was missing, it really was intense".[199] She did not identify herself with Egyptian customs or traditions however later on appreciated the sense of community and the way she was welcomed into the family, even though she didn't speak the same language as them and couldn't communicate with them.

After converting to Islam and especially after wearing a hijab and being visibly Muslim, customers that entered her shop started asking her more questions about Islam and fact-checking things they had heard. She believes they sought her out because she spoke German and there weren't many Muslim families in her town that spoke German but also because they still somewhat perceived her as being part of their community as well.
Most interactions she described were those where she felt like they were impactful in breaking down stereotypes and prejudices or educating people on Islamic values. It was less evident that interactions with Austrian society post-conversion had a strong impact on her sense of identity. However, she does mention that predating her conversion, the Catholic Youth really shaped her, and she enjoyed the sense of community she found there.

[198] Interview Fatima O., (5).
[199] Interview Fatima O., (6).

4. Family and Community Influence

Fatima's parents were both very present in her life because due to their farm they worked and lived under one roof. Everyone in the family had a designated task and specific household chores they had to do. At every meal they sat together as a family and even when started working in a different city it was clear that she would drive back home every weekend to see her family. Her husband plays a key role in her conversion to Islam and therefore heavily impacted her adult life. Once she had children of her own, she felt a need to have a Muslim community for them. At the time and in the town, they were living in there was no active youth organization and the few mosques that existed were ethnically divided and didn't offer activities for young people whose main language of communication was German and who were socialized in Austria. That was the beginning of the Muslim Youth Austria that started with Fatima's sons and a handful of youngsters living in the same area. They built their own Muslim community because there was none.

When comparing her children's upbringing to her grandchildren's she says: "Yes, of course things have changed. So much has happened in such a short amount of time. They grow up as Muslims, always see people praying, we always greet each other with Salamu Alaikum in the house, therefore it's a totally different approach. The kids already go to school with so many Muslims. My kids didn't have any Muslims with them in school".[200] She also mentioned that she felt like Muslims are generally more accepted nowadays then when she converted to Islam. However, at the same time she speaks of a change in the climate surrounding Islam and Muslims. She feels like everything has become "harsher, ruder and more egocentric when it comes to being of service to others and politeness".[201] She believes that the media and access to information via phones and computers play a very big role in why the climate has changed in a negative way.

5. Narrative Structure

Fatima structures her narration around two phases in her life: pre-conversion and post-conversion. In her stories pre-conversion, she speaks about her family life on the farm, her tight-knit community and her activities in the Catholic Youth and her passion for her job as a seamstress. The point of transition in her life story is the moment she met her husband. With this encounter

[200] Interview Fatima O., (12).
[201] Interview Fatima O., (12).

much of her outlook and purpose in life changed because it was defined by following Islamic values and practices, some of which differed from her previous ones.
In addition to her conversion, she describes starting wearing the hijab as a significant life event because she was struggling with the idea of wearing it and was afraid of people treating her differently.

Another time in her life that she highlighted was when her children founded the Muslim Youth Austria and what it meant for the Muslim community and herself to help create something significant. Finally, her first Hajj was a powerful experience for her. "When I saw the Kaaba for the first time from afar, I felt such ease, as if a weight had been lifted. I can't even describe the feeling. [...] It was like an inner cleansing, really pure, like if you're reborn as a baby. Free from everything that exists. What I always valued was expecting only what I deserved and not more, like deceiving someone, I'm too honest for that".[202]

Dhia Sh. - The Sculptor of Babylon[203]

Dhia Sh. was born in Babylon in 1953 to a stay-at-home mother and a father who was in the military. After finishing school, he worked as an animator for Iraqi Television in 1973 and was simultaneously a national sculptor and in charge of the artistic design of Baghdad. He eventually moved to Austria in 1977, after vacationing there first and then decided to study Art in Upper Austria. Dhia worked with renowned Austrian artists such as Maria Lassnig, Haimo Kuching and Erwin Reiter. He got married to a Christian Austrian woman in 1985 and has three children with her. While working as an independent sculptor he also opened and managed a restaurant in Vienna which was also displaying his art. He had an older brother who disappeared in 2006 in Iraq and is believed to have died.

[202] Interview Fatima O., (9).
[203] Oral History Interview with Dhia Sh., 15.07.2021 in Vienna, Interview for Österreichische Mediathek's Project *MenschenLeben* (forthcoming); Interviewer: Georg Traska, Recordings in possession of Österreichische Mediathek, Gumpendorferstraße 95, 1060 Vienna; Transcription in possession of Österreichische Mediathek; Interviewer asked for the most part open-ended questions, Quality of sound and video is very clear.

