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Feeling at Home in the Nation

THE MUSLIM WOMAN'S HEADSCARF seems to attract an unusually large set of interpretations in political debates. *Kopftuch, foulard, voile, başörtüsü, türban, hoofddoek, burka, niqab, hijab*[1]—rather than simply being innocuous pieces of cloth used to cover hair, neck, face, and eyes, headscarves have become a foil for a long series of debates on the conditions under which religiously identified Muslims belong in public spheres marked by secularity or Western political traditions. Debates on *where* and on *what occasions* headscarves can be worn—in schools, hospitals, and private enterprises, only at home, or on the way to but not at work—turn into conflicts, sometimes heated, about where Muslims can show their religiosity. Debates regarding *how* headscarves should be worn—tied behind the neck, showing an earlobe, obscuring all hair, falling over the shoulders, covering the face—segue into discussions of what headscarves represent politically. Do they represent fundamentalist Islam? A threat to nationhood? Or a claim to a new ethnoreligious identity that deserves recognition, perhaps even the acceptance of belonging? Finally, discussions regarding the person *underneath* the scarf show that the subjects of national belonging can be defined in multiple and conflicting ways: are "they" Muslims, Islamists, immigrants, converts, fundamentalists, French, Turks, Dutch, or Germans?

Discussions of the headscarf's meaning and representations can also turn into pronouncements on the need for greater regulation: How should the state and others respond to women wearing headscarves in public institutions? Should "we" ban them everywhere, ban them in certain institutions, protect the wearing of the headscarf entirely, or protect it only if worn in certain ways or capacities? These questions focus on the role of the state in regulating whether Muslims can belong to the nation.

Political debates about the headscarf illustrate how the headscarf has become a symbol of the diversity resulting from large-scale, post–World War II migration into European countries and, in the case of Turkey, from rural-to-urban migration in a secular Muslim-majority country. In both popular and scholarly analyses of European countries, the headscarf has come to signify an immigration-related decline of the coherent nation-state, a decline that is either embraced as bringing a desirable cosmopolitan order one step closer, or seen as a threat to the very coherence of society. In many Muslim-majority countries, the headscarf has turned into a metonym for issues associated with the participation of religious Muslims in the public sphere.[2] This can be seen in cases where the headscarf becomes symbolic of a "dangerous yearning" for a political order in which religious authority supersedes the authority of the secular nation-state of the postcolonial era.

In this book, we analyze the struggles over the inclusions and exclusions of national belonging by looking at "national narratives," the public discourses that define what it means to belong to a geographic community governed by a particular nation-state.[3] We focus our analysis on four countries—France, Turkey, the Netherlands, and Germany—and join a group of scholars who have studied the headscarf, including the hijab, and burka, and niqab, through the lens of national belonging. We add to the work of those, such as John Bowen and Joan Scott,[4] who have written what many consider the definitive books analyzing the French headscarf debates but who do not move beyond France to see how these conflicts play out in other countries' settings.[5] Here we follow in the footsteps of Christian Joppke's comparative analysis of headscarf debates in France, Germany, and Britain.[6] However, whereas Joppke focuses on the ways in which the headscarf is perceived as a threat to liberalism across these sites, we analyze the headscarf debates as productive of the particularities of national belonging, applying a critical feminist, intersectional, postcolonial lens to this project.[7] This feminist starting point is in line with that of Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer, who produced an edited volume that covers the headscarf debates in multiple European countries.[8] However, we generate a discursive analysis of the way in which national narratives are produced that is much more in-depth than is allowed for in their emphasis on explaining policy change. We also move beyond their focus on Western Europe to add to our cases Turkey, a Muslim-majority liberal democratic country, in order to challenge the assumption that these are solely "Western" debates.[9]

When it comes to national belonging, for many of these scholars, but also for actors engaged in the media and politics, the headscarf symbolizes a rupture. Their analyses combine attempts to understand why, where, and how Muslim women wear their headscarves, including examination of formal political-legal regulation, in order to outline how the headscarf has inspired exclusionary practices in a given country or countries. In this book, we shift the angle of vision away from the rupture in national belonging and turn instead toward the opportunities that headscarf debates provide to revisit, reaffirm, and potentially rearticulate the meaning of national belonging. In other words, we treat the headscarf debates not (solely) as disruption but also as opportunities for articulating the national narratives that delineate belonging in the contemporary era.

