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**ISLAMKUNDE IN NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA:
A SOURCE OF INTEGRATION OR DIVISION?**

A Thesis in

German

by

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ABSTRACT

Confessional religious education is a regular school subject in German public schools (German Constitution VII, 3). This religious education is provided at any school in North Rhine-Westphalia attended by at least 12 students of the particular confession (NRW School Law III, 31, 1). The majority of Muslims living in Germany, the Turkish Alevi minority being the exception, are not yet considered to constitute a legally recognized religious community, and therefore, do not have a right to confessional religious education (Kaplan 2008). In 1999, North Rhine-Westphalia launched an Islam instruction school trial as an interim solution. It differs from confessional religious education in that it is fact-based rather than faith-based (Ucar 2007).

There have been several studies on the acceptance of this interim school subject by the Muslim community (e.g., Kiefer 2005, Ucar 2006). In contrast, my study asks: What do people see as the socio-political goals of the school trial and are they being accomplished? I interviewed political/government officials, representatives from the Muslim organizations and Churches, and principals and teachers from two schools partaking in the school trial and from one school which is not. I distributed questionnaires to the 4th-grade students, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and their parents at these schools. The purpose of this study is to highlight the varying expectations that members in society have for the school trial, and how these affect their acceptance of the course. The results of this study lay a good foundation for a more informed public discussion of this controversial issue.

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***Islamkunde* in North Rhine-Westphalia: A Source of Integration or Division?**

INTRODUCTION AND SET-UP

Confessional religious education is a regular school subject in German public schools.¹ This religious education is provided at any school in North Rhine-Westphalia attended by at least 12 students of the particular confession.² The majority of Muslims living in Germany, the Turkish Alevi minority being the exception, are not yet considered to constitute a legally recognized religious community, and therefore, do not have a right to confessional religious education.³ In 1999, North Rhine-Westphalia launched an Islam instruction school trial (*Islamkunde*) as an interim solution. It differs from confessional religious education in that it is fact-based rather than faith-based.⁴

There have been several studies on the acceptance of this interim school subject by the Muslim community.⁵ In contrast, my study asks: What do people see as the socio-political goals of the school trial and are they being accomplished? I interviewed political/government officials, representatives from the Muslim organizations and Churches, and principals and teachers from two schools partaking in the school trial and from one school which is not. I distributed questionnaires to the 4th-grade students, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and their parents at these schools. The purpose of this study is to highlight the varying expectations that members in society have for the school trial, and how these affect their acceptance of the course. The results

¹ Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland VII, 3.

² Schulgesetz NRW III, 31, 1.

³ Ismail Kaplan, "Start gegeben: Alevitischer Religionsunterricht an den Grundschulen," AABK, 22 Sep. 2008, 20 Jul. 2009 <<http://www.alevi.com/religionsunterricht0+M5baf1cb4474.html>>.

⁴ Bülent Ucar, ed. Islamkunde in Nordrhein-Westfalen: Einige Infos (Düsseldorf: NRW Landesinstitut für Schule, 2007).

⁵ E.g. Michael Kiefer, *Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005).

Bülent Ucar, "Die Akzeptanz des Faches Islamkunde in NRW," Staatlicher Islamunterricht in Deutschland: Die Modelle in NRW und Niedersachsen im Vergleich, ed. Stefan Reichmuth et al. (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006) 53-60.

of this study lay a good foundation for a more informed public discussion of this controversial issue.

This paper begins with an introduction of the issues leading to and surrounding *Islamkunde* and the set-up of the current study. The second section delves into the research itself and discusses the results, and the paper finishes with a conclusion and discussion of future research.

The first section, Introduction and Set-Up, starts with an introduction of the historical and cultural context. The Religion Class Historical Overview addresses the idea of Religion Class in Germany, Muslims as The “Transient” Religious Minority, The Problem of Integration and finally the school trial itself, “*Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache.*” Building on the historical background, the paper moves on to discuss the cultural context framed in the concepts of *Leitkultur* and *Grundgesetz* Patriotism. This part highlights The Problem of German Identity, The *Leitkultur* Debate, and the concept of Constitution Patriotism. The first section then moves on to The Research Question and Plan. Here the paper presents the study’s Main Questions, and explains the methodology employed.

Introduction

Today around thirteen million Muslims live in the European Union accounting for 3.5% of the total population, according to conservative estimates, although the number and origins of Muslims vary greatly between Member States.⁶ The majority of Muslims in some States, such as Britain and France, stem from these States’ former colonies. For example, the majority of Britain’s two million Muslims have origins in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, whereas most of

⁶ Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, 2006).

France's four to six million Muslims come from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.⁷ On the other hand, around 3.8 to 4.4 million Muslims live in Germany making up 4.6% to 5.2% of the population of a country with only a short-lived colonial history. About 63% of German Muslims have Turkish roots though another 14% come from southern European countries like Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Albania.⁸

The growing Muslim minority population in Europe and its integration difficulties have drawn significant national and international attention and sparked passionate analyses and debates over possible solutions. More so than with other minority populations, the European Union and its member states are keen on solving Muslim integration issues as is evident from the EU's annual report on immigration and integration launched in 2004 and its funding of integration projects since 2002,⁹ the British government's revamping of citizenship tests and ceremonies in 2004 and the Home Office's announcement in 2005 of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion,¹⁰ and the Spanish government's creation in 2004 of a foundation to help minority religions integrate into Spanish society.¹¹ These initiatives and projects have been launched out of fear of what will happen if Muslim integration does not occur. These fears include anything from localized outbreaks of violence and unrest to Islamic extremism and international terrorist attacks. Favorite examples include events such as the September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks against the US in which 2981 people died at the hands of 19 young

⁷ Germany, Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, Das Integrationsportal: Muslime in Europa, 19 Jul. 2009 <http://www.integration-in-deutschland.de/cln_117/nn_284176/SubSites/Integration/DE/01__Ueberblick/ThemenUndPerspektiven/Islam/Europa/europa-node.html?__nnn=true>.

⁸ Sonja Haug, Stephanie Muessig and Anja Stichs, Muslimisches Leben in Deutschland (Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2009) 11-12.

⁹ United States, Congressional Research Service report for Congress, The Library of Congress, Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries (Washington: CRS Web, 2005) 6-7.

¹⁰ United States, Muslims in Europe 14-15.

¹¹ United States, Muslims in Europe 42.

