

Rites without Passage: The Civic Conversion of Young Refugees in Contemporary Germany

Carol J. Petty ^{1*}

¹ *George Mason University*, UNITED STATES

*Corresponding Author: cpetty3@gmu.edu

Citation: Petty, C. J. (2024). Rites without Passage: The Civic Conversion of Young Refugees in Contemporary Germany, *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 9(1), 03. <https://doi.org/10.20897/jcasc/14929>

Published: August 9, 2024

ABSTRACT

The backdrop of Germany's 'refugee crisis' thrusts matters of deep symbolic relevance into public consciousness, transforming 'the refugee' into a potent figure for imagining political community. As the drama of the 'refugee crisis' settles into an 'integration through education' program, vocational school faculty grapple with incorporating diverse sets of newcomers. Young asylum-seeking students negotiate within this deeply uncertain context, weaving routes to belonging that traverse ambivalent discourses and complex bureaucracies. Qualitative analysis and selective sampling are used to uncover dynamics of mixed-contact that emerge in a vocational school's project of civic remediation. Research data include interviews with program faculty and students (N=32) and samples of professional materials used in the field site. Data analysis uncovers the rite of civic conversion, a set of dramatic movements through which the construction of social difference is simultaneously concealed, defeated, and rendered legitimate. Though expressed in distinct forms, civic conversion distances refugee students from pathologized aspects of an imagined social past (exit) and induces scenarios for students to rhetorically cast off the presumed pathologies of their past, present, and future (renewal). This rite consecrates a dividing line between those who must ritually distance themselves from an assigned 'deficiency' and those who need not. The problems, functions, and implications of this rite are discussed in relation to their macro-sociological consequences.

Keywords: social theory, cultural sociology, subjectivities, refugee studies, migration

INTRODUCTION

The 2015 'refugee crisis' and corresponding settlement of new migrants in Germany thrust matters of deep symbolic relevance into public consciousness. En route and on arrival, contemporary refugees from North African and Middle Eastern countries became plot lines in the high drama of symbolically re-defining nationality and culture in Germany. Cast as both symbols of national rehabilitation and national decay, symbols of renewal and decline, of the success and the failure of liberal democracy, 'the refugee' became potent source material for imagining political community.

National newspapers mourned with photos of Aylan Kurdi, a 3-year-old migrant, drowned and washed ashore. Days later, Chancellor Merkel opened national borders to asylum-seekers expelled from Hungary. Thousands of people left Budapest on foot, chanting 'Germany, Germany;' swellings of public support met them – events branded in the press as Germany's *Willkommenskultur* and packaged as a novel national moment: "Could this be the beginning of the end of Germany's postwar rehabilitation?" (Bennhold, 2015). Months later another rendering took hold. Newspapers splashed with accounts of 'foreign' men surrounding, robbing, and sexually assaulting

women at New Year's Eve celebrations in Cologne. These accounts rallied the 2016 PEGIDA demonstrations, propelling a competing attempt to define the nation. Alternative for Germany (AfD) won seats in parliament the following year, overturning Germany's long-standing parliamentary exclusion of the far right. Campaigning against the culture of Holocaust remembrance, embracing anti-Islamic, anti-immigrant rhetoric, the AfD voiced a reactionary narrative of the nation: it was impossible to incorporate these new migrants without also sacrificing the nation. With coarse rapidity, Germany's relationship with asylum-seekers became prime fodder in re-crafting the nation.

Amid this context of symbolic ambivalence, teachers in vocational schools across the country were handed the task of educating and integrating asylum-seeking young adults. As the drama of the 'refugee crisis' settles into this sober institutional project, schools grapple with incorporating diverse sets of newcomers, whose background and needs do not neatly fit within professional and administrative practice. Newly matriculated refugee students negotiate within this deeply uncertain context, weaving routes to belonging that traverse ambivalent discourses and complex bureaucracies. Students, intimately aware of the public and institutional discourses that seek to define them, wrestle extensively with making themselves legible (and worthy) to the representatives of this (and other) institutions. Practical and symbolic struggles coalesce within the German vocational school, an institutional context that 're-solves' these issues through producing definitions of who the refugee *is* and who they *should be* in relation to state, market, and civil society.

This paper uses the context of a German vocational school and its 'integration through education' program to uncover the *rite of civic conversion*, a set of dramatic movements through which the construction of social difference is simultaneously concealed, defeated, and rendered legitimate. Representations of the young 'refugee student,'¹ techniques of civic remediation, and dynamics of mixed-contact animate this rite. Professionals approach the ideological work of 'integration through education' as a project of civic remediation.² This remedial approach asserts a common-sense demand that the refugee student be *re-made* to ensure democratic life. I assess the meaning of the broad yet imperative 'civic objective' via success stories of vocational school faculty, stories which portray refugee students as undergoing a dramatized *civic conversion*. Though expressed in distinct forms, *civic conversion* distances refugee students from pathologized aspects of an imagined social past (exit) and induces scenarios for students to rhetorically cast off presumed pathologies of their past, present, and future (renewal).

I argue that extended portraits of refugee students triumphing over their social origins and disavowing social prejudice conceal and divert from real accomplishments of 'integration through education.' *As presented*, pedagogy moves refugee students towards a closer relationship with civic ideals. While the exit-renewal structure resembles a 'ritual transition' – a dramatic pattern marking passage between socially relevant lines (Zerubavel, 1991) – conversion tales merely *present as* ritual transitions. Dramatic turns narrate students as becoming more alike, but the contents of conversion stories either negate the premise that any real change occurred, or the changes observed are indistinguishable from those of standard-track vocational students. What are students and faculty actually creating in their civics-laden encounters with one another?