National Narratives and Conflicts of Belonging

This book, then, looks at the production of narratives of national belonging, wherein we define *belonging* as the subjective feeling of being at home in one's country, of easily moving through its particular places and spaces, and the sense of comfort and joy in inhabiting a particular locale.[10] Belonging, in this sense, also means being able to articulate complaint without renouncing the claim to belonging, or the freedom to complain about aspects of living somewhere without being told that you should leave, of not being trapped in a distinction between those whose home is unambiguously "here" and those who are seen as having either a primary or secondary home elsewhere. Belonging, thus conceived, is simultaneously highly personal and utterly political.

National belonging is fundamentally about demarcating difference. Indeed, analytically speaking, national belonging is always relational, constituted by creating a boundary between who is in and who is out.[11] As Benedict Anderson and other researchers have shown, the very idea of nationhood is produced in the tension between the imagined homogeneity of the nation and the realities of difference in the populations constituting the nation.[12] Difference is thus a challenge to national belonging with the potential of inspiring a fear that national belonging can fracture. At the same time, difference is central to the constitution of national belonging—because national belonging is always constituted *vis-à-vis* what or who we are not. We label contestations about the limits of acceptable difference *conflicts of belonging* and argue that they become sites in which to confront national identities by (re)enacting or (re)defining them.

The differences through which national belonging is articulated change over time, and national belonging needs to be read in its specific historical contexts.[13] In the European case, the post-World War II influx of migrants in the aftermath of the Holocaust generated conflicts of belonging that continue to haunt the national imagination across Europe's countries. The popular story about postwar migration to Europe portrays various European nations as homogeneous prior to the shock of large-scale immigrant presence. The literature easily debunks this—each European nation-state is itself marked historically by distinctions of ethnicity, class, and religion that continue to shape these nations.[14] However, the way the image of homogeneity can be constituted through its contrast with "immigrant difference" illustrates the power of immigrant presence in constructing national belonging as rooted in homogeneity. At the same time, the reality of historical difference within these nations suggests that national belonging does not by definition exclude newcomers to the nation. Rather, national belonging is constituted through the very process of figuring out what can and cannot be accommodated.

National narratives turn the real heterogeneities that mark populations into imagined homogeneity, through appellations to a common language, religion, shared history, shared political practice, and sense of shared origin. In addition, national narratives demarcate the bases of belonging to the nation through social divisions of race, ethnicity, gender, and religion.[15] Building on an ideal-typical approach to national narratives, we argue that they are "discursive formations," constructed ways of speaking that identify the contours of national belonging.[16] Such discourses have "real" effects because they shape practices—including practices of regulation.

National narratives are by definition messy—they contain contradictory discourses regarding who belongs and who does not—but their messiness is productive, generating a sense of national belonging through the tensions and contradictions contained within these narratives. When we analyze national narratives, we see that key elements repeat over decades, even centuries, exactly because they are contested rather than agreed upon. These elements of national narratives identify the social norms, values, and practices that are seen as most in need of being defended or changed in defining belonging to the nation. Overarching concepts such as republicanism, secularism, and tolerance often become the labels for such norms, values and practices. However, these key elements in a country's national narrative are by definition not stable, but the contestations over the meaning and practices they label give them longevity and structuring force. At the same time, contestations over national belonging also enable new elements, such as gender equality, to become central in national narratives of belonging.

As we analyze the key elements in national narratives, we build on approaches to discourse and sense-making practices that are closely attuned to the multiplicity of meanings that can attach to objects, ideas, and practices. However, we approach national narratives as largely singular. In other words, our starting assumption is that each nation has a national narrative—a story told about what it means to belong to that nation. Yet these national narratives are uniform neither in time nor in content. The multiplicity enters in how the narrative elements that make up the story are interpreted and strung together. These elements reference beliefs, ideas, and practices, ranging, for example, from adherence to liberal democracy and gender equality to everyday practices of eating particular foods or separating trash for recycling. These beliefs, ideas, and practices that together form a national narrative are embedded in the everyday lives of people. In this sense, Ernst Renan's statement almost a century and a half ago that the existence of a nation is based on this "daily plebiscite" continues to hold.[17]