Arabs directed by Islamist extremists,¹² the 2004 murder of controversial Islam-critical Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh at the hands of a Dutch-born Muslim of Moroccan origin,¹³ the 2004 Madrid train bombings which killed 191 people and injured 1841 and for which 21 people, mostly Moroccan, were convicted,¹⁴ the 2005 London bombings in which 52 people were killed and more than 750 injured at the hands of four Muslim extremists¹⁵ and the death threats by Muslim militants following the publication of the Prophet Mohammed cartoons in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in 2005.¹⁶

This study focuses on the EU region with the greatest Muslim minority, North Rhine-Westphalia.¹⁷ North Rhine-Westphalia is Germany's most populous state and shares borders with both the Netherlands and Belgium.¹⁸ Regarding the Muslim minority issue, what sets Germany apart from its neighbors is its relationship between state and religion. According to Ghadban, there are three state-religion models in Europe. There is the "separate system" in which state and religion are strictly separated as is the case for France, Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands. There is also the "unified system" in which there is a state religion as is the case for England, Norway, and Denmark. Finally, there is the "Concordat and treaty system" in

¹² United States, National Commission, The 9/11 Commission Report Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States Executive Summary, 21 Aug. 2004, 14 Jun. 2011 <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report_Exec.htm>.

¹³ "Dutch Courage and the death of Theo van Gogh – Counting the Cost – A usually tolerant country troubled by intolerant Muslim extremism," The Economist 31 Aug. 2006, 14 Jun. 2011 <<http://www.economist.com/node/78540110>>.

¹⁴ "Madrid Train Attacks," BBC, 14 Jun. 2011 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/guides/457000/457031/html/default.stm>>.

¹⁵ "7 July Bombings," BBC, 14 Jun. 2011 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/london_blasts/what_happened/html>.

¹⁶ "Mohammed Cartoon Row Intensifies," BBC, 1 Feb. 2006, 14 Jun. 2011 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4670370.stm>>.

¹⁷ North Rhine Westphalia, Innenministerium, Islamismus-Missbrauch einer Religion.

¹⁸ North Rhine-Westphalia, Die Landesregierung, Nordrhein-Westfalen, 20 Jul. 2009 <<http://www.nrw.de/Nordrhein-Westfalen/index.php>>.

which various Concordats and treaties regulate the relations between the state and the religious communities. Germany fits in this last category.¹⁹

In Germany, state recognized religious communities receive many special privileges and are considered partners of the state. Not only do religious communities enjoy tax breaks and other monetary dispensations, the state also collects the so-called “church tax” for them. In addition, the religious communities work closely with the state on the confessional religious instruction (*Religionsunterricht* or *RU*) in German public schools. RU is to be provided at any school in North Rhine-Westphalia attended by at least 12 students of the confession.²⁰ RU is a normal school subject in German public schools (except in Berlin and Bremen) and is usually a required subject for members of the particular religious community, although parents may withdraw their children from the class and children over 14 may withdraw themselves.²¹ In most states, children who are withdrawn from RU must take an ethics course. Exceptions to this rule include Berlin and Brandenburg, where the ethics course is required and religion is completely optional, and Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia, where religion and ethics courses are treated equally, and students may freely choose between the two.²²

Because the German state must interact with religious communities and, because of its religious neutrality, must interact with all religious communities, the state is required to address the Muslim minority population not only in terms of immigrants or Germans, but also as

¹⁹ Ralph Ghadban, “Staat und Religion in Europa in Vergleich: Grossbritannien, Frankreich und die Niederlande,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Jul. 2002, 20 Jul. 2009
<http://www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/STZS3V,0,Staat_und_Religion_in_Europa_im_Vergleich.html>.

²⁰ Schulgesetz NRW, III.,31, 1.

²¹ Germany, Bundesministerium des Innern, Staat und Religionsgemeinschaften in Deutschland, 19 Dec. 2005, 20 Jul. 2009
<http://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/Themen/PolitikGesellschaft/KirchenReligion/StaatReligion/StaatReligion_node.html>.

²² United States, State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, “Germany,” International Religious Freedom Report 2010, 17 Nov. 2010, 19 Jun. 2011
<<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148938.htm>>.

Muslims. Like its European neighbors, Germany at large and North Rhine-Westphalia especially have been very concerned with integrating the Muslim minority in German society. Although the majority of Muslims living in Germany are not yet considered to constitute a legally recognized religious community (even though the Turkish Alevi minority has been recognized since 2004)²³, various German states including North Rhine-Westphalia have been experimenting with different types of Islam instruction in public schools. School ministry officials have proclaimed integration of the Muslim minority in German society to be one of the goals of teaching Islam in school.²⁴

North Rhine-Westphalia has taken the lead in Islam instruction. North Rhine-Westphalia started offering “religious instruction for students of the Islamic faith” within the framework of “mother language instruction for Turkish children” back in 1986, and was the first state to offer “Islamic instruction” taught in German in 1999. North Rhine-Westphalia has continued this school trial, renaming the course “Islam studies in German” (or *Islamkunde* as opposed to *Islam RU*) in 2005.²⁵ North Rhine-Westphalia has even implemented the first state approved Alevi RU during the 2008-09 school year.²⁶ Integrations minister Armin Laschet announced on July 1st 2009 that true Islam RU would be introduced starting in the 2010/11 school year in North Rhine-Westphalia.²⁷

The media has commented a great deal on these school trials and experiments, and they have also been the subjects of studies such as Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen by Michael Kiefer, Klaus Gebauer’s “Islamkunde in NRW,” Bülent Ucar’s “Die

²³ Kaplan.

²⁴ Klaus Gebauer, “Bildungs- und gesellschaftspolitische Ziel-Ebene,” Islamkunde in Nordrhein-Westfalen: Einige Infos, ed. Bülent Ucar (Düsseldorf: NRW Landesinstitut für Schule, 2007) 11-12.

²⁵ “Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache (Organisation),” Islamkunde in Nordrhein-Westfalen: Einige Infos, ed. Bülent Ucar (Düsseldorf: NRW Landesinstitut für Schule, 2007) 4-7.

²⁶ Kaplan.

²⁷ “NRW: Laschet verkündet Islamunterricht – Die Grünen kritisieren,” Migazin, 3 Jun. 2009, 20 Jul. 2009 <<http://www.migazin.de/2009/07/03/nrw-laschet-verkundet-islamunterricht-die-grunen-kritisieren>>.

Akzeptanz des Faches Islamkunde in NRW,” Kays Mutlu’s “Erfahrungsbericht eines muslimischen Orientalisten als Lehrer im Schulversuch "Islamische Unterweisung als eigenständiges Unterrichtsfach in NRW” among others. Such commentaries and studies often focus on the legalities of these types of classes, their curriculum and curriculum’s goals, their level of acceptance by the Muslim community, their similarities and differences to regular confessional Islam instruction, and how NRW compares to other states and countries.