1. Self-Identification

Dhia Sh.'s interview took place in his atelier and therefore it became evident very quickly that a core aspect of his self-identification is his art and more specifically sculpturing. He views himself as an artist, a creator of things but also as a highly political individual. Growing up in the midst of ancient ruins and sculptures in the old city of Babylon he always had an appreciation for art. "Whether in Upper Austria or Vienna, I never knew anything but art".[204] He also identified himself as a Bedouin, a desert man, which for him meant "belonging to oneself".[205]

He mentioned that he never understood why people in Iraq fought over their ethnic identities "Arabs say Yazidis are Arabs, Kurds say they are Kurds, they are neither. Why shouldn't we accept that? Everyone wants to find their origin story"[206], therefore it can be understood that Dhia does not put much value in defining or externally defining identities for other people. His life motto is "Live and let live", thus he doesn't like to intervene or engage in discussions about other people's identities. Throughout the interview he mentions that he identifies as religious but also discloses that he doesn't follow all religious guidelines. "I'm religious [...] but I don't think that I am better than others. I can't reconcile that with my knowledge or upbringing. The persistence of always thinking one is right that's what's bad".[207]
He also discloses that he was raised to always speak his mind regardless of what people would think. "I always talk about human rights in the Arab world, about different political views of Arab countries. Naturally I don't make myself very popular with these governments, but I do with the people".[208] Politics have always been a core part of his identity since he was a child and especially because of the political unrest in Iraq that he was born into. He would generally describe himself as critical of government and values women's rights and equal rights for all people regardless of their ethnicity or religion.

One of the elements that he described as something that had changed was his appreciation for ancient sculptures in Babylon. As a child he used to destroy some of them because he wasn't aware of their cultural significance. "As a child I didn't appreciate it, but later I totally did. When I was

[204] Interview Dhia Sh., (5).
[205] Interview Dhia Sh., (8).
[206] Interview Dhia Sh., (8).
[207] Interview Dhia Sh., (16).
[208] Interview Dhia Sh., (19).

at the academy my professor asked us to sit in the museum and draw for 12 hours. We loved drawing. The professor did this so they would be close to their culture".[209]

2. Influence of Cultural/Religious Heritage

Religion in general played a considerable role throughout Dhia's interview. He primarily talked about his views on various cultural or religious practices but less about which of these elements he cares about himself. His father didn't want his daughters to wear the hijab because he was against it. Following his father's suit he said: "Unfortunately his grandchildren are covered. These are the times we live in now: Backwards" or "Islam is in the heart and the mind, not in the looks. Persisting on being right, that's what's bad". Dhia believed that wearing the hijab is not a form of practicing your religion but seems to view it as something that is backward and not timely therefore somewhat contradicting himself in his stance on "live and let live".

Concerning his relationship with Islam he explained: "Religion has always played a major role, but not in the same sense as it does now. At the moment it's not religion, it's torture you have to say. People used to be very different when it came to religion. Of course, people prayed five times a day, that was quite normal. But the way they practice religion now, it wasn't like that. They were a bit freer, or much more Muslim than they are now. Now it's all politics".[210] Dhia doesn't agree with mixing religion with politics because he believes that politicizing religion divides people.

What he doesn't agree with is pitting religions against each other and claiming that one is better than the other. "The principle is that a human being remains a human being [...] No one is right, everyone has an opinion, so you can live together in peace. But if the Muslims insist they are right and they are the believers of God and they are important and right for the whole world. [...]The Quran also writes about 'all people', not just Muslims".[211] Dhia uses generalizing terms such as "The Muslims" but in other parts of the interview he differentiates between Muslims and radical extremists such as ISIS.

When asked about the cultural heritage such as sculptors that exist in Babylon, he clarifies that it is not Muslims that have destroyed that cultural legacy but "it's ISIS, they have nothing to do with

[209] Interview Dhia Sh., (22–23).
[210] Interview Dhia Sh., (11).
[211] Interview Dhia Sh., (15).

Islam. [...] The cultural heritage of Iraq does not belong to Iraqis; it belongs to the whole world. Arabic culture exists in many European museums in Berlin, in Austria, in England, in France. I am very happy that these cultures exist in these museums".[212] While Dhia explained that he considers himself to be a religious person he later makes clear that he believes more in humanity than the theological aspects of Islam as he mentions that he drinks alcohol and doesn't necessarily approve of family members wearing the hijab.

When asked if one of his children chose Islam he laughingly said: "Yes, my son, but currently he is just a Muslim on paper".[213] The way in which he said this insinuates that he does not prioritize passing along religious heritage as he also said the following after being asked if he performed Hajj: "No, I never performed Hajj. I didn't want to, and I'd rather not say anything more about it. It's a cliché, just for someone to call him Hajji [name for someone that has performed Hajj]. I don't want that; I already have gray hair. I really need to be a human first, that's why I believe in everything".[214] However, he did think it was important to pass along his cultural heritage to his grandchildren because "if I had one power in Iraq, I would want for people to be close to art and their culture. That's why I take my grandchildren to the museum. I also take them to exhibitions, and I know it can be exhausting because kids aren't as patient during exhibitions, but I still try to do it so that at least people in my immediate proximity accept art".[215]

3. Interactions with Austrian Society

Dhia's first interaction with Austrian society after moving to Linz to study in 1977 was in English because he was still learning German in his first year. What helped him learn German in a year were the many conversations he had with Austrians. He recalls that there weren't many Arab students at his university, but he was able to communicate in German within the first three months. He interacted with people in pubs while going out to drink and socialize. "Even though the dialect in Upper Austria was different from standard German I was able to master it. My wife, Christine, also talked Upper Austrian with me, this was the colloquial language, it was common to talk that way".[216] Language, more specifically learning German, seems to have been a gateway into Austrian society for Dhia.