Students enrolled in *Internationale Förderklassen* (IFK) make good use of the material in their civics classes, but not as expressions of liberatory renewal. These students distinctly encounter faculty (and other institutional representatives) who maintain an unfalsifiable premise of their 'liberal deficiency.' They learn the specifics of how they are considered negatively different, attempt to dispel these notions through disavowals and dialog, recognize the obstinacy of those expectations, and invert the stigmatizing terms applied to them to create a *narrative of belonging*. Completing a remedial course in civics, thus, does not accomplish reforms in how IFK students are regarded as 'problems' by social institutions or professional wisdom; it *informs* students about this situation.

The tangible 'renewal' for these *civic converts* is to realize that their social environment sees in them fundamental deficits and that no evidence can be presented to disconfirm this pervasive social expectation. Out of this interchange, converts develop the capacity to navigate, manage, and tailor the suite of pre-established, intractable symbolic boundaries into everyday strategies for navigating mixed-contact. The required act consecrates arbitrary lines as legitimate through acute misdirection, enacting what Bourdieu (1991) termed a 'rite of institution.' The *civic*

¹ I use the term 'refugee student' with reservation. This phrasing is intended to honestly capture how a specific cohort of students has been 'figured.' It describes how people enrolled in 'integration through education' programs have "become fetishistically overdetermined and publicly imagined and represented (that is, figured) in excessive, distorted and/ or caricatured ways" (Tyler, 2013: 10). I switch to more neutral terms like 'IFK Student' or simply 'student,' when not referencing this figure.

² *Integration durch Bildung* is an umbrella term used frequently in public-facing representations of the schooling offered to the 2015 cohorts of asylum-seekers in Germany. Two prominent programs instituted for youth and younger adults (ages 16-25) at the time of data collection were *Fit für Mehr* and *Internationale Förderklassen* (IFK). I studied the latter type, which translates as 'international remedial course.' While these courses of study are not officially described as 'refugee classes,' faculty referred to this program interchangeably as the 'IFK' and as 'refugee classes.' *No one* referred to students in the program as 'international students,' which is conventionally used to describe migrants who enter Germany on student visas.

conversion rite institutes a dividing line between *those who must* ritually distance themselves from an assigned 'liberal deficiency' in their imaginary social past, present, and future and *those who need not*.

DATA AND DATA COLLECTION

I collected interview and field data over a 1-year term (2017-2018) at Hofer Vocational School (HBK),³ located in a city of approximately 200,000 people in North Rhine-Westphalia. Participants in this study include students enrolled in *Internationale Förderklassen* as well as the faculty and administrators of this program. I recruited faculty participants from an IFK program meeting and student participants via classroom visits. Students were provided with a small honorarium (10 euros each) for their participation, and a donation of 100 euros was made to the school association. I conducted 20 in-depth interviews with IFK students and 12 with program faculty, observed school events and program meetings, and analyzed professional guidelines (faculty teaching materials and materials issued by the regional education ministries). The interview protocol for students inquired about their understanding of and experiences with settings and representatives of the host society. The interview protocol for faculty emphasized their understanding of and experiences with IFK students. Interviews were recorded and conducted on-site in German and translated into English by the author.

Data Coding Process

Research aims included understanding the categorical terms program participants used to identify social incorporation and the symbolic structures that support the use of those categories. To this end, I selectively coded research data for

- (1) dimensions of success faculty applied to their work with IFK students,
- (2) properties targeted for remediation within professional guidelines,
- (3) definitions of the context of reception provided by IFK students, and
- (4) student presentations of their relationship with the new social context.

A refinement of these codes revealed central patterns in the figuration of the refugee student, the techniques applied to this figure, and the dynamics of encounters between refugee students and representatives of the host society (i.e., mixed contact). Thus emerged two core themes, the *civic conversion story* and the *narrative of belonging*, each of which expresses 'the main concern or problem for the people in the setting' (Strauss, 1987: 35). I crosscut these core themes to extract variation in how outsiders (student participants) and insiders (faculty participants) make use of civic categories to navigate mixed contact.

Logic of Analysis

The social form at the center of this paper is the 'mixed contact' (Goffman, [1963] 1986) and its layered expression among participants differently situated within that contact. I apply 'mixed contact' to parse dynamic properties of scenarios *depicting* and *manifesting* encounters between insiders and outsiders.⁴ While Goffman conceived mixed contact specifically as the 'moments when stigmatized and normal are in (...) one another's immediate physical presence,' my broadened use of this term corresponds to using a 'language of relationships, not attributes' to witness the 'primal scenes of sociology' ([1963] 1986: 12, 3, 13). This broadened application of mixed contact deploys the methods of social pattern analysis by using 'social geometry' to identify patterns of social life (Zerubavel, 2007).

The *imagined*, the *represented*, and the *actual* experience of mixed contact tangle and collide, opening up core contradictions in the rite of civic conversion. Campaigns based on professional expertise provide a trove of 'concretely imagined cases' (Lamont and Swidler, 2014: 161) for accessing systems of meaning and categorization that actors draw upon to participate in social life. The interview situation shows how *actual* mixed contact is managed, revealing beyond the imagined and representational depictions of professional expertise. The full dimensions of mixed contact reveal how a shared reality is constructed, the mindsets necessary for that shared reality to emerge, and the intersubjective work of shaping new populations into an established social system.

The Project of Civic Remediation

'Integration through education' presents, in large part, as a project for protecting democracy. Guidance materials for faculty depict potential issues arising in mixed contact classrooms and assign professionals the task of both inducing and managing scenarios in the service of democratic life. This material writes shortcomings onto

³ The proper names provided in this paper (i.e., the school and study participants) are all pseudonyms.