These media reports and studies do not pause to question the socio-political purpose of these programs, but instead accept that North Rhine-Westphalia is pouring money, time, and energy into different Islamic instruction programs in the name of social integration. Does *Islamkunde* or an eventual Islam RU really foster the integration of Muslims into German society? If so, how exactly? Does the German Christian population view *Islamkunde* as promoting integration? Does the German Muslim population?

When referring to Christians and Muslims in this study, the religiosity and beliefs of individuals and groups are not considered. For the purpose of this study, it is irrelevant if people are true believers or if they follow some or all of the tenets of their faith because the German government does not investigate these issues, but rather treats all members of a recognized religious community the same. For example, all German Catholics receive the same treatment from the government without differentiation between those who attend Sunday mass every week and those who do not, those who take Communion and those who do not, etc. People are considered Christian or Muslim if they label themselves as such, or if they are members of one of the Churches or Muslim organizations. School religious instruction in Germany is the constitutional right and obligation of every child who is a member of a confession irrespective of his or her personal beliefs. This study seeks to understand the viewpoints of people who

theoretically have this right. The reader should remember, however, that not all Christians and Muslims necessarily practice their faith or have strong feelings about it.

The goal of this research project is not to find definite answers to these questions or to prove an explicit link between *Islamkunde* and the level of Muslim integration in NRW. Instead, the aim of this project is to explore the differences or similarities between various social groups' understanding of *Islamkunde*'s socio-political goals and their perceptions regarding the realization of these goals. In other words, is everyone on the same page?

This question is very pertinent now at a time when *Islamkunde* could soon be expanded to most of Germany and regular *Islam RU*, even for the Sunni majority, may become a reality in the near future. This would mean that after a long, arduous struggle and a great effort from all parties involved, the final goal would have been reached. If major differences in goals and expectations are discovered at that time, the disappointment and disillusionment that result could seriously set back any future cooperation and "integration."

Religion Class Historical Overview

Religion Class in Germany

Since the Middle Ages, RU has been an integral part of German education. Originally, RU was almost exclusively Christian, Catholic or Protestant (essentially Lutheran), depending on the region. Prior to the founding of the Weimar Republic in 1919, Germany was actually considered a "Christian State".²⁸ The majority of children attended confessional schools during this period.²⁹ The constitution of the Weimar Republic ended the explicit combination of state and religion. However, due to parent petitions, religion was made a "regular school subject,"

²⁸ Martin Heckel, "Religionsunterricht für Muslime?" *Juristenzeitung* 54.15/16 (1999), 741.

²⁹ Frank J Gordon, "The German Evangelical Churches and the Struggle for the Schools in the Weimar Republic," *Church History* 49.1 (1980), 47.

though attendance was not mandatory.³⁰ Still, most children continued to attend Catholic and *Evangelische*³¹ schools. In 1931, out of the 52,959 German elementary schools only 295 were secular and 97 were Jewish. Even the *Simultanschulen* – interdenominational Christian schools, now called *Gemeinschaftgrundschulen* – which the Weimar Constitution proclaimed as the normative school type only numbered 8,921.³²

Hitler began his reign by reassuring the Christian churches and their members that the status quo would be maintained in terms of religious education.³³ He even concluded a Concordat in September 1933 with the Holy See which safeguarded the freedom of Catholic confessional and private schools and gave the Church the right to determine RU curricula and appoint its teachers.³⁴ However, as he consolidated his power in 1936, he changed his conciliatory approach.³⁵ The Nazis pushed for all public schools to become interdenominational, liquidated many private schools, especially the Catholic ones³⁶, and abolished grades in RU.³⁷ By 1945, in those schools where RU had not been abolished outright the quality had suffered significantly.³⁸ At the same time the Nazi regime was eliminating Catholic confessional and private schools, it abolished Jewish RU in public schools and forced Jews to attend Jewish schools. In 1938 there were 68 public Jewish primary schools and 72 private Jewish primary

³⁰ Gordon 48.

³¹ *Evangelisch* means Protestant though the overwhelming majority of German Protestants are Lutheran.

³² Gordon 54.

³³ Ernst Christian Helmreich, Religious Education in German Schools: An Historical Approach (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959) 154.

³⁴ Helmreich 159.

³⁵ Rainer Lachmann and Bernd Schröder eds., Geschichte des evangelischen Religionsunterrichts in Deutschland: Ein Studienbuch (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007) 351.

³⁶ Helmreich 176.

³⁷ Helmreich 183.

³⁸ Helmreich 194.

schools.³⁹ In 1942 all schooling of Jewish children by paid or unpaid teachers was forbidden by law.⁴⁰

At the end of World War II (May 8, 1945) the German school system completely collapsed. The four occupying powers ordered all schools closed for summer vacation.⁴¹ In November 1945 the occupying powers decided that religious instruction should be made available to all students on a voluntary base.⁴² There was also the question of the legality of the Concordat of 1933. In the end, the Americans decided that it was “technically binding and will be respected unless declared inoperative in whole or in part by the Allied Military Authority.” In contrast, Russia chose to simply ignore it.⁴³ This difference highlights the fact that the various occupying powers did not enforce a unified school code in terms of religion class or anything else for that matter. The occupying powers even made different arrangements with the German states in the same sector. This inconsistency was the result of at least the Western powers’ attempt to follow local traditions and parental desires as much as possible.⁴⁴

School codes were formalized in the constitutions of the respective West German states in 1949. In 1946 the Soviets had implemented the “Law for the Democratization of German Schools” in their sector. This forbade private schools and made religious instruction the concern of the churches which were to give it on their own time and at their expense.⁴⁵ The constitution of the German Democratic Republic in 1949 adopted this law though it further stipulated that churches had the right to give religious instruction on school premises.⁴⁶

³⁹ Helmreich 202.

⁴⁰ Helmreich 208.

⁴¹ Helmreich 213.

⁴² Lachmann 274.

⁴³ Helmreich 219.

⁴⁴ Lachmann 274.

⁴⁵ Helmreich 258.

⁴⁶ Helmreich 259.

The Federal Republic of Germany took the more traditional state-sponsored approach to RU. Its *Grundgesetz* specifies in Art.7.3 that RU is a “regular school subject” except in secular schools. This means that the RU grade appears on the report card⁴⁷ and is calculated into the student’s GPA which means that it influences whether or not a student needs to repeat a grade level.⁴⁸ Because RU is a regular school subject, the state is required to provide sufficient funding and teachers. However, the content of RU must be in accordance and agreement with the religious organization. In this way, the separation of state and church is maintained.⁴⁹ Although religion is a “compulsory” class and students are automatically enrolled, students may withdraw from the class if a guardian submits a written request.⁵⁰ The *Grundgesetz* did exempt two German states from the RU requirement under the “Bremer Klausel” (Art. 7.3.1). Bremen requires its students to take a “Bible History” course instead of a RU. West Berlin’s regulation was similar to that of the GDR.