Approached in this way, national narratives are anchored in the development of nation-states, and it might seem that such narratives will become less and less salient in our increasingly trans- and postnational world.[18] The ever-expanding reach of the European Union, in particular, would suggest a decline in the significance of the national in structuring people's experiences of belonging. Indeed, when it comes to supra- or international processes, headscarf debates show that cross-national appeals to similar concepts come into play, which some would see as confirmation of the decline of national significance. However, we show that seemingly transnational concepts are given different meanings and are mobilized toward achieving different goals in the countries under study and, as a result, these concepts have particular meanings in different national contexts.[19] Similarly, we witness how political debates in one country are reported in other countries, and how these discourses cross national public spheres. Yet, as the Dutch, Germans, and Turks discuss the French headscarf ban, they quickly turn to their "own" way of approaching this issue, again reaffirming their distinct sense of national belonging as they confront apparently transnational processes.

Moving down the spatial scale, evidence suggests that immigrant youth, in particular, frame their belonging in terms of the city, even a certain district of a city, rather than the country they live in, in order to challenge the negative connotations of national belonging.[20] This is especially prevalent in Germany, where the Nazi past, not shared by those who came to the country after 1945, is often used as a historical reference point to discuss Germanness.[21] However, we suggest that although these historical, trans-, and postnational processes are certainly in play, they do not or cannot replace the salience of national belonging altogether, as this example from our German case also suggests.

The discourses that form the resulting national narratives circulate through the media, government reports, and other sites of public debate such as the Internet, with its homemade video clips and blogs. Writing about the formation of nation-states, Anderson argues that the shared images underlying national identity are fostered, in part, through newspapers, which generate common narratives that frame definitions of national identity.[22] Newspaper consumption reinforces the territorial and linguistic unity of the nation, creating "a sense that the nation or national society has an ongoing existence" and that "nationhood is constituted over time."[23] The media both reflect and shape the discourses that constitute national narratives. As news media speak of the politics of wearing the headscarf, discussing, for example, its presence in key sites of national identity formation such as schools and state bureaucracies, headscarf debates become objects through which to analyze contemporary constructions of national belonging.[24]

Government documents and social media are sites with different roles in the discursive production of national narratives. Government reports on the headscarf, including transcripts of parliamentary debates, social policies, and laws and regulations, delineate national belonging by referring to "shared values and practices" as they shape formal regulations that govern acceptable conduct in the context of the nation-state.[25] Also, states clearly play a particular role in the formation of national narratives, with actors in public functions drawing on and developing national narratives to further their political and policy agendas or to strengthen state legitimacy, insofar as it is seen as dependent on the coherence of the idea of "the" nation. Whereas government documents tend to focus inward on the nation-state, social media can establish national orders but also transcend national boundaries to reach a global audience and potentially resist authority by being uncensored and fast developing. In so doing, such social media can create their own interpretations of national narratives even as they might shift the locus of belonging.

Studies of national identity formation also illustrate the ways in which "regular" people discuss national belonging.[26] This literature alerts us to the ways in which national narratives live not only within the news media and formal politics but also in everyday interactions. To capture some of this, we turn to targeted interviews with Muslim women who are politically active in the headscarf debate. Some of these women, by virtue of both their minority identities and their political activism, speak through the media, but only a few can be seen as key players in these public debates. In much of the public debate, newsmakers give a platform to Muslim women who can act as code breakers for their own religious communities.[27] These women often speak with a voice of experience to reinforce stereotypical portrayals of their communities and to affirm exclusionary interpretations of key elements in national narratives.

People who dominate the media and political discourses reaffirm, rearticulate, or transform these beliefs, ideas, and practices, often in contestation with other political actors who occupy similar political, social, and cultural positions. Those who become the object of these articulations—in our case, headscarf-wearing women—often articulate their own versions of the national narrative, in terms of how they belong or do not belong. In our analysis, we focus on those elements (regardless of whether they describe values, ideas, or practices) of the national narrative that come up in headscarf debates and on how these elements are used to articulate national belonging.