⁴ To clarify this point about 'manifesting,' the interview situation itself manifests the mixed contact encounter. Encounters with the interviewer unearthed, on the one hand, the faculty's wish to tell a tale of *civic conversion* and, on the other, the students' pressing need to maintain a *narrative of belonging*.

the young ‘refugee student,’ figuring these newcomers as lacking a sufficiently liberal understanding of tolerance, egalitarianism, and dialogue. The faculty’s failure to appropriately induce and manage situations to alter these points of view (imaginatively) creates dire consequences for the social system: an imperiled democratic order, the loss of a hard-won, tolerant civil sphere, and the emergence of a frustrated, dependent migrant populace. New students placed in these programs are thereby earmarked with a deeply problematic *civic character*.

Each vocational school has extensive latitude in how they organize, design, and execute their ‘integration through education’ programs. Education ministries provide schools with a general blueprint that outlines subject areas of learning and a total number of educational hours required for this 1-year intensive program (with option to repeat for a second year). General aims include learning the German language, developing occupational goals, acquisition of a secondary diploma, and, following program completion, transition into an apprenticeship program and gainful employment (APO-BK, n.d.).

An advisory manual for instructional faculty presents the imagined thought process of teachers reading the program blueprint for the first time:

“What should students [in the IFK] actually learn? These young people are allocated to vocational schools (...) but do these young people even know the significance of a recognized qualification, of craftsperson or master craftsman? And, what are we even supposed to offer? Isn’t language the biggest problem, and therefore the learning goal? Or, should we offer German geography, democratic awareness, etc.? Or, foreground the occupational, with career orientation or the connection of instruction and learning with concrete occupations? The course timetable doesn’t provide much information – at the same time this means a certain amount of freedom with the curriculum” (Frehe-Halliwell and Kremer, 2018: 2).

An array of rather open-ended tasks is thus handed to vocational school faculty, who develop a more concrete playbook on-site to meet the extensive and distinct needs of their IFK students. Faculty administering the IFK face distinct challenges in their work with precarious immigrants: students have been deported mid-semester, lost hope in their prospect of staying and abandoned an otherwise successful course of study, been sought by the immigration authorities, failed to fulfill instructional-hour requirements due to unrelenting bureaucratic processes, and generally need a lot of clarification about taken-for-granted standards.⁵

Amid these changes in the nature of their work, program faculty manage (and construct) a symbolic structure that includes themselves and their asylum-seeking students. The framing of remedial civics curriculum assigns significance to this task:

“Teaching fundamental values and political education are among the most important tasks of faculty. This applies in particular to lessons with asylum-seekers and refugees required to attend vocational school” (ISB, 2018: 11).

During their lessons with refugee students, vocational faculty are figured as upholding the democratic order in Germany and instructed to hold traction against the slippery slope of ‘relativism’:

“Under no circumstances should the guiding principles of [political education] be interpreted in such a way that rules for living together in a democratic society can be freely interpreted and, accordingly, applied by each individual. Our core values are non-negotiable and must not be sacrificed to any value relativism” (ISB, 2018: 14).

While not directly construing refugee students as inherently anti-democratic, professional literature assigns a *deficiency* in democratic skills engendered by the refugee student’s socialization within distinct political systems:

“The socialization history of refugee pupils is no less of a challenge. The social and political frameworks in the countries of origin are often based on systems of values and norms that can hardly be compared with the local situation. In class, necessary knowledge and insights must be communicated, which are key to foundational understanding and the hoped-for and desired acceptance of our free-democratic basic order and its underlying consensus of values” (ISB, 2018: 8).

“An educational challenge is that the above-mentioned principles [*Beutelsbacher Konsens*]⁶ conflict with the social reality in the countries of origin of the refugee students. Controversy and open discussions are

⁵ This is a summary of interview data describing the administrative and workplace problems of IFK program faculty.

⁶ The original ‘Beutelsbach consensus’ holds multiple principles beyond open discourse; one principle is to put pupils “in a position to analyze a political situation and evaluate how their own interests are affected as well as how to seek means and

usually not cultivated there. The possibility of a controversial public debate on political and social issues is one of the central achievements of our free and democratic basic order” (ISB, 2018: 13-14).

Instructional activities impute sweeping deficits in social tolerance and democratic readiness. These activities provide corrective plans to address anticipated proclivities towards inegalitarianism, tailoring pedagogical means for transforming those mindsets. Depicted classroom scenarios render refugee students as not only deficient in but *resistant to* the ways of a free-democratic order. Opening space for refugee students to exercise political judgement appears here as both imperative and inherently risky.

The protectionist framing of professional guidelines embeds a basic, self-evident premise that the presence of new populations without democratic skillsets will inevitably disrupt the free democratic order. The *necessity* of a program of civic transformation for the survival of democracy appears as a commonsense assertion and core assumption of the project of civic remediation. The validity of that premise is not at issue in this paper. I wish however to illustrate the core template for ‘mixed contact’ crafted for faculty members who teach civics to refugee students. Suffice to say, there is extensive, specific priming that informs the repertoire of expectations that faculty bring to the situation.

Civic Conversion as Debate

Civic conversion as *debate* casts refugee students’ civic remediation as a transformative experience effected through debate and dialogue. These tales depict refugee students triumphing over a troubled social past through settling down in liberal democracy. When these students undergo a debate conversion (and convert their classmates), they appear as embodiments of the ideals of political community. Reasoned debate not only moves the refugee students nearer to civic ideals, the capacity to move students along this path verifies those same ideals. It confirms the ‘realness’ of principled achievements in German civil society. Key plot points include the refugee student’s capacity for major transformation, their (historical) deprivation from adequate experiences, and their civic renewal within the host society.