RU has continued in its post-war form through the present. Although there was some discussion of discontinuing RU in the 60s and 70s, the status of RU was never seriously threatened. In the early 70s, between a fourth and a third of students in high school withdrew from RU. The popularity of withdrawing was in part due to the fact that this meant the student acquired a free period.⁵¹ In response, the states introduced the substitute class “Ethics,” which became mandatory for all students not enrolled in RU. Furthermore, RU was established as a *Abiturfach*. Consequently, the number of students who withdrew from RU decreased significantly in the late 70s and 80s.⁵² German Unification also did not significantly influence

⁴⁷ Friedrich Wintzer, et al., *Praktische Theologie* (Neukirchen-Vlyun: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997) 159.

⁴⁸ Stefan Muckel, “Islamischer Religionsunterricht und Islamkunde an öffentlichen Schulen in Deutschland,” *Juristenzeitung* 56.2 (2001), 60.

⁴⁹ Heckel 751.

⁵⁰ Wintzer 159.

⁵¹ Lachmann 284.

⁵² Lachmann 286.

RU. The new states adopted the *Grundgesetz* and implemented state-sponsored RU as directed. Brandenburg, unlike the other states, chose to call upon the “Bremer Klausel” and implemented an obligatory class called “Life Construction/Ethics/Religion” instead of RU. Berlin has also continued with its policy of inviting religious communities to offer RU after hours instead of making RU a school subject.⁵³

The “Transient” Religious Minority

Post World War II, the German religious landscape underwent an important, though at first unnoticed, change. Until 1961, most Germans and people living in Germany were Christians. In addition to a small Jewish minority, there was also a very small Muslim minority, mostly from Egypt and Palestine.⁵⁴ However, due to labor shortages during the Economic Wonder in the 1950s and 60s, the German government signed bilateral recruitment agreements with Italy, Greece, Turkey, Portugal, and Yugoslavia. These agreements allowed guest workers to work in the German industrial sector in jobs with few qualifications. These mostly male workers were later joined by their families. As the large majority of the guest workers were Sunnis or Alevis from Turkey, Germany’s Muslim population increased significantly.⁵⁵

However, for a long time the government worked under the assumption that these families would one day return to their respective countries and so did little to integrate this “transient” minority.⁵⁶ At this time, the German public and even many of the guest workers themselves thought that they would eventually return to their countries of origin. In this context, states with large numbers of guest workers such as North Rhine-Westphalia offered mother

⁵³ Wintzer 162.

⁵⁴ North Rhine-Westphalia, Innenministerium, *Islamistische Organisationen in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, 2007, 18 Oct. 2008 <www.im.nrw.de/verfassungsschutz>.

⁵⁵ Lachmann 384.

⁵⁶ Lachmann 384.

tongue supplemental instruction for the children of guest workers. Theoretically these extra lessons existed to help children keep up their mother tongues, hence easing their reintegration into their countries of origin.⁵⁷ In addition to language learning, North Rhine-Westphalia introduced Islamic instruction (*Islamkunde*) within the framework of the mother tongue supplemental instruction in 1986; this Islamic instruction program has continued until the present day. Again, the state was providing the guest worker children the tools necessary, language and religion, to reintegrate into their countries of origin. As far as the German public was concerned, these children were *foreigners* first and foremost. Their religious beliefs were not of great importance as they were not German and as they would be leaving anyway.⁵⁸

Here to Stay: The Problem of Integration

Only after the German state and society at large realized that the *guest workers* were staying in Germany did the heated debates and discussions of Islam, integration, and the possibility of regular Islam RU become widespread. German citizenship laws, reflecting the new perspective on *guest workers*, underwent a series of evolutions during the 1990s, culminating in the Immigration Laws of 2004.⁵⁹ These laws allowed *guest worker* children to acquire German citizenship.⁶⁰ In 1999, during the same time period then, North Rhine-Westphalia began its *Islamische Unterweisung in Deutscher Sprache* which was later renamed *Islamkunde in Deutscher Sprache (Islamkunde)*.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Muckel 63.

⁵⁸ Riem Spielhaus, "Religion und Identität – Vom Deutschen Versuch, "Ausländer" zu "Muslimen" zu machen," *Internationale Politik* March (2006), 28.

⁵⁹ Spielhaus 29.

⁶⁰ Albrecht Fuess, "Islamic Religious Education in Western Europe: Models of Integration and the German Approach," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 27.2 (2007), 228.

⁶¹ "Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache (Organisation)."

Today between 3.8 and 4.3 million Muslims live in Germany out of which between 2.5 and 2.7 million are of Turkish origin. A good 45% of all Muslims living in Germany have German citizenship.⁶² Around one million Muslims live in North Rhine-Westphalia alone. About 670,000 are Turkish citizens and between 250,000 to 300,000 are German citizens with Turkish backgrounds. Islam is Germany's second largest religion after Christianity.⁶³ As these immigrants gain German citizenship, their religion tends to be a way to identity them as being different from other Germans. As Spielhaus puts it, the "foreigners" have become the "Muslims." Currently, Germany and North Rhine-Westphalia are looking for ways to integrate this ethnic and religious minority. The debate about Islam RU must be viewed in light of these circumstances as well as the long history of RU in Germany.

Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache

This study focuses on the school trial *Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache*. Although it is not the first model of Islam instruction in North Rhine-Westphalia, it is the first model to be used for the purpose of integration. The Islam instruction introduced in 1986 and still running within the mother tongue supplementary education offered to migrant children supports the old mindset that migrant children are foreigners and will eventually return to their countries of origin.

The school trial *Islamkunde* was launched in 1999 and will continue at least until the 2010/11 school year in which it will supposedly be morphed into the school trial *Islam RU*.⁶⁴ Regardless of whether this plan remains on schedule, *Islamkunde* remains an important stepping stone in the process towards *Islam RU*. In fact, both the North Rhine-Westphalia government as well as the four major Muslim associations conceived of *Islamkunde* as a stepping stone from the

⁶² Haug 11-12.

⁶³ North Rhine-Westphalia, Innenministerium, Islamistische Organisationen in Nordrhein-Westfalen.

⁶⁴ *Islam RU*: Confessional Islam Instruction.

very beginning. The school trial *Islamkunde* needs to be examined due to this stepping stone role. Does everyone think that it is a step in the right direction?

In the 2008/09 school year, 128 schools of all types and 10,122 students were taking part in the school trial. North Rhine-Westphalia has 6,566 schools and 2,826,162 students (though not all Muslim of course) in total. Therefore, it is clear that although North Rhine-Westphalia's *Islamkunde* school trial is the largest of its type in Germany,⁶⁵ it only reaches a small minority of Muslim students.