The Headscarf as Symbol and Enactment: Intents and Perceptions

Throughout our analysis, we pay attention to two positions from which the headscarf can be discussed—that of the wearer and that of the nonwearer. In addition, former wearers of the headscarf often occupy a special place in debates about the headscarf. For wearers, the headscarf can have a range of meanings beyond the obviously religious (though itself complex) meaning. These meanings include the headscarf as a symbol of multiple modernities,[28] a marker of ethnic identity,[29] a way of claiming dignity that is denied to an immigrant group,[30] and an enactment of the promise of liberal self-expression,[31] as well as a way to cover up one's messy hair.[32] The voices of wearers describe the experience of wearing the headscarf, the reasons why they wear it,[33] and the effects that wearing it has on their lives, often claiming that they face discrimination in the labor market and on the streets.[34] Most work on the experiences of headscarf-wearing women in the West focuses on covering hair; very little focuses on the experiences of women who wear a niqab, which covers the face and hair but leaves the eyes visible. The burka, a garment that covers the entire face, with the eyes covered by mesh fabric, is almost never worn by European Muslims; rather, it is traditionally worn in Afghanistan. Still, many newsmakers report on burka debates in Europe when they are actually referring to the niqab. The few reports on women who cover their faces suggest that they have experienced increased hostility on the street as "burka bans" have gained political and popular support.[35] The notion that the burka stands for submission is especially strong even though many women who have recounted their reasons for wearing it claim that it is a freely chosen expression of their religiosity.

For nonwearers, discussions focus on how they perceive the headscarf both objectively and subjectively.[36] In public discourses, nonwearers who speak out against the headscarf imagine it to signify a long list of rejections, including the rejection of liberal democratic values, of gender equality, and of secularism. In their accounts, the headscarf comes to stand for the embrace of Islamic political rule and the submission of women's bodies to God and men. Muslim women who do not wear the headscarf, including those who used to wear the headscarf but took it off, can play a particular role in these accounts; they are seen to speak as liberated women who can recount the "true" meaning of the headscarf to a public hungry for accounts of Muslim women's experiences of the veil.

Those who see the headscarf—including not only the hijab but also the niqab and burka—in a negative light often discuss a highly personal sense of being judged by headscarf-wearing women. On a Dutch blog, one commenter argued that having to buy alcohol from a cashier with a headscarf made him feel judged for his alcohol consumption. Indeed, Dutch anthropologist Annelies Moors has analyzed how Dutch debates on possible burka bans reflect a strong sense of discomfort and even dislike for a garment that appears to stand for a rejection of all things Dutch. She argues that a similar politics of discomfort permeates burka ban debates in the Netherlands and elsewhere.[37]

On the other end of the spectrum, both wearers and nonwearers supportive of women's right to wear a headscarf argue that they are proud to live in a country, city, or neighborhood that can incorporate this kind of diversity. Popular media further normalize the headscarf as they discuss the latest trends in headscarf fashion by referring to competing headscarf looks that appeal to different budgets, from very expensive to very modest styles, brands, and fabrics. Such media, arguably, reflect an almost glib support for multiculturalism, emphasizing the importance of laissez-faire in liberal democracies and happily supporting the headscarf because it adds color to "our" drab European streets. Such understandings of diversity try to put the fact of multiculturalism or the presence of those who are visibly from minority groups in a positive light. Yet they do not necessarily articulate the degree to which such diversity should lead to a multicultural politics in which belonging becomes reflected in the development of group rights.

In countries such as Turkey, where the headscarf is not about cultural but about religious diversity, the presence of headscarves in the public sphere is taken by some as evidence of "true" democratic freedom, and the rise of an Islamic bourgeoisie. This group is the target audience of high-quality Islamic "lifestyle magazines" (*yaşam tarzı dergisi*) such as *Âlâ* (a variation on the name of the French magazine *Elle*[38]), which discusses the recent trends in Islamic fashion, including expensive designer headscarves created in the style of well-known fashion designers such as Vakko and Pierre Cardin.