“We can fight each other on the plane of reason”

The debate style conversion constructs refugees as symbolically ‘outside,’ but especially able to be re-made in the image of civic ideals. Herr Pasquel, co-chair of the IFK program, discusses his understanding of successful civics education:

H. Pasquel: We work a lot to convey the idea that we are all human, we are all the same, we all have the same worth, all children of God, and so on. But, for the students that was already obvious. Antisemitism was also a big question. Some have that deeply embedded through their upbringing. But, up through now, students have said, “Herr P., we know that. Our blood is exactly the same as the blood of others” (...) What can I say. This is a new land for them and there you can do anything. There’s really a ground -- obviously, there is a preceding history -- but the ground is there to plant anything, so to speak (...) And, it’s wonderful when this fruits (...) Everyday I’m glad, because I have students who have lived through war or persecution, whatever it may be, and they are from various nations and religions, which in their home country fought with each other, and suddenly in one room you have peace. Let’s say it like that. For students that is – also for me – beautiful to see. That we can learn peace. And, on another level, that we can fight each other on the plane of reason (...) Where you also notice, we can use our reason instead, and that the students can demonstrate that one can speak and use words to solve problems, not just power.

A host of possibilities materialize in this account. The students attain distance from their troubled pasts and experience a *new* social context that counters previous experiences of repression and exclusion. Refugee students *can* demonstrate civic ideals of multicultural tolerance and dialogue. The assumed deficiencies of their social past *can* be corrected. Placing students with histories of ethnic-religious conflicts together in a classroom and teaching them to engage each other using reason and debate symbolizes, simulates, and affirms ‘remedial’ achievements. The debate story’s progression, from fertile ground to peace and beauty, models an ‘exit’ from a barren social past and a prodigious ‘renewal’ in the social present.

“Something really happens there”

Imagining and narrating students in such ways heightens the faculty’s appreciation of civic life. Herr Richter describes a particularly transformative set of debates in his civics classroom:

methods to influence that political situation according to their interests” (Wehling 1977: 180). The IFK textbook (ISB, 2018) states this particular principle as “empowerment for participation.”

H. Richter: For most students it's quite boring, but the students in the refugee classes are at least more interested than students in the same department from other classes. Our constitution lends itself quite well as an introduction: "Human dignity is inviolable." This reference to the rights, so not just the duties, which every individual has. (...) I have one class in mind. There are many female students in that class (...) And, there the female students are very interested in equal rights. That's very important and they appreciate that a lot, that in our country we have this form of democracy. Meanwhile, in the same class there are certain male students, who don't find it so great that not all the power comes from the man. (...) Certain young men assume that in relationships, as a principle, that the man always makes the decisions, that this is taken for granted – this also applies to male students, generally - But, [they] can't show this with arguments, why this should be the case. Meanwhile, the women proceed with arguments. And, this leads to conflicts. But, through the debates, the young men become aware that they lack an argument. Something happens there. Something really happens there.

German legal documents and arguments built from them become resources that empower female refugee students to confront illiberal hierarchies (within the refugee in-group). As with H. Pasquel's account, this story of successful civic remediation breaks H. Richter out of the mundane experiences of teaching civics. Instead of bored students, he observes and experiences firsthand the (sacred) value of constitutional protections. The interpretation of female refugees as 'very interested in equal rights' and appreciative of democracy constructs civic deprivation, again, as *preceding* settlement in Germany. The prior deprivation needs to be (and is) meaningfully addressed through well-reasoned debates and rhetorical investment in foundational texts, lending a liberatory meaning to civic remediation. The 'something' that has happened is not primarily a disruption of patriarchal thinking among male refugee students; it is an affirmation of the value and necessity of teaching civics to refugee students. The narrated transformation presents as a substantial disruption of prior presumed experiences with irrational, authoritarian social arrangements.

Dialogue and Social Suspicion

Although students in 'integration through education' programs leave a variety of sending countries, as well as social and economic circumstances, their structural grouping into the same school program means they study alongside other young people seeking asylum. This grouping institutionalizes a common categorical definition and creates a context for shared experience among these recently arrived migrants. Their firsthand accounts describe a common realization that this new social world interprets them and 'their kind' as categorically the same.

Ali, a second-year student in the IFK program, provides a clear articulation that the categorical difference of 'refugee' manifests through a shared stigmatizing experience:

Ali: I think that everyone, and sure it isn't that many, but that all who are refugees in Germany, when someone from another country, a refugee, does something bad or illegal, then we're all in it. What's important [is] where are, where are the honest people, who want to work and live here? You have to get the people [to] know that. I have that.

The discovery and recognition that one is not seen as an individual but as the embodiment of a problematic category prompts a set of moral arguments to disconfirm that assumption. Students recognize that (in situations of mixed contact) the actions of other people whom they do not know are now their burden, indeed the burden of 'all who are refugees.' The problem of overcoming this position becomes central to navigating social life.

Karam discusses an early experience he had realizing that he was being seen as belonging to the same category as terrorists:

Karam: Well, at first when we came to Germany, it was, it was the terrorist attack on Paris. Yeah, back then. And we know a little, everyone could think about themselves. When a Muslim killed those people, what are the people to think about us? So [I] had difficulties. When I was with a German or anyone [and] said "I want to talk with you" but I have problems with the language. I can't talk at all. What am I supposed to talk with him? What should I talk about with him? What is he to think about me?

This association with a violent terrorist attack becomes the backdrop of Karam's real and imagined interactions with new people in Germany, infusing these moments with ambiguity and jeopardizing his social identity. Not knowing if others think the worst of him and not knowing how to divorce himself from these assessments complicate Karam's attempts to present himself to others: "What should I talk about with him? What is he to think about me?" Initially, a lack of linguistic resources limits what he can effectively communicate about himself: "I can't talk at all." Managing these circumstances – the specter of stigmatization alongside limited language proficiency – requires major resources, resources of self-presentation that can garner better social interactions and resources to manage the psychological shifts of an ambiguous, polluted social identity.