[212] Interview Dhia Sh., (22).
[213] Interview Dhia Sh., (9).
[214] Interview Dhia Sh., (170).
[215] Interview Dhia Sh., (23).
[216] Interview Dhia Sh., (5).

In his interview he talked a lot about his interactions with several renowned Austrian artists such as Maria Lassnig. When she was around 80 years old, she invited Dhia into her atelier in the 13th district in Vienna to make a cast with him and was very curious about him and wanted to learn more. He met with her many times to help her with various chores because of her advanced age and socialized with her and other artists. “Maria Lassnig talked to me about the old times, about Babylon, about Iraq. She was also interested in politics, but that wasn’t important to her. She wanted to know how it is there, that's what was important to her. [...] She had a strong personality”.[217]

His interaction with Austrian society was what eventually persuaded him to move permanently to Austria for his studies. He was traveling through Europe and visited various places that were known to be hubs for artists, but it was when he visited the Academy of Arts in Linz that he was enthusiastic. He heard from students that many students of Fritz Wodruba, an Austrian sculptor, taught there. He received word from an Iraqi in Linz about the Academy, did the entrance exam and succeeded. “It was what I always wanted to do. The sculpture workshop was in a small building with a few students. I was impressed with the system”.[218] Through his Austrian wife and his well-known artist father-in-law, he was introduced to many people and traveled with them through Europe as well.

4. Family and Community Influence

Family has shaped Dhia’s identity greatly, especially after his father, who was a politician, was arrested and Dhia’s family was forced to leave their home and move to South Iraq to be safe. He originated from a powerful and influential family in Babylon. His grandfather was not only a strong presence in his life but also in his village. His father was also a role model for him in the way he prioritized knowledge and was able to talk about culture and poetry and was a very open-minded person. “He thinks differently, he is more aware and knows a lot about many countries. He has a lot of experience with people and has seen a lot of suffering [...] he was a peaceful person”.[219]

The unrest he experienced between Arabs and Kurds shaped his identity in the sense of wanting to disconnect from all identity markers that create a division between people. His relationship with

[217] Interview Dhia Sh., (13).
[218] Interview Dhia Sh., (4).
[219] Interview Dhia Sh., (9).

his father suffered from the political unrest and his brother was also kidnapped and to his knowledge most likely murdered because of his political views. Therefore, many of the politicized strong views he shared in this interview can be traced to the fate of his close family and the loss he had suffered because of it. “I hail from a village, a village has a certain consciousness, certain customs, if something doesn’t suit you, you have to leave quickly. I still have that in my life, if I don’t like it somewhere I leave, I don’t want to change anything”.[220]

His mother also had an impact on his identity and why women’s rights were important to him. She wore a white hijab, while most women wore a black hijab, and Dhia called her a ruler. It was unconventional for women to swim in the rivers in Iraq, but his mother did it anyway and somewhat defied social norms throughout his life. Dhia’s brother, after becoming a political leader, advised him against coming back to Iraq because of Dhia’s political views that he shared very publicly. “He said he thinks I don’t belong there. [...] With my views and the ongoing war in Iraq, my views were not those of the government”.[221]

Therefore, one might say that Dhia was politically persecuted, and his brother was part of that system while also looking out for his safety. This eventually led to him not returning to Iraq to see his family and therefore a familial disconnect. Many of the characteristics of his father shaped him, his outlook and identity and were aspects he wanted to pass along to his own children such as always speaking your mind, not forcing anyone to do anything and knowing your culture and your customs. Therefore, one could suggest that his family played a stronger role in his identities than Muslim communities.

5. Narrative Structure

Dhia focuses much of his narrative on commenting on political and socio-political events in the past and present. He touches on family life in Babylon, his interest in art and sculpting, his studies and move to Austria and in between all of these focal points he shares his views and opinion on events he wasn’t necessarily asked about by the interviewer. Therefore, there is no clear chronological or thematic structure in this interview. However, he does highlight significant life events or people in his life story. In terms of family, his father, uncles, and mother take up much

[220] Interview Dhia Sh., (15).
[221] Interview Dhia Sh., (5).

room in his stories in which he shares what he learned from them and what characteristics they had. The historical and present political situation in Iraq also has a significant presence in his identification process as he seems to have adopted specific views in spite of the political unrest and wars that happened there. Additionally, he shares much of his journey in the art scene in Austria and at the end of the interview proudly shows the interviewer his favorite art pieces in his gallery.