Leitkultur⁶⁶ and Grundgesetz⁶⁷ Patriotism

In addition to understanding the history of RU in Germany, it is also necessary to look at Germany's immigration and integration debates in order to fully understand *Islamkunde*'s social context.

The Problem of German Identity

In today's European countries there exists general fear of losing one's national homogeneity and becoming countries of immigration:

Die eingesessenen Bürgerinnen und Bürger der europäischen Nationalstaaten erleben diese "Völkerwanderung" [Migration] als kollektive Erschütterung ihres bisherigen Zusammenhalts. Die alten, geschönten Selbstbilder von nationalen Homogenität zerbröckeln... Die Aussicht man könnte ein "Einwanderungsland" werden oder sogar schon eines ist, führt zu angstvoller Realitätsverleugnung oder zu panischen Abwehrreaktionen.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Michael Kiefer, "Islamunterricht in den Ländern – Überblick über die Modellversuche," Auf dem Weg zum Islamischen Religionsunterricht, Ed. Michael Kiefer, Eckart Gottwald and Bülent Ucar (Berlin: Lit Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2008) 117.

⁶⁶ *Leitkultur*: leading or guiding culture

⁶⁷ *Grundgesetz*: Basic Law/Constitution

⁶⁸ Emanuel Richter, "Die Einbürgerung des Islams," Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte: Muslime in Europa 20 (2005), 3.

Due to its history, Dr. Emanuel Richter points out that “Der Traum von der nationalen Einheit ist in Deutschland besonders stark ausgeprägt.”⁶⁹ However, even when Germans expect complete assimilation from immigrants, little is explicitly demanded beyond their acceptance of the principles of democracy and human rights in the Grundgesetz and their acquisition of German due to the problem of defining “Germanness.”⁷⁰

Due in part to the German nation state’s late birth in comparison to other European countries, Germany has long struggled with its identity. Before Germany’s unification under Bismarck, culture rooted in the ethnic concept of *Volksgeist* played a central role in identity.⁷¹ In the absence of a strong definition of what it is to be German, Germans have often defined their national identity by contrasting it to what they are not. This tradition was carried to the extreme under the Nazi regime when the Aryan “German” was contrasted to the inferior “Other,” Jews, Slavs, Roma, homosexuals, etc., who lived in Germany.⁷² Although today the main category of the “Other” is National Socialism and the Holocaust,⁷³ ethnicity still plays a part in German identity. Unlike France, for example, Germany continues to see itself as a *Volk* united by cultural and blood ties. This conception can be seen in its citizenship law, which is still primarily based on *jus sanguinis*, although the law has been relaxed to allow children born to non-German to receive citizenship if they meet certain conditions.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Richter 3.

⁷⁰ Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) 211.

⁷¹ Sabine von Dirke, “The German Debate on Multiculturalism,” *German Studies Review* 17.3 (1994), 513.

⁷² Stefan Manz, “Constructing a Normative National Identity: The Leitkultur Debate in Germany 2000/2001,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 25:5-6 (2004), 483.

⁷³ Manz 481-482.

⁷⁴ Manz 483.

The Leitkultur Debate

The term *Leitkultur*⁷⁵ ironically was coined by the Syrian immigrant Bassam Tibi in 1996. He argued that multicultural policies would lead to parallel cultures and a loss of universal values. To combat such disintegration he proposed a European *Leitkultur* that would bind society together by the universal values of the Enlightenment. German politicians later substituted German for European, thereby applying it to a specific national context.⁷⁶ Throughout the 1990s, conservative voices, CDU/CSU as well as parties further to the right, advocated assimilation of immigrants and brought up the fear of losing German identity.⁷⁷ Foreigners were expected to prove themselves “worthy” of citizenship through acculturation.⁷⁸

Although, during the late 1990s several CDU/CSU representatives had used *Leitkultur* in their political discourse without attracting much attention,⁷⁹ the *Leitkultur* debate was sparked in October 2000 by the then parliamentary leader of the conservative CDU opposition party, Friedrich Merz, when he said in a parliamentary speech that immigrants should adopt the German *Leitkultur*.⁸⁰ Although Merz related it back to the concept of *Verfassungsschutz*⁸¹ and he and the CDU dropped the term within three weeks,⁸² the comment triggered a massive response from supporters and detractors alike and remained the number one topic for several weeks.⁸³ When considering the historical context of the remark, this response is not surprising. “Leit” obviously indicates a hierarchical relationship between cultures with “German” culture

⁷⁵ *Leitkultur*: Leading or guiding culture.

⁷⁶ Manz 484.

⁷⁷ Manz 483.

⁷⁸ von Dirke 523.

⁷⁹ Manz 484.

⁸⁰ Ewing 212.

⁸¹ *Verfassungsschutz*: Protection of the Constitution; Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

⁸² Ewing 213.

⁸³ Manz 482.

placed above “Other” cultures.⁸⁴ The political left and representatives of minority groups in Germany, including Jews and Muslims, spoke out strongly against the use of the term.⁸⁵ Paul Spiegel, the chairman of the Central Council for Jews in Germany, even used the *Kristallnacht* commemoration on November 9th to voice his strong disapproval.⁸⁶

Although the term *Leitkultur* was soundly critiqued by the left and moderate voices within Germany due to its echoes of Germany’s traumatic past, it remains less clear that the Germans were upset with the concept behind the term.⁸⁷ How should immigrants and foreigners be expected to adapt to the host country? Is learning German enough? What aspect of “Germaness” can Germans and integrated immigrants rally behind?

Constitution Patriotism

Due to Germany’s Nazi past, it is generally not considered appropriate for Germans to take pride in their history or national symbols. Consequently, the *Grundgesetz*⁸⁸ created in 1949 has been formative in German post-war identity. From this pride in the *Grundgesetz*, Jürgen Habermas and Dolf Sternberger developed the idea of *Verfassungspatriotismus*.⁸⁹ Theoretically this is a safe patriotism because it reflects the universal Enlightenment values and as such has gained general respectability.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Manz 483.

⁸⁵ Ewing 202.

⁸⁶ Manz 486.

⁸⁷ Ewing 212.

⁸⁸ *Grundgesetz*: Basic Law/Constitution

⁸⁹ *Verfassungsschutzpatriotismus*: Constitutional Patriotism.

Manz 488.

⁹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung: Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 642.

Dolf Sternberger, “Verfassungspatriotismus,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (23 May 1979), Seite 1.