Tolerance and skill for managing this situation develops over time, with lessons from the civics classroom propping up students' strategies to navigate mixed contact. The following perspective from Saad, an advanced IFK student starting his apprenticeship placement, clarifies how the terms of difficult situations can be catalogued, mentally managed, and addressed using dialogue:

Saad: I have watched a lot of situations here, because there are many people, for example, they're out smoking hash or something else. And, one doesn't know what I've got, what I'm smoking, if I'm bad or good. He's gonna look close if I'm good or not. Then, afterwards, he comes and talks with me a bit more.

The use of dialogue here operates as a device for dealing with pervasive suspicions, prejudices, and fears of insiders-others. The primary utility of dialogue is not to stoke an intellectual debate. It is a step that follows benign acceptance that one is by default regarded with suspicion. It is a tool that disarms and manages others' expectations in the situation of mixed contact.

Civic Conversion as Denunciation

The alternative form of civic conversion is effected through *denunciation*. Successful denunciation conversions are achieved through a refugee student's stated agreement with civic ideals, an agreement tied specifically to how the instructor interprets the meaning of those ideals. While classroom discussion is a tool in this approach, discussion and dialogue are not central in exemplifying a transformation. Success in denunciation conversion entails students espousing approved civic ideas and disavowing 'uncivic' ones.

"Now they're already saying it, too"

Faculty recognize denunciation conversion as occurring when students *agree with* a predefined set of ideas. Frau Hesse, who teaches German and Politics, presents her experience teaching the concept of religious pluralism:

F. Hesse: We have, at least with regard to religious issues, reached an agreement in my class that it's not important which religion you belong to, rather how people treat each other. We say, I say, 'A good heart is the most important thing.' The students are totally shocked when I tell them that I'm not a person of faith. But, do I behave badly? No. (...) The idea of the next life, for example, is present in every religion and now they're already saying it, too.⁷

Moving students' level of assessment from group membership – 'which religion you belong to' – to behavior – 'how people treat each other' – marks for her a meaningful shift in how refugee students conceptualize morality. Communicating tolerant perspectives on religious pluralism resituates refugee students' judgment of moral behavior, (imaginatively) shifting them away from a prior conception of morality based on religious membership to one based on *individual* behavior. Making the case for evaluating individuals, she presents her own lack of religiosity to separate morality from religious membership. This work to realign the locus of morality is anchored in an understanding that students would otherwise be engaged in religious sectarianism, evaluating others on the basis of their religious membership, or lack thereof. F. Hesse presents her pedagogical success here as convincing students to agree that moral behavior does not require religious affiliation.

A tactic here, which also appears in curricular activities for managing religious pluralism, encourages refugee students to develop an *equated* understanding of religious affiliation.⁸ When refugee students come to acknowledge that all religions are in some way the same, religious affiliations (and non-affiliations) are equalized in legitimacy. Agreement with this presentation indicates successful civic remediation. The conclusion of denunciation conversion celebrates 'renewal' by highlighting refugee students' rhetorical separation from a presumed inegalitarian perspective. They are *now* using the same unifying discourses as F. Hesse. This achievement conceives secular morality, religious equality, and the primacy of individual behavior over group affiliation as both *new* and transformative.

"Equal means that everyone is equal"

Major pedagogical effort is put towards having refugee students verbalize their rejection of 'incorrect' perspectives. Frau Breuer recounts her approach to teaching equality before that law:

F. Breuer: So, as a woman, would I want to live in a society where women are devalued? No, I wouldn't. I'm grateful for the emancipation, I'm grateful for the Enlightenment, and I'm grateful that - by all

⁷ Incidentally, this shared 'idea of the next life' is not a factual representation of all religions.

⁸ For illustration of classroom activities used to teach religious pluralism through drawing commonalities across religious affiliations, see KH-II unit 9 (ISB, 2018).

means, theoretically - we enjoy equal rights. Practically speaking that isn't the case, but you also have to convey that this isn't a given - that you impart this to young men and women, so that it is accepted and carried forward (...) in pursuit of an identity, the less you articulate what your expectations are and what you would like to have, then the other one starts to interpret this for themselves: what's acceptable and what's not. (...) I have also spoken about the law, about judges in Germany who handed down rulings that incorporated cultural contexts and gave the perpetrator a lighter sentence. For example, in the context of spousal murder (...) And, I've quite clearly stated my personal position that I see this as wrong. Equal means that everyone is equal, also including getting to have more rights. And, I ask them how they feel about this and honestly I haven't had a single refugee who found this comprehensible, that culture would make a difference.

The imagined 'exit' and 'renewal' that unfold here are harder to see than in some of the other narratives, because the renewal is pressed upon the refugee student's future. The transformation is as follows: F. Breuer's students were, prior to civic remediation, on a certain path with the potential to disrupt legal equality through supporting 'getting to have more rights.' When refugee students 'accept' and 'carry forward' an appropriate interpretation of equal rights, and reject their subversion through 'cultural contexts,' her educational intervention disrupts this path. The refugee student's un-remediated presence in Germany *was going to* introduce more inequalities in the legal system.⁹

The 'exit' is from a pathway of complicity that injects hazards into legal institutions, while the 'renewal' appears as the hearty disavowal of ideas thought to cause such hazards. She instantiates a denunciation conversion by inducing students to vocalize opposition towards the inegalitarian things they were presumably going to precipitate. F. Breuer's surprise in hearing students agree with her interpretation, and the imagined surprise of the listener, reveal again a core presumption that refugee students harbor support for certain things.