All four of the interviews allowed for analysis of each of the five areas, and as expected, each participant had a different focal point within their life story. The aspect of self-identification was less self-evident and needed more eliciting than other areas of analysis. In terms of cultural and religious heritage all participants had much to say about how their home culture and religion shaped their identity positively or negatively but for some culture and culturally-based values played a more important role than religion.

Dhia, Maha and Anas Shakfeh highlighted values such as open-mindedness, diversity and dialogue as their core values. All of them credited their family and diverse environment for instilling these values in them and that these values helped them with their move to Austria or their interactions with Austrian society. Religion played a fundamental role in all four participant's lives. However, for some it was a spiritual source and moral guide and for others it was seen as intertwined with cultural values and Dhia didn't prioritize practicing religion.

Those with a migration biography sought out interactions with Austrian society almost immediately after moving to Austria and experienced generally positive reactions. Fatima, as the only Austrian-born participant, was already part of that society and therefore had different experiences with acceptance and exclusion than the other participants. Being native to Austria afforded her with a sense of self-evidence to the land which eliminated issues such as struggling with language barriers, navigating societal norms and conventions as well as having to establish a sense of belonging. Her answer to the question of what feels like home to her was not focused on a specific location or country but rather her environment unlike the other participants.

Their sense of belonging was strongly tied to their migration history which entailed having to rebuild elements of social, community and religious life. Nonetheless, Fatima experienced moments of othering after her conversion, where changes to her physical appearance (wearing of

the hijab) turned her into an object of questioning and simultaneously made her a point of contact between Austrians and Islam. For Maha, Fatima and Dhia family dynamics and their influence in shaping their identity were much more present than with Anas Shakfeh mainly because of the depersonalized nature of his interview. The Muslim community as an anchor and marker for shaping identity was more tangible in Fatima and Anas Shakfeh's stories because they actively sought out a specifically Muslim community, unlike Dhia and Maha who had interest-based communities.

Fostering or Hindering a Sense of Belonging

After having analyzed the ways in which the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria author their identities and what key elements their narratives are structured around, this chapter aims to discuss the second research question of this paper: *What are the elements, experiences, and socio-political realities elicited from the interviews that foster or hinder a sense of belonging, and how have Austria's immigration and integration policies affected the self-identification processes of these post-War Muslim generations?*

The discussion uses a combination of Sentiment Analysis and Topic Modeling to create a comprehensive analysis to identify commonalities and differences in how interviewees experience or don't experience a sense of belonging. This is executed by focusing on their lived-experiences and eliciting in what way socio-political realities and Austria's immigration and integration policies may have impacted their self-identification process. Sentiment Analysis involves the identification and extraction of subjective information in a text and aims to determine the attitude, emotions, and opinions expressed by the author.[222] It is used in these interviews to classify statements into positive, thus fostering a sense of belonging, and negative, hindering a sense of belonging or neutral. Topic modeling, like GTM, identifies clusters of topics that frequently occur, enabling the discovery of thematic structures within a set of data.[223]

[222] Bing *Liu*, Sentiment Analysis and Opinion Mining (Synthesis Lectures on Human Language Technologies 5, Cham 2012).
[223] David M. *Blei*, Andrew Y. *Ng* and Michael I. *Jordan*, Latent Dirichlet Allocation. In: Journal of Machine Learning Research 3 (2003) 993–1022.

These clusters are identified as the following:

1) **<u>Fostering A Sense of Belonging</u>:**
   - Acceptance → Experiences of inclusion and acceptance
   - Community Support → Role of community and support networks
   - Policy Impact → Praise of specific policies and their implications
2) **<u>Hindering A Sense of Belonging:</u>**
   - Exclusion → Instances where participant feel marginalized or excluded
   - Discrimination → Experiences of prejudice or discrimination
   - Policy Critique → Criticism of specific policies and their implications

Fostering A Sense of Belonging

In their interviews participants described moments and experiences of feeling a sense of home, belonging, inclusion, being part of a community or environment in a meaningful way. The sense of belonging is shaped by social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. While *identity* can be seen as who we are, belonging relates more to our relationships with others and our place within social structures. The fostering of a sense of belonging is measured against experiences of acceptance, community support and policy impact. Within those categories historical, cultural, socio-political or religious elements are part of the analysis as well.

Acceptance

Acceptance or a feeling of being accepted is a very subjective and individual sentiment which can take different forms. Anas Shakfeh describes the moment he received his citizenship as a clear state-emanated act of accepting someone into a country by granting them equal status and rights to its locals. “Citizenship was granted to me in 1980 and with that the decision to permanently stay here was clear. For me, citizenship was not just a piece of paper, as some say, but a fundamental decision to spend his life here”.[224]

Shakfeh went on to detail how welcomed they felt by the majority of people and that they enjoyed equal rights to locals. There was no noticeable rejection or exclusion “unlike the rejection that has

[224] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (12).

become more present in the last years".[225] He associates that acceptance with a generational difference because he mainly interacted with the post-War generation of politicians and officials which he described as open-minded and tolerant. Maha also felt it was easier to find your place in society in Austria and people were more open-minded. "I had the feeling that it was more difficult to enter society in Algeria than in Austria. They [Algerians] were more closed-off than people in Europe".[226] Through Fatima's interview a difference in the degree of acceptance was felt when she moved from the country-side to the city. She claimed that because the community she lived in, in the countryside was tight knit she never experienced anything negative, and people were accepting her even after her conversion. When they had questions about Islam, they directly asked her about it and didn't exclude or discriminate against her.