Ironically, the ideas of *Grundgesetz* Patriotism and *Verfassungsschutz* have had more of a direct effect on the Muslim population than the controversial concept of *Leitkultur*. Since 2001, legislation affecting immigrants has been pushed through in the name of protecting the Constitution.⁹¹ Since 2005 it has become possible to deport “foreigners” – even those born and raised in Germany – on little more than suspicions of them endangering the *Grundgesetz*.⁹² Furthermore, the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, part of the Federal Ministry of the Interior), who is responsible for protecting the *Grundgesetz* from all subversive groups, lists Muslim organizations that do not advocate violence in its reports alongside of neo-Nazi groups with published violence statistics. Such reports strengthen the public’s associations between Muslims and their organizations and the endangerment of the *Grundgesetz* and its values.⁹³ Although not wishing to draw parallels to the Nazi regime and the current German government, one can see how this current fear of subversion of the *Grundgesetz* continues the tradition of a fear of the “Other,” of the “enemy” within.⁹⁴

The current study on *Islamkunde* must be viewed both in relation to the history of RU in general and Germany’s struggle to integrate its immigrants.

Research Questions and Plan

Main Questions

There are two sets of questions that guide this study:

- 1) Do NRW inhabitants believe that “integration” is the goal of *Islamkunde*? If not, what is the goal? How does *Islamkunde* promote integration?

⁹¹ Ewing 202.

⁹² Ewing, 208.

⁹³ Ewing, 209-210.

⁹⁴ Ewing, 206.

2) Do NRW inhabitants support *Islamkunde*?

Methodology

North Rhine-Westphalia was chosen for this study because of its large Muslim minority and because of its leadership role in Islam instruction within Germany. This study focuses on grade schools because grade schools are more conducive to integration than secondary schools are: 1) Every child attends grade school, whereas children are divided up into four types of secondary schools. Muslim students of immigrant families tend to be overrepresented in some of these options and underrepresented in others for various reasons which go beyond the scope of this study. 2) Parents are more actively involved in their children's education during the grade school years. As far as RU is concerned, children cannot opt out of religion class on their own accord until they are 14 years old.

I was in North Rhine-Westphalia from May 17th to July 31st, 2009. In this time, I interviewed representatives from the *Islamkunde* school trial's major actors and participants. There were three major groups: the North Rhine-Westphalia government, the religious communities, and the school communities.

I interviewed representatives from the five parties who have at least one seat in the North Rhine-Westphalia *Landtag*. I also interviewed the government official who is responsible for the school trial in North Rhine-Westphalia's School Ministry.

I interviewed representatives of three of the major four Muslim associations: *Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, *Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren (VIKZ)*, and *Diyanet*

Isleri Türk Islam Birliği (DITIB). I also interviewed a representative of the *Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland*⁹⁵ and received a statement from the *Erzbistum Köln*.⁹⁶

Finally, I studied two grade schools in Cologne that offer *Islamkunde*. Here I interviewed the principals and the teachers and distributed questionnaires to the fourth grade students and their parents. I also studied a grade school in rural North Rhine-Westphalia that does not offer *Islamkunde* to compare my findings with what one might find at the majority of schools in North Rhine-Westphalia (i.e., those that do not offer *Islamkunde*). At this school, I also interviewed the principal and teachers and distributed questionnaires to the fourth graders and their parents.

I obtained IRB approval from Penn State on June 1, 2009 (IRB #30994). In accordance to IRB protocol, I informed participants about the study and their rights. I received written consent from the parents in the name of their children, as well as oral consent from the children themselves and the other participants. I informed my interviewees that I was audio recording the interviews, for which I also received oral consent. Per IRB protocol, all participants were assured that their participation was confidential and that no personal identifiable information would be published. Therefore, no names nor professional titles appear in this study.

⁹⁵ *Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland*: the Protestant Church of the Rheinland, part of the German Protestant Church.

⁹⁶ *Erzbistum Köln*: the Archbishopric of Cologne, part of the German Catholic Church.

RESEARCH AND RESULTS

Political Parties and the Government

The North Rhine-Westphalian government launched the *Islamkunde* school trial in 1999 and since then legally carries the sole responsibility for it. The School Ministry directly oversees the school trial, and the politicians have the power to alter it. Therefore, any discussion and analysis of the *Islamkunde* school trial would be incomplete without the political parties' stances and attitudes towards *Islamkunde* and the School Ministry's assessment of it.

I e-mailed the five parties in the North Rhine-Westphalia Parliament requesting to meet with representatives who could explain their party's position on Islam instruction to me. Each party chose a representative to meet with me in July 2009. The party positions and feelings detailed below are the results of these interviews. The government official, who is responsible for *Islamkunde* at the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, also granted me an interview in July.

The North Rhine-Westphalia Political System

North Rhine-Westphalia was founded on August 23, 1946 in the post-World War II British occupation zone. On October 2, 1946, the state parliament started its first session although the members were appointed by the British. The first democratic elections took place in spring 1947 and since then various coalitions, the CDU, and the SPD have governed North Rhine-Westphalia.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ North Rhine-Westphalia, Landtag, 60 Jahre Landtag 21 Jul. 2009
<http://www.landtag.nrw.de/portal/WWW/GB_II/II.1/OeA/60JAHRE/010_60Jahre_Landtag.jsp>.

State parliament elections take place every five years.⁹⁸ Any German citizen living in North Rhine-Westphalia who is at least eighteen years old is eligible to vote. North Rhine-Westphalia has 128 voting districts. The winners of these voting districts enter the state parliament directly. The remaining 53 (or more) members come from the parties' state reserve lists and are used to give each party its proportionally correct representation based on the overall election results. Every person's vote is essentially counted twice: once for the candidate he or she voted for in his or her voting district and once for the party of that candidate. In this manner, parties who were not able to send any of their candidates directly to the state parliament may still be allotted seats. However, only parties who have won at least five percent of the general vote are permitted to enter the state parliament.⁹⁹

The state parliament elects a president who is responsible for all of the parliament's administrative tasks.¹⁰⁰ The state parliament also elects a minister president who has the power to appoint and fire the other ministers.¹⁰¹ The state government is composed of the minister president and the other ministers.¹⁰² Currently North Rhine-Westphalia has ten ministries: the Ministry of Innovation, Science, Research, and Technology, the Ministry of Finances, the Ministry of Economics, the Middle Class, and Energy, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Work, Health, and Social Services, the Ministry of School and Further Education, the Ministry of Building and Traffic, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Environment and Nature

⁹⁸ North Rhine-Westphalia, Landtag, Wahlen, 21 Jul. 2009
<http://www.landtag.nrw.de/portal/WWW/GB_II/II.1/OeA/Wahlinformationen/wahlen.jsp>.