Disavowal and Belonging

Dealing with being a 'refugee' means having to answer for the misdeeds of other people you do not know. Distancing oneself from negative assumptions becomes a major part of social interaction for those who occupy this category. Students enrolled in 'integration through education' use the material of denunciation conversion to narratively distance themselves from the negative qualities ascribed to these 'bad others.' They regularly invert stigmatizing qualities: students stress how they are different from the stereotyped image of the criminal or 'bad' refugee, denouncing laziness and welfare-dependence and espousing a moral life of skilled work, paying taxes, and giving back.¹⁰ This *narrative of belonging* includes a self-portrait as *civic convert*.

The following selection demonstrates how IFK students weave in the plot lines of remedial civics to present themselves:

Saad: I have met with people, and I have learned a lot. There is no difference, I don't know, [if you're] gay or not, we are all equal humans. One just needs to speak from the heart and talk with each other.

Mohammad: It was, when I came [to] Germany, there's many, many foreigners, who are always making trouble and the Germans, they think: "the refugees, they're all bad." And, they aren't. You can't say, 'everyone is bad.' Every country, there are bad people and good people.

Amadou: I am a little bit open. I can – I don't say, "him, he's beneath [me]," or something like that. For me everyone, everyone is equal, regardless of religion or what kind of person, it doesn't matter.

Abdul: With me now, the most important [thing] is that everyone here is respectful, really, regardless of what country they're from, what nation, what religion.

Students steer through the situation of mixed contact using a discursive performance of a tolerant-self.¹¹ The remedial civics classroom clearly announces itself in these self-presentations: difference appears as a feature of individuals, not groups; group differences are flattened to a point of irrelevance; acceptance and tolerance towards sexual, national, and religious differences is repeatedly and explicitly avowed. These appeals to a greater unity, irrespective of social category, enable students to situate themselves outside of negative labels by presenting group-

⁹ For a dissection of the idea that an irreconcilable conflict exists between women's legal rights and cultural groups coded as not sufficiently liberal (e.g., those from Muslim majority countries), or the concept 'defensive liberalism,' which poses gender egalitarianism and multiculturalism as inherently oppositional, see Benhabib (2002).

¹⁰ See Davis (1961) for a more extensive articulation of strategies that stigmatized people use.

¹¹ The quotes from this section do not *depict or imagine* the mixed contact dynamic; they are statements students used within a mixed contact encounter.

based distinctions as invalid criteria of evaluation, while also depriving them of the strategic use of group membership to pursue collective aims.¹²

'Integration through education' positions refugee students as capable of reform. Students, for their part, adeptly recognize this expectation and mobilize it to craft the role of the civic convert. Beneath the celebratory civic conversion tale is a troubled moral path, through which refugee students learn of the flaws and deficits their social environment sees in them and come to intimately know that burden. In mixed contact, students mobilize civics lessons to claim self-worth and social belonging. Democratic modes (e.g., dialogue) acquire shape as individual life management strategies; grievances about the social environment are directed inward (e.g., benign acceptance of suspicion, managing presumed pathologies of an assigned in-group). Using legitimate means of democratic redress appears rather unwise, as publicly linking themselves with the categorical pollution they are made to experience could introduce new hazards into an already precarious situation.

A Rite without Passage

There appears to be no way for refugee students to behave that would dispel the pervasive expectation that they bring ideological perils, nor any way for these students to prevent being understood (pre-civic conversion) as threats to cherished civic arrangements. Students regularly present themselves as *already* possessing the desired attitudes. In conversion stories, faculty depict a preexisting embrace of treasured liberal ideas: as when H. Pasquel recounts students telling him 'Herr P., we know this' or when F. Breuer points out that *none* of her refugee students agreed with differential treatment before the courts. The transformative thrust of the conversion story persists despite clear observations that students express 'normal' levels of support for civic ideas; as in the cases of H. Richter and F. Hesse, when their students were swiftly receptive ("they're already saying it, too") and non-receptive to liberal ideas ("this also applies to male students, generally") in ways typical of any young person developing a moral horizon. Yet, these same students are narrated as being substantively changed and the work of changing them as an imperative contribution to the maintenance of democracy.

Civic conversion stories present an exit-renewal transformation, despite contents clearly at odds with that portrayal. The denunciation form of civic education simultaneously *marks* students with a set of contaminating attributes and induces them to rhetorically cast off these same contaminating attributes. This process is treated as correcting the refugee student's nebulous, yet ever present, potential to negatively influence the standing order of things. Debate conversions offer a less contaminating instance, while still insisting on the exit-renewal structure. Faculty persist in casting IFK students as civic converts, despite the more nuanced picture that directly working with these students reveals to them. Major public and professional educational efforts continually urge refugee students to 'fit' into liberalism; faculty simultaneously acknowledge that their students already embraced these ideas (or were receptive and unreceptive in typical fashion); and, there is the persistent understanding that 'success' fundamentally transforms the refugee student. The necessity of this transformation can only be verified, not disconfirmed. The curious thing, then, is the hegemony of the narrative form and its intractability to disconfirming evidence.¹³

The presentation of civic conversion as a dramatic transformation holds major properties of what Zerubavel termed 'ritual transitions':

"Most of the fine lines that separate mental entities from one another are drawn only in our own head and, therefore, totally invisible. And yet, by playing up the act of 'crossing' them, we can make mental discontinuities more 'tangible'" (1991: 18).