Shakfeh used the Bosnian War in 1992 as an example of Austrian locals and authorities showing acceptance and a "Willkommenskultur*"* towards Bosnian refugees at the time.[227] His explanation for displaying acceptance in that moment in time is the historical connection between Austria and Bosnia after its annexation in 1908. According to Shakfeh, Bosnian refugees were well accepted and cared for because they were Europeans and integrated quicker. Therefore, in his analysis race and the speed in which immigrants "integrate" into society were important factors in why they were accepted. Another element that created a sense of acceptance, as mentioned by Shakfeh, is the public celebration and honoring of Islamic holidays or important occasions.

At the governmental level, Shakfeh highlights how the former Austrian president used to regularly invite Muslim representatives into the Hofburg for a community meal. "Some people say that it's just a meal. But you don't go there to eat, everyone has enough food at home. These are signs for our society that Muslims are part of us and part of society. It's also important for Muslims to see that their Islamic traditions are honored by the mayor. These are important signals for overall society".[228]

[225] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (12).
[226] Interview Maha A., (6).
[227] The narrative shift around Muslims and the securitization of Islamic practices became most evident after the terrorist attack on 9/11, followed by the American-led military campaign known as the War on Terror.
[228] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (20).

Community Support

Fatima felt very much at home after moving to Vienna because she was with her family and being in close to her family gave her a sense of comfort and community. “I feel so at home. Regardless of being in St. Georgen or in Upper Mühlviertel, she always feels at home. But not in Egypt. Since I’ve come to Vienna I feel at home. I have the kids, grandkids, daughters-in-law, son and family around me. The house is never empty [...] you never feel like you’re alone”.[229]

Eliminating feelings of loneliness and seeking out community is something all participants have done at some point in their lives. Dhia joined a community of artists on multiple occasions and owned a restaurant where he regularly welcomed different kinds of people and groups. Maha mentioned multiple times throughout the interview that she always sought out **social events** or communities that were focused on art, knowledge, culture or women-empowerment. Therefore, finding people with similar values and interests helped her establish a sense of belonging.

This is similar to Fatima who created a women-group for converts to discuss various topics and experiences every other week in Linz. “It was always very good. It was a good community”.[230] It helped Fatima to find people with a similar biographical journey as hers to talk about everyday challenges and experiences. She and her husband also motivated their children to establish a Muslim youth community for adolescents that were born and raised in Austria and didn’t feel represented in the traditional ethnically separated mosques. This was when the idea to create the Muslim Youth Austria was born.

In Shakfeh’s story, community support was a crucial part of financing Islamic infrastructure in Austria such as mosques, community spaces and offices, Islamic cemeteries and much more. Establishing that infrastructure enabled Muslims to pursue their religious practices. The Imam Conference that was established by Shakfeh and other Muslim religious community leaders in Europe was at some point also financially supported by the City of Vienna and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The conference was established to create a Europe-wide dialogue platform of Muslim representative bodies and find solutions for challenges and share best practice initiatives for interreligious dialogue.

[229] Interview Fatima O., (13).
[230] Interview Fatima O., (10).

When Dhia owned his restaurant, he often hosted bigger groups and at some point was approached by a group of Roma and Sinti who wanted to celebrate in his restaurant and had been rejected by others restaurants before. "I told them that they can come to my restaurant [...] it was a loud evening but fun. I was very impressed by them, their mentality and lifestyle was different [...] but if you know someone you're willing to forgive much more".[231] Dhia highlighted the importance of getting to know communities that are different from yours and respect their differences without having to necessarily understand them.

Policy Impact

Participants highlighted the importance of various policies that impacted their sense of belonging in a positive way. Anas Shakfeh shared that he believes that the constitutional state is upheld successfully in Austria. "The constitutional state exists even when the political situations get rougher for Muslims"[232], referencing Anti-Muslim campaigns by the FPÖ. Dhia and Maha talked about various systems that are in place such as the health care system and university systems which made it appealing for them to permanently settle down in Austria. "The system in Austria, in Europe, is safer. Many things: health, hospitals. [...] My middle son had health issues…they saved him. Somewhere else they might not have. It's much safer [here]".[233] Dhia praised his university system in Linz saying: "We had so much freedom. We had Art Drawing, Graphics, Art History and many more things. [..] I was impressed by the system".[234]

After 9/11 there were a lot of discussions worldwide, especially in the US, about the securitization of Muslims and fighting "Islamic Terror" but Shakfeh perceived Austria's reaction to these events as exemplary. "In Austria there was the best cooperation between politics and the religious community to deal with this world event in Austria in a peaceful, natural way"[235]. Then Federal President Klestil contacted Shakfeh and invited him and other leaders of religious communities to a joint event, which was broadcasted live, in the Hofburg. "The message was: You see, in Austria we have harmony. This should be a model for all other EU members".[236]

[231] Interview Dhia Sh., (7).
[232] Interview Dhia Sh., (22).
[233] Interview Maha A., (6).
[234] Interview Dhia Sh., (4).
[235] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (18).
[236] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (18).