The headscarf's multiplicity in meaning coincides to some degree with a variation in terminology. In our own discussions, we use *headscarf,* the most neutral term we can find.[39] This is also the term used most often in the Netherlands (*hoofddoek*) and Germany (*Kopftuch*). In both countries, however, the word *veil* (*sluier* in Dutch, *Schleier* in German), with its connotations of hiding oneself, comes up as well, and we note this and analyze the politics surrounding the term. In France, the terminology has shifted over time and between speakers, from the more neutral *foulard* (headscarf) to the more loaded *voile* (veil), which we indicate in our analysis.[40] In Turkey, we use *headscarf* as a translation for *başörtüsü,* the neutral Turkish word for head covering, but when applicable we also use *türban,* which politicians use to signify what they see as the politicized wearing of the headscarf. In both France and the Netherlands, the headscarf and niqab are often debated separately, with the term *burka* often used to label the niqab, which women actually wear.

Agency and freedom are recurring concepts in all discussions of naming and wearing the headscarf, both within and outside academia. In 1992, Arlene MacLeod analyzed Egyptian women's newly refound practice of wearing the headscarf. She argued that these women were not responding to gendered pressures to submit to modesty but rather were actively choosing to wear the headscarf, in order to make both religious and political statements against a secular, highly corrupt political regime.[41] Attempting to escape the binary of individual resistance and submission, Saba Mahmood argued that the practices of pious Egyptian women need to be understood according to an expanded definition of *agency* as expressed directly in submission rather than always being tied to individual resistance.[42] Such an understanding of agency can also be applied to practices of Turkish and European Muslim women.

In short, the objective meaning of the term *headscarf* is difficult to pin down. Not only does it have multiple signifiers, but also the signified meaning changes according to the country's political context, the actors who are using the term, and the discursive context within which the term is used. Thus, the headscarf brings together a range of discourses. At the same time, the headscarf breaks apart these unifying discourses to reflect multiple differences that inform the ongoing formation of national narratives in each country. Thus, the meaning of the headscarf constantly evolves, and its use in political debates introduces new conflicts of belonging to the nation.

Analyzing Headscarf Debates as Conflicts over Belonging

We analyze how national narratives are reaffirmed, rearticulated, or transformed when confronted with the headscarf as a visible representation of difference associated with Islam and migration. We have chosen to focus on France, Turkey, the Netherlands, and Germany, because they form two paired comparisons that allow us to take into account the forces that might impact national narratives of belonging. France and Turkey adhere to a strict form of secularism that renders religious practice largely a private affair. The Netherlands and Germany share an approach to religiosity in which state neutrality in religion means accommodation for religious behavior in the public sphere. These different approaches to religion offer a starting point from which to analyze differences and similarities in articulations of national belonging during headscarf debates.

In both France and Turkey, belonging to the nation has been predicated on being secular. France, a civic republican country where a strict form of secularism has historically inhibited personal expressions of religion in the public sphere, is similar to Turkey, which has also rooted its democracy in a strict form of secularism. And even though Muslims are seen as newcomers in France and the historical majority in the Turkish context, in both countries, perceptions of Muslims' religiosity has positioned them as problematic citizens. As we show, in France, Muslims are constructed as former colonials and current immigrants; they represent outsiders to the nation. In Turkey, where Islam is the majority religion, religious Turkish citizens have been constructed as outsiders to the Turkish nation since the foundation of the Turkish Republic. However, in recent years France and Turkey have diverged sharply. Whereas France has retained its commitment to secularism, in Turkey, religious Muslims have recently refound a powerful place in the public sphere, with the ascent to power of an Islamic political party, the Ak Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi,* Justice and Development Party). This ascent has meant a divergence in the meaning and impact of secularism in relation to belonging.[43] In France, a law passed in 2004 prevents Muslim girls from wearing a headscarf to school, and a 2010 ban forbids all women to wear an Islamic face covering in public. By contrast, in contemporary Turkey, many women, regardless of the length and style of their coverings, are now allowed full access to the higher education institutions that formerly denied them entry. In September 2013, the Turkish government lifted the headscarf ban in all public places where the secular state is present.