To punctuate the 'reality' of discrete things and to pass between relevant symbolic boundaries, we substantiate transitions by 'dramatizing the moments of entering and exiting' (Zerubavel, 1991: 18-19). The denouement of civic conversion exemplifies this aspect of ritual transition: the refugee is *now* liberated from their unenlightened past, the refugee is *now* cleansed of intolerance, the refugee is 'now already saying it, too,' and so forth. But, what happens when there is no *transition* – only a ritual? What if the conversion rite enhances discontinuity without passage? As conceived, a ritual transition *creates passage*. To use a few of Zerubavel's (1991) own examples, the boxing match does (barring a major interruption) start after the ritual glove touch, and you are married to your spouse after your wedding (until you get divorced or die). Where do refugee students land after they express a civic conversion? Are they German now? Are they integrated now? What tangible change is made possible?

¹² The externally assigned group agenda to convert patriarchal male counterparts or prevent the German courts from giving spouse murderers light prison sentences, notwithstanding.

¹³ My intention is not to suggest that no student enrolled in an 'integration through education' program holds any of the problematized points of view imputed to them, nor to suggest that IFK students have no need for clarification about permissive aspects of liberal democracy. It is instead to point out that faculty, in the face of potentially disconfirming evidence, continue to approach refugee integration monolithically as a civic conversion.

I argue that the dramatized exit-renewal structure *conceals non-passage* between lines. While it is tempting to see civic conversion as a kind of initiation rite, this encounter does not confer ascendance to equal (or improved) social status, attributes which would allow it to correspond with an initiation.¹⁴ ‘Passage’ through civic re-education does not revise the expectations applied to refugee students. The *tangible* ‘renewal’ of civic conversion is, on the one hand, students learning that their assigned symbolic difference can only be managed, not dissolved and, on the other, institutional insiders confirming (to themselves) that this is the opposite of what they are doing. The reality of an exclusionary boundary is *being made* through its triumphant defeat.

Civic conversion as a rite without passage consecrates the legitimacy of arbitrarily constructed boundaries, while concealing that effect behind a conversion drama. The mechanisms of ‘rites of institution’ are at play here:

“To institute, in this case, is to consecrate, that is, to sanction and sanctify a particular state of things, an established order, in exactly the same way that a *constitution* does in the legal and political sense of the term (...) by making it known and recognized; it consists of making it exist as a social difference, known and recognized as such by the agent invested and everyone else” (Bourdieu, 1991: 119).

The ritual transition presented in civic conversion – the ‘before’ and the ‘after’ of refugee students – obscures. It directs attention away from the “hidden set of individuals in relation to which the instituted group is defined” (Bourdieu, 1991: 118). Rites of institution, as social rituals, invoke the passage of their subjects, while legitimating a difference *between those subject to the ritual and those not subject to it* (Bourdieu, 1991). The dubious dramatic claim of civic conversion sets refugee students symbolically outside by stubbornly insisting they be brought inside. The arbitrary line instituted by the rite of civic conversion is between *those who must* ritually distance themselves from an assigned ‘deficiency’ in their social past, present, and future and *those who need not*.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The circumstances of ‘integration through education’ for these younger cohorts of asylum-seekers in Germany instantiates many of the elements in the civic integration models increasingly relied on in Europe. Citizenship scholars have charted and critiqued this ‘civic turn’ (see Mouritsen, 2008; Halikiopoulou et al., 2013; Goodman, 2018; Mouritsen et al., 2019; Larin, 2020). This scholarship identifies fundamental patterns in state-led immigration regimes and their civic integration projects: ‘one-sided’ focus on the individual, direct state involvement to ‘encourage desired mind sets,’ expansion of the ‘realms of desirable ‘good citizenship,’ and use of civic tests to screen migrants prior to granting them rights of entry and/or residency (Mouritsen et al., 2019: 601). Civic integration models have been critiqued for their inability to demonstrate measurable increases in integration outcomes (Mouritsen et al., 2019), for applying ideological requirements of membership only to migrants (Larin 2020), and for promoting the use of liberal-democratic ideals in reactionary movements of ethnic exclusion (Halikiopoulou et al., 2013). This paper invites a distinct lens on civic integration, one which sees its parameters as unfolding from a rite without passage.

Civic conversion requires that ‘national’ boundaries and coherent attributes of European societies exist; it demands that there are *outsiders* who can, if not properly transformed through education, undermine these societies by polluting them. While ‘integration through education’ programs conceptualize these differences as mutable through pedagogy, the necessity of corrective remediation remains irrefutable. The construction of the refugee student as a cultural outsider who can merely be *reformed* stands immutable. Consecrating the pathological center of the civic conversion rite – the ‘refugee student’ who needs re-education to not threaten democratic society – actually binds the larger cultural system, and the social system beyond.

German ‘integration through education’ pervasively weaves in and tames the discourses that pollute and impinge the refugee student.¹⁵ When students wrangle and evade these discourses, they bring their own ‘self-governing capabilities into alignment with political objectives’ (Rose, 1992: 147). Ani, a student from Armenia clarifies this larger social function:

Ani: Yeah. [I’m] learning so much about everything. What do you need to know when you go to the Social Welfare Office [*Sozialamt*], for example. What do you need to say; what should you not say. How do you need to do this? And, then, for apprenticeship training, apprenticeship language, and what do

¹⁴ To be clear, the school itself does help students gain stable footing in Germany in quite significant ways such as brokering their migration status, but these are not direct elements of what is attained through civic conversion.

¹⁵ For a discussion of how the ‘assimilative’ modes of incorporation in the United States encourage individuals to separate themselves from civic discourses that pollute their identities, see Alexander (2006: 425–427).

you need to wear, what do you need -- what do you need to talk about, what do you need to be able to do, what do you need to do beforehand, *so things go easy for you* [emphasis added].