⁹⁹ North Rhine-Westphalia, Landtag, Das Wahlsystem, 21 Jul. 2009
<http://www.landtag.nrw.de/portal/WWW/GB_II/II.1/OeA/Land_und_Landtag/wahlsystem.jsp>.

¹⁰⁰ Constitution of North Rhine-Westphalia, Section 3, Paragraph 1, Article 39.

¹⁰¹ Constitution of North Rhine-Westphalia, Section 3, Paragraph 2, Article 52.

¹⁰² Constitution of North Rhine-Westphalia, Section 3, Paragraph 2, Article 51.

Protection, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection, and the Ministry of Generations, Family, Women, and Integration.¹⁰³

Islamkunde Over the Years

The Red-Green Coalition (1995-2005)

From 1980 to 1995, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) had governed North Rhine-Westphalia by itself, but in 1995 the SPD lost its absolute majority and was forced to form a coalition with *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*.¹⁰⁴ This government issued the decree on May 28, 1999, that set up the school trial *Islamische Unterweisung in deutscher Sprache als eigenständiges Unterricht* to run parallel to the Islam instruction that had started in 1986 within the framework of mother tongue supplemental instruction. On February 23, 2005, the school trial was renamed *Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache (Islamkunde)*.¹⁰⁵

In 1999, the school trial's goal was the integration of the Muslim minority, who it now seemed, was in Germany to stay.¹⁰⁶ The politicians' enthusiasm for the school trial at that time is up for debate. One of my interviewees, who was a teacher in the trial and went on in 2005 to create lesson plans and syllabi for *Islamkunde* and to supervise the trial, maintains that the political consensus from the very beginning supported Islam instruction in North Rhine-Westphalia.¹⁰⁷ Another, who worked closely with Klaus Gebauer in developing the school trial,

¹⁰³ North Rhine-Westphalia, Die Landesregierung, Die Ministerien, 21 Jul. 2009
<http://www.nrw.de/Die_Landesregierung/Die_Ministerien/index.php>.

¹⁰⁴ North Rhine-Westphalia, Landtag, Kommentar zu den bisherigen Landtagswahlen, 21 Jul. 2009
<http://www.landtag.nrw.de/portal/WWW/GB_II/II.1/OeA/Wahlinformationen/Wahlbetrachtungen.jsp>.

¹⁰⁵ "Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache (Organisation)."

¹⁰⁶ Kiefer, Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen 95.

¹⁰⁷ Professor at the University of Osnabrück, Personal Interview, 22 Jul. 2009. All interviewees were granted confidentiality through the IRB protocol I used to conduct my research. Therefore, no names or identifying characteristics of interviewees will be released.

refutes this view and argues that in 1999 many politicians were against the school trial.¹⁰⁸

Regardless, everyone agrees that political interest for *Islamkunde* skyrocketed after the September 11th US terror attacks as a way to prevent terrorism in NRW and Germany as a whole.¹⁰⁹

Due to the wide political support, *Islamkunde* grew quickly. By February 2005, 110 schools, 75 teachers, and 7000-8000 students were participating in the trial.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the May 2005 election ushered in a new government with a new set of priorities.

The Black-Yellow Coalition (2005-?)

In the 2005 election, the *Christlich Demokratische Union* (CDU) won a clear victory and reentered the government, which it had been excluded from since 1966, in a coalition with the *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP).¹¹¹ The CDU leader in North Rhine-Westphalia, Dr. Jürgen Rüttgers, was elected Minister President. In the previous election in 2000, he had campaigned unsuccessfully with slogans such as “*Kinder statt Inder*”¹¹² and “*Mehr Ausbildung statt mehr*

¹⁰⁸ Die Linke, Personal Interview, 3 Jul. 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Bülent Ucar, Interview, Qantara.de – Dialog mit der islamischen Welt, 2009, 22 Jul. 2009 <http://de.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php?wc_c=469&wc_id=1025&printmode=1>.

¹¹⁰ “Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache (Organisation).”

¹¹¹ North Rhine-Westphalia, Landtag, [Kommentar zu den bisherigen Landtagswahlen](#).

¹¹² *Kinder statt Inder*: Children instead of Indians.

Patrick Bartlett, “Germans debate technology v immigration,” [BBC](#), 6 Apr. 2000, 15 Oct. 2011 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/704539.stm>>.

Einwanderung.”¹¹³ In contrast to these former slogans, deemed hostile towards foreigners in some circles,¹¹⁴ his government has emphasized integration.

Dr. Jürgen Rüttgers explained his choice to create the first Ministry for Integration in Germany in his inaugural speech, “*Der Zusammenhalt der Generationen und das Gelingen der Integration sind für die Zukunft unserer Gesellschaft entscheidend.*” In the speech, he especially stressed the importance of integrating the Muslim minority and his desire to launch a “*regulären islamischen Religionsunterrichts in deutscher Sprache, unter deutscher Schulaufsicht und mit in Deutschland ausgebildeten Lehrkräften.*”¹¹⁵ It is interesting to note that in his next sentence he wanted to legally ban Muslim teachers from wearing headscarves in public schools, and in the following sentence he transitioned to “public security.” Although he did not link the topics, this juxtaposition seems to confirm the idea that German politicians cannot talk about German Muslims and integration without mentioning “security concerns” in the same breath.

The government is no doubt supporting Islam instruction in North Rhine-Westphalia’s public schools because of integration and a desire to curb Islamic extremist tendencies like the other parties. In addition, however, the CDU’s interest is also a response to growing pressure from the Churches. The Churches are keen on keeping their religious community rights and privileges and want to ensure that religious instruction remains in public schools. As a result, they have been putting pressure on the political parties – and the CDU as a Christian party has

¹¹³ *Mehr Ausbildung statt mehr Einwanderung*: More education instead of more immigration. Tina Hildebrandt, “Auf dem Grat,” Der Spiegel, 19 Mar. 2001, 16 Oct. 2011 <<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-18758690.html>>.

Jürgen Rüttgers, Interview, Netzeitung.de, 27 Apr. 2001, 12 Jul. 2009 <<http://www.netzeitung.de/sport/tennis/141207.html>>.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Stein, “Wahlkämpfer Rüttgers verteidigt Äußerung "Kinder statt Inder," Berliner Zeitung, 10 Mar. 2000, 12 Jul. 2009 <<https://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2000/0310/none/0084/index.html>>.