Additionally, the integration of Islamic religious education in schools was an important step, according to Shakfeh, in making Muslim students feel seen and create a sense of belonging. "This integration [of Islamic religious education] in the school is most important. Previously, Muslims had to sit in the corridor while other pupils had religious education. After the introduction of Islamic religious education, Muslim pupils felt equal. The right integration, belonging and loyalty happens through religious education".[237] Shakfeh emphasizes that there is a connection between being institutionally and lawfully equal to others and feeling a sense of belonging.
Finally, participants also mentioned other factors that fostered a sense of belonging, such as Austria having a good global reputation in Arab-speaking countries especially when it came to the education system.

Hindering Sense of Belonging

As most interviews were conducted in 2021 it was noticeable that all four interviewees sensed a change in the socio-political climate towards Muslims. It was not rare for participants to compare their youth and adulthood spent in Austria with their current perception of Austria's climate in old age. All of them chose more positive sentiments to describe the past and found overwhelmingly negative sentiments for the present. The most prevalent clusters for recurring themes in the hindering of a sense of belonging were exclusion, discrimination and policy critique which according to them had negatively impacted Muslims in Austria.

Exclusion

Participants described various forms of experiencing exclusion throughout their lives that impacted their self-identification and sense of belonging. Both Fatima and Maha talked about the lack of dialogue and respect in relationships. Maha emphasized a lack of conversations within her own family that impacted familial relationships and thus reinforced a feeling of loneliness. This loneliness, however, seems to have been irrespective of her geographical location but was rather a result of fractured family ties. "My sons are very busy with their own families. My husband, whose story I know, speaks so little with everyone. These conversations are missing".[238] Fatima claimed that the social climate has generally become more difficult and more egocentric in terms of being

[237] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (16).
[238] Interview Maha A., (17).

in service of others and politeness. “It doesn’t just happen on the streets but it’s also how children talk to their parents these days, it’s unbearable, that scares me”.[239]

Anas Shakfeh highlights the power of creating fear within a society that fuels stereotypes and prejudices about certain groups and divides society. As an example of spreading fear through populism he mentioned the arrival of refugees in 2015 to Austria. When they began to arrive, Austrian society was welcoming to them, civil society organized to provide basic needs and they showed solidarity. “In this moment politics discovered the game of playing with society’s fears. The fear of large numbers of refugees, combined with attacks, armed conflicts in the Middle East, the emergence of ISIS, and the [terrorist] attacks in Paris and Brussels, these are enough reasons to stir up fear”.[240] Shakfeh expressed understanding for people’s fears because he realizes that rapid demographic changes can be a trigger for fear and thus cause exclusion as a consequence.

Dhia focused on the lack of freedom of speech he experienced in Iraq when he criticized political systems, the government and policies. His opinions on various issues have resulted in his arrest, torture in prison, and eventually made a return, after his studies in Austria, impossible. He had always planned to return to Iraq but was advised by multiple family members not to, forcing him to settle permanently in Austria. This led to strained family relationships, in 1993 he lost all claims to his inheritance in Iraq because the government had confiscated his properties because he had become and Austrian citizen. Due to the systematic exclusion, he experienced by his country of origin it impacted his sense of belonging in a negative way.

Discrimination

All participants mentioned having experienced or witnessed various forms of discrimination, either to themselves or people they know. Fatima mentions how a woman she knew was excluded from the job market because she was wearing a hijab. “They don’t take Muslim women with hijab anymore”.[241] Maha revealed that she stopped considering wearing the hijab after coming back from Hajj because she felt that she would experience discrimination and negative attention on the streets. “It went from being against foreigners to being against Muslims. Unfortunately, you see it

[239] Interview Fatima O., (12).
[240] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (18–19).
[241] Interview Maha A., (10).

on the tram, on the street, while shopping. Maybe not me directly, but I see it happening to others. Because they look a bit different".[242] Fatima described that there was a sort of obsession with commenting on her hijab and a lot of prejudiced questions about the meaning of hijab and why she wears it. "I can remember that one time a man asked, 'Are you not hot with this?' [...] and one time I was insulted on the bus".[243]

Shakfeh considers that the main responsibility for the growing incidents of discrimination that Muslims experienced lies with populist politics that reinforced the message of general suspicion against Muslims. "We did register the fear of the Muslim population, because they experienced discrimination. The community [IGGiÖ] tried to do something about it but doesn't have that many options".[244] Fatima also shared her sentiments about how Islam is perceived within society. She felt like these days everyone is against Islam and as soon as someone knows that you are Muslim you're already labeled. Fatima believed that Muslims were partially to blame for that situation too because "Muslims come from so many different cultures, and everyone thinks that their opinion is the most important one and doesn't accept any other opinions".[245]

Institutionalized discrimination was also addressed by Shakfeh who shared stories about attempts of the post-war generation of Muslims in Austria to find a space for prayer. After negotiations with the University of Vienna to provide a designated prayer room a group of international students were rejected in 1966.