The school and the knowledge she obtains there provide her with an insider's perspective on how to navigate the social world, explicating behaviors that will ease individualized difficulties. As administrators of an instance of civic integration, the IFK faculty become 'experts of subjectivity' who perform the task of 'governing through freedom' (Rose, 1992, 1999). Much like professionals, everyday citizens, too, are called upon and deputized to perform these functions.¹⁶ The demand for experts of subjectivity clearly exceeds the school walls.

Tenacious, unscientific convictions about the realness of ritually imposed differences constrain young newcomers within the German opportunity structure.¹⁷ Their encounter with symbolic closure tells them what is really on offer. In keeping with the project of aligning selves with political objectives, the emergent disposition that 'converted' students display – their *narrative of belonging* – articulates with a state-led project of migration utilitarianism, in which migrants fill shortages in the direct labor force without altering organizing principles of the social structure. This accomplishment mitigates strain between the finite opportunities on offer and the subjective aspirations of the students.¹⁸ The ability to reformulate their complicated predicament into simple matters of skill directed towards the self – to make it *so things go easy for you* – sustains a growing rift between the subjective and objective dimensions of contemporary life.¹⁹ As a type of social integration, the rite of civic conversion affixes system to psyche and civil society.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, J. C. (2006). *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195162509.001.0001>
- Ausbildungs- und Prüfungsordnung Berufskolleg (APO-BK). (n.d.). Verordnung über die Ausbildung und Prüfung in den Bildungsgängen des Berufskollegs [Regulation on Training and Examination in the Educational Courses of the Vocational College], *B.A.S.S. NRW*. Available at: <https://bass.schul-welt.de/3129.htm>
- Benhabib, S. (2002). *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691186542>
- Bennhold, K. (2015). As Germany takes in refugees, it also rehabilitates its image, *The New York Times*, 22 September. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/23/world/europe/as-germany-takes-in-refugees-it-also-rehabilitates-its-image.html>
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power* (J. B. Thompson, ed.). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Davis, F. (1961). Deviance disavowal: The management of strained interaction by the visibly handicapped. *Social Problems*, 9(2), 120–132. <https://doi.org/10.2307/799007>
- Frehe-Halliwell, P. and Kremer, H.-H. (2018). Internationale Förderklassen (IFK) an Berufskollegs: Herausforderungen und Praxisbeispiele der Bildungsgangarbeit vor Ort [International Support Classes (IFK) at Vocational Colleges: Challenges and Practical Examples of Local Educational Work], *Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen and Centre for Vocational Education and Training (CEVET)*. Available at: https://www.uni-paderborn.de/fileadmin/cevets/Projekte/Projekt_3i/Handreichung_IFK_FreheHalliwell_Kremer_2018.pdf
- Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (2006). *Young People and Social Change*. Buckingham, UK: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Goffman, E. (1986). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster. (Original work published 1963).
- Goodman, S. W. (2018). *The Civic Integration Turn*. New York, NY: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315512853-17>
- Halikiopoulou, D., Mock, S. and Vasilopoulou, S. (2013). The civic zeitgeist: Nationalism and liberal values in the European radical right. *Nations and Nationalism*, 19(1), 107–127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2012.00550.x>

¹⁶ The broad involvement of everyday citizens in the German 'integration through education' effort was beyond the scope of this paper's analytical emphasis on professionalized forms of civic remediation. Additional public-facing efforts such as the 'Open Your Heart' campaign enlist everyday citizens in the task of aligning immigrant selves with liberal governance.

¹⁷ To this point, see Lamont and Molnár (2002: 168) on the role of symbolic boundaries in organizing and stratifying social life. Symbolic boundaries become 'objectified,' manifesting 'unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities' (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 168).

¹⁸ See Merton (1938) on the strain between subjective aspirations and objective opportunities.

¹⁹ See Furlong and Cartmel (2006) on this rift and its consequences for contemporary youth.

- Institut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung (ISB). (2018). *Kommunizieren und Handeln II: Lernszenarien zur Politischen Bildung, Wertebildung und Berufliche Integration* [Communicating and Acting II: Learning Scenarios for Political Education, Values Formation and Professional Integration]. München: Stiftung Bildungspakt Bayern.
- Lamont, M. and Molnár, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28(1), 167–195. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141107>
- Lamont, M. and Swidler, A. (2014). Methodological pluralism and the possibilities and limits of interviewing. *Qualitative Sociology*, 37(2), 153–171. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-014-9274-z>
- Larin, S. J. (2020). Is it really about values? Civic nationalism and migrant integration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(1), 127–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1591943>
- Merton, R. K. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review*, 3(5), 672–682. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2084686>
- Mouritsen, P. (2008). Political responses to cultural conflict: Reflections on the ambiguities of the civic turn, in K. E. Jørgensen and P. Mouritsen (eds), *Constituting Communities: Political Solutions to Cultural Conflict* (pp. 1–30). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230582088_1
- Mouritsen, P., Jensen, K. K. and Larin, S. J. (2019). Introduction: Theorizing the civic turn in European integration policies. *Ethnicities*, 19(4), 595–613. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796819843532>
- Rose, N. (1992). Governing the enterprising self, in N. Rose (ed), *The Values of the Enterprise Culture: The Moral Debate* (pp. 141–64). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511488856>
- Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511557842>
- Tyler, I. (2013). *Revolt Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London, UK: Zed Books. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350222359>
- Wehling, H. G. (1977). Beutelsbacher Konsens [Beutelsbach Consensus], in S. Schiele and H. Schneider (ed), *Das Konsensproblem in der Politischen Bildung* (pp. 173–184). Stuttgart, Germany: E. Klett.
- Zerubavel, E. (1991). *The Fine Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Zerubavel, E. (2007). Generally speaking: The logic and mechanics of social pattern analysis. *Sociological Forum*, 22(2), 131–145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2007.00010.x>