¹¹⁵ „a normal Islam RU class in German, monitored by German Schools, and with instructors who were educated in Germany.“

Jürgen Rüttgers, “Nordrhein-Westfalen kommt wieder: Mehr Selbstbestimmung wagen,” Regierungserklärung vor dem Landtag Nordrhein-Westfalen, 13 Jul. 2005.

been especially susceptible – to introduce Islam RU on the level of Catholic and *Evangelisch* instruction in an effort to bulwark their positions in the face of demographic change.¹¹⁶

The goal of introducing Islam RU in North Rhine-Westphalia took concrete form in August 2006 when Dr. Rüttgers' cabinet decided to launch a new school trial (Islam RU) in Duisburg and Cologne.¹¹⁷ The government's goal was to work with the local mosques and to form a *Schura*¹¹⁸ in addition to a council of Islam studies graduates to act as the required "partner" in lieu of a legally recognized "religious community." This school trial met with a lot of skepticism even within the government coalition party ranks.¹¹⁹ The four main Muslim organizations were also not pleased because they felt the school trial was a trick to sidestep them in the religious instruction process. The four Muslim organizations created a *Koordinierungsrat der Muslime* in response, but the government refused to recognize this new organization as a "religious community." However, without the Muslim organizations' support, which financially support the mosque communities, the school trial was doomed to failure.¹²⁰

On June 1, 2009, the Minister of Integration Armin Laschet announced a new cabinet decision to launch a new Islam RU school trial to start in the 2010/11 school year. This time the school trial is not limited to Duisburg and Cologne. The idea is that during this trial Muslims and Muslim organizations in North Rhine-Westphalia will be able to develop and form a body that the state recognizes as a "religious community."

¹¹⁶ Die Linke, Personal Interview, 3 Jul. 2009.

SPD, Personal Interview, 6 Jul. 2009.

FDP, Personal Interview, 1 Jul. 2009.

¹¹⁷ Bülent Ucar, "Eine Brücke von der Islamkunde zum Islamischen Religionsunterricht in Nordrhein-Westfalen," *Auf dem Weg zum Islamischen Religionsunterricht*, Eds. Michael Kiefer, Eckhart Gottwald, Bülent Ucar (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008) 77.

¹¹⁸ *Schura*: communal council meeting.

¹¹⁹ YV, "Modell startet in Köln und Duisburg. Islamischer Religionsunterricht an nordrhein-westfälischen Schulen," *Landtag intern* 10 (2006) 17.

¹²⁰ Bülent Ucar, "Eine Brücke von der Islamkunde zum Islamischen Religionsunterricht in Nordrhein-Westfalen" 78.

Although all of the parties say that they support the idea of Islam RU, many individuals are skeptical of what this new school trial will mean. A professor from the University of Osnabrück flatly calls it *Etikettenschwindel*.¹²¹ The government official, who is in charge of *Islamkunde* in the School Ministry, agrees that there will be very little difference between *Islamkunde* and this new school trial.¹²²

Even the cabinet's decision of July 1st recognized that the *Islamkunde* structure is a good basis to develop into Islam RU. Why then has the Black-Yellow Coalition not expanded *Islamkunde* more? Since 2005 only eighteen additional schools have been added to the school trial and in 2006 expansion was completely stopped¹²³ even against the opposition parties wishes.¹²⁴ According to the SPD member of the North Rhine-Westphalia parliament I interviewed, the CDU did not want to expand the school trial because it did not want to give the SPD any credit. Regardless of the political motivations, the school trial *Islamkunde* only reached about 3% of all Muslim students in North Rhine-Westphalia in the 2008/09 school year.¹²⁵

Party Positions Regarding *Islamkunde*

Since the May 2005 election, the CDU and FDP have been in power. As of April 2010, the party representation in the North Rhine-Westphalia parliament was as follows: The CDU had 89 members, the SPD 74, the FDP 12, the Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 11, and Die Linke 1.

¹²¹ *Etikettenschwindel*: playing with names.
Professor at the University of Osnabrück, Personal Interview, 22 Jul. 2009.

¹²² Official in North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.

¹²³ Britta Altenkamp, Pressestelle SPD-Landtagsfraktion, 1 Jul. 2009.

¹²⁴ YV 17.

¹²⁵ Professor at the University of Osnabrück, Personal Interview, 22 Jul. 2009.

Member of parliament Rüdiger Sagel switched party affiliation from Bündnis 90/Die Grünen to Die Linke in October 2007.¹²⁶

On February 1, 2006, the four parties in parliament decided to found a parliamentary working group for the Islam dialogue. The main goal of this multi-party group is to reach a consensus on the criteria of a state-recognized Muslim “religious community.”¹²⁷ In the meantime, the multi-party group interacts with the *Koordinierungsrat der Muslime* to address all topics relating to German Muslims including Islam instruction in schools. Although wide consensus between the parties exists on this subject, each party naturally has its own particular outlook.

CDU

According to the staffer I interviewed, the CDU has pushed for Islam RU on equal footing with Christian RU from the very beginning. According to the CDU, confessional religious instruction is necessary for a child’s personal development. The staffer emphasized that only an enlightened Islam, compatible with the German constitution and German values, will be taught in schools. He explained that confessional Islam instruction will support Muslim integration in many ways. First, the children will internalize their personal values which will boost their self-confidence and allow them to find their way. Second, they will not feel like they are being shut out of German society because their religion will receive recognition in school. Finally, they will see that their values are in agreement with German values.

¹²⁶ North Rhine-Westphalia, Landtag, Die Fraktionen, 17 Feb. 2010 <http://www.landtag.nrw.de/portal/WWW/GB_II/II.1/OeA/Parlament/Fraktionen.jsp>.

¹²⁷ North Rhine-Westphalia, Landtag, Aufgaben: Parlamentarische Arbeitsgruppe Islam-Dialog (A04/1), 25 Jul. 2009 <http://www.landtag.nrw.de/portal/WWW/GB_I/I.1/Ausschuesse/A04_1/aufgaben.jsp>.

According to the CDU staffer, the main problem remains the lack of recognition of the Muslim “religious community” without which no constitutionally-sanctioned Islam RU can take place. From the CDU’s perspective the Muslim organizations are at fault for the lack of progress in this area.¹²⁸ The staffer said that the Muslim organizations do not work well with the government and do not respect German values such as academic freedom as the fight about Professor Kalisch shows.¹²⁹

Due to the legal problem of recognition, the CDU supported the school trial *Islamkunde* as a step in the right direction. The staffer said however that *Islamkunde*, since it is not confessional religious instruction, is not enough, and therefore, it is time to move on to real Islam RU in North-Rhine Westphalia’s public schools. The CDU hopes that the Muslim organizations will support the government in this endeavor which will greatly benefit Muslim school children.¹³⁰

SPD

The SPD member of Parliament I interviewed agrees that all democratic parties, including her party, the SPD, would like to see Islam RU. However, because the necessary legal framework was and is still not in place, the SPD launched *Islamkunde* in 1999. According to the SPD, Islam in school is necessary because