Policy Critique

The participants expressed concern over the general socio-political climate and on the other hand mentioned specific policies that were in place that heavily impacted Muslims' sense of belonging. Because of Shakfeh's role as former president of the IGGiÖ, he mentioned concrete policies and political players who, in his opinion, were responsible for policies that were targeting, criminalizing or securitizing Muslims in Austria. One of the main policies that he critiqued was the amendment to the Islam Law in 2015. Initially, he had advocated for changes to the Islam Law because it had been almost 100 years old and didn't provide the necessary legal basis to

[242] Interview Fatima O., (12).
[243] Interview Fatima O., (12).
[244] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (19).
[245] Interview Fatima O., (12).

accommodate the needs and rights of the growing Muslim communities such as providing pastoral care for prisoners and armed forces.

"This Islam Law was passed and implemented despite widespread opposition from Muslim community representatives and the board of IGGiÖ".[246] Shakfeh believed that the government was using current events, such as the terrorist attack in Vienna in 2020 to legitimize these changes. "None of the parties spoke up against these amendments, [...] even the opposition parties; only FPÖ asked for an even stricter amendment".[247] Furthermore, he clearly opposed any type of interference of foreign governments into policies regarding Muslims in Austria with the argument that Muslim communities have developed differently than in Muslim majority countries and thus have different needs. He specifically mentioned how the then laicist Turkish government wanted to abolish religious education in Austrian schools because it wasn't under their auspice. "I always said that countries of the Islamic world should manage their own affairs. Muslims in Austria should neither intervene there nor should anyone in Austria interfere. If a foreign ambassador speaks for someone, then he is a foreigner. But we want to be citizens".[248]

Maha and Fatima criticized political parties that fuel anti-Muslim sentiments in society by conflating refugees, immigrants and Muslims. "At the moment I have the feeling that everyone is against Islam. That used to be better. In the past, everything was always far away when something negative happened with Muslims. Now everything is close".[249] She also highlighted that it is crucial for political parties to be honest and rebuild the trust they lost if they want people to vote for them.

Finally, Dhia expressed his opinion on the dangers of mixing religion with politics. He is totally against the idea of a clerical government and said: "Politics is politics and religion is religion. You have to make a very clear distinction, otherwise you will never successfully lead a nation".[250] His conclusion was very much fueled by his experiences with censorship and political persecution in Iraq after he had expressed his opinion on policy matters on multiple occasions.

To conclude, this analysis reviews the various forms of fostering and hindering a sense of belonging that were experienced by the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria. Factors

[246] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (20).
[247] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (21).
[248] Interview Anas Shakfeh, (21).
[249] Interview Fatima O., (12).
[250] Interview Dhia Sh., (19).

that played a role in fostering a sense of belonging were experiences of acceptance, community support and the impact of policies. Some of the forms of acceptance that they experienced were the granting of citizenship, intentional inclusion, embracing societal values such as open-mindedness and tolerance, as well as historical connections between countries and public acknowledgement and celebration of Islamic holidays.

Community support was highlighted in familial and society settings, but especially from communities they either established themselves or joined which shared similar values, interests and biographical journeys as the interviewees helped in fostering a sense of belonging. Furthermore, social events and the communal support in financing Islamic infrastructure helped Muslim communities at large to find an anchor of support and mutual understanding. Participants highlighted the importance of policy impacts on their self-identification with Austria. These policies included a functioning and democratic constitutional state, health care and university systems, cooperations between politics and religious communities as well as reaching institutional and lawful equality.

However, interviewees also describe experiences of exclusion, discrimination and critiqued policies that they perceived as hindering a sense of belonging. Forms of exclusion included spreading fear through the criminalization of Muslims, lack of dialogue and the absence of freedom of speech in their respective countries of origin. Issues that fueled experiences of discrimination were the exclusion from public spaces and the job market because of the hijab, populist politics and its links to media coverage as well as institutionalized discrimination concerning religious practices. Finally, the interviews consistently included criticism of certain policies and politics in general which included the amendment to the Islam Law in 2015, interference of foreign governments in Austrian Islam politics, political parties that fueled anti-Muslim sentiments and mentions of the dangers and consequences of mixing religion with politics.