Although much of the literature on headscarf debates focuses on France and Turkey as paradigmatic cases, we turn to a second paired comparison: the Netherlands and Germany. These two countries have historically allowed greater space for religious expression in the public sphere than either France or, until recently, Turkey. Both of these countries adhere to the principle of state neutrality in the expression of religion and tend to be more open than either France or Turkey have been to creating space for expressions of religiosity, including headscarves, in the public sphere.[44] Nonetheless, the Netherlands and Germany have differed in their general approaches to national belonging, with the Dutch practicing religious tolerance and pluralism over the centuries and the Germans hewing to ethnocultural understandings of nationhood since the establishment of the modern German state in 1871.[45] When it comes to Muslim immigrants, until the late 1990s the Netherlands represented pluralism and multiculturalism in the liberal democratic context. In Germany, by contrast, denial of the fact of immigration by the long-serving conservative governments of Konrad Adenauer (1949–1963) and Helmut Kohl (1982–1998)—expressed in the term *guest worker*—left only complete assimilation as a way for immigrants to belong to the nation until the beginning of this millennium.[46] The lengthy colonial history of the Dutch and the almost complete lack of a similar experience in Germany[47] is another important factor influencing the differences between the national narratives of belonging in these two countries.

Debates over the headscarf and burka have upset national narratives of belonging in both countries. In the Netherlands, politicians' repeated attempts to ban the burka from the public sphere, starting in 2005 and continuing to the present, illustrate that tolerance, multiculturalism, and pluralism have all come under pressure. Even though these attempted bans have largely failed, the conflicts generated by both head and face coverings have activated debates over national belonging. In a similarly heated debate, in Germany, a 2004 Supreme Court decision that ultimately led to a ban on the wearing of headscarves by public school teachers cemented the headscarf's position as a foil for public debate on the parameters of national belonging.

The differences between the ways in which these four countries institutionalize secularism and protect religious freedoms also suggests a gradient in the degree of the state's role in producing national narratives. The Turkish state has been particularly powerful in this domain, followed by France and then Germany and the Netherlands, with, as our analysis suggests, the latter three having progressively stronger civil society engagement when it comes to articulating national narratives. In Turkey, however, civil society has been powerfully controlled by political parties and further curbed by three military coups and one political coup in the post-World War II era. Most recently, the Ak Party government, which took power in 2002, pressed charges against many civil society actors, including academics and journalists, some of whom were subsequently sentenced and put in jail. The street protests of 2013 show that there is strong public opposition to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's policies.

In analyzing the discourses that constitute national narratives, we show that actors in each country enter into conflicts over national belonging as they debate the headscarf and burka, but they activate and reenact quite different understandings of national belonging. We do not separate the actors who propagate these understandings into "Muslims" and "others." Instead, we show how both Muslim and non-Muslim politicians, government officials, and activists creatively draw from existing discourses to reaffirm, rearticulate, or transform national narratives, noting how such narratives vary by country in their degree of uniformity. This approach does not mean that being a Muslim does not matter. Rather, it shows *when* it matters, noting when actors position themselves explicitly as Muslims, acting as cultural code breakers for their own communities, translating Islamic practices for the general population in ways that validate the generalized fear of Islam and the superiority of Western constructions of interaction in the public sphere. Alternatively, Muslim-identified actors can reinforce those elements of national narratives that support accommodating or tolerating religious practices.

Although our analysis focuses largely on dominant discourses, and on people in clear positions of power, we argue, following Ruth Wodak and her collaborators, that opportunities for change often come from imaging nationhood in radically different ways.[48] When, in 1989, three French teenagers showed up wearing headscarves at their high school located in a Parisian *banlieu* (suburbs frequently referred to as ghettos because of social (public) housing and low-income residents), they probably did not realize that their actions started a fifteen-year debate that ended in the banning of headscarves from French elementary and high schools.[49] Leyla Şahin might not have imagined that her attempt to obtain a Turkish university education would result in a negative verdict by the European Court of Human Rights that reinvigorated Turkish debates on the place of secularism in the public sphere.[50] In the Netherlands, politically successful ultraright politician Geert Wilders' claims that the "headrag" should be taxed were countered by young Muslim women who created a poster campaign that showed "Real Dutch" women in Islamic dress.[51] In Germany, social-democratic politician Thilo Sarrazin's derogatory statements regarding *Kopftuchmädchen* (headscarf girls) whose children "overpopulated" formerly "German" neighborhoods led to rounds of national self-reflection on the acceptability of ethnoreligious difference in German society.[52] In the pages that follow, we show how such seemingly individual statements and actions have reverberated through national debates in ways that have enabled vigorous rearticulations of the meanings and conflicts of national belonging.