Conclusion and Outlook

This research has explored into four cases that are exemplary of the multifaceted identities of the first post-war generation of Muslims in Austria. The use of oral history interviews helps us to gain an insight into the intricate processes by which these individuals construct their identities. The study has also shed light on the elements, experiences, and socio-political realities that either foster or hinder a sense of belonging, while critically examining the impact of Austria's immigration and integration policies on these processes.

The oral history interviews serve as a powerful medium through which the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria articulate their identities. These narratives reveal the complex interplay between personal experiences, collective memories, and broader socio-political contexts. Identity authorship is not a static process, but an ongoing negotiation influenced by various factors, including family dynamics, community ties, and socio-political environments.

The narratives of individuals such as Maha S., Anas Shakfeh, Fatima O., and Dhia A. Sh. illustrate diverse pathways of how Muslims in Austria navigate their identities. Their stories underscore the importance of cultural heritage, personal agency, and the broader socio-political landscape. For example, Maha S.'s emphasis on family and community highlights the role of close-knit social structures in fostering a sense of belonging, whereas Fatima O.'s experiences of discrimination underscore the external challenges that shape identity construction.

Several key elements emerged from the analysis that significantly impact the sense of belonging among the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria. Firstly, the role of Muslim institutions such as mosques and Muslim community centers are pivotal in providing a sense of community, offering spaces for religious practice, cultural expression, and social support. These institutions help maintain a connection to cultural roots and facilitate the transmission of values and traditions. The additional financial and public support of these institutions through governing forces can strengthen a sense of belonging and can positively contribute to the self-identification process of an individual.

Secondly, strong family bonds and intergenerational ties are crucial in shaping identity. Families serve as the primary context for the transmission of cultural and religious values, providing stability and continuity amid changing external circumstances. The migration of individuals heavily impacts these family ties and can lead to estrangement or separation in the process. Furthermore, economic stability and political environments play critical roles in shaping experiences of belonging. Economic insecurity or a dysfunctional healthcare or education system and political marginalization can lead to feelings of exclusion, whereas stable economic conditions and inclusive policies can foster a sense of belonging and home.

Providing platforms for active participation in civic and political life empowers individuals and communities, enabling them to assert their identities and advocate for their rights. Activism serves as a means of resistance against marginalization and a way to claim space within the broader society. These spaces, however, have to be protected and sustained rather than restricted, suppressed and criminalized. Additionally, discrimination and Islamophobia profoundly affect identity construction, often reinforcing feelings of otherness and exclusion. These experiences highlight the need for policies that address the existing structural inequalities between the Islamic religious community and other religious communities. Another element that the interviews emphasized was the role of gender-specific experiences in shaping identities. Muslim women, in particular, face unique challenges and navigate different societal expectations, which influence their sense of belonging and self-identification.

Austria's immigration and integration policies have had a profound impact on the self-identification processes of post-war Muslim generations. The research identified several critical issues related to these policies and the impact on the current political climate as well as the rise of anti-Muslim rhetoric. The crackdown on Muslims through the police Operation Luxor exemplifies the securitization of Islam and contributes to a climate of fear and general suspicion, which undermines efforts to foster a sense of belonging. Moreover, legal frameworks such as the Islam Law have both protective and restrictive implications for Muslim communities. While they provide official recognition and certain rights, they can also impose limitations and create bureaucratic challenges, impacting the daily lives and identities of Muslims as can be observed by the legal implications through the amendment to the Islam Law in 2015. The responses of Muslim communities to these policies vary, ranging from adaptation and negotiation to resistance and

advocacy. These responses reflect a dynamic interaction between individual and collective agency and the structural constraints imposed by policies.

The findings of this research provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex and dynamic processes of identity construction among the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria. This study highlights the importance of diversifying data, challenging externally determined narratives which lack critical and decolonial perspectives and emphasizing the importance of qualitative research methods such as oral history.

The aim of this thesis was to offer valuable insights for historians and the larger academic body by uncovering under- or misrepresented historical narratives on Muslims in Austria and Europe as well as highlighting recent findings about the historical and legal rootedness of Islam in Austria. Future research could expand on this study by exploring several areas which could include a comparative analysis of different minoritized groups in Austria or Muslim communities across various European countries could provide broader insights into identity formation. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in identities and belonging over time could offer a dynamic perspective on how these processes evolve in response to shifting socio-political contexts. Further intersectional analyses considering additional identity markers such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education could enrich the understanding of the diverse experiences within Muslim communities. Finally, exploring the perspectives of younger generations of Muslims who have grown up in Austria could shed light on intergenerational differences and continuities in identity construction.

In conclusion, this thesis offers an in-depth exploration of the identity construction processes of the first post-war generations of Muslims in Austria. By capturing their voices through oral history interviews, the study not only contributes to academic knowledge but also provides a platform for these individuals to articulate their experiences and perspectives. As Austria continues to navigate its multicultural landscape, fostering a deeper understanding of its Muslim communities will be essential for promoting social cohesion and inclusivity. This research underscores the importance of creating inclusive policies and practices that recognize and celebrate the diverse identities within Austrian society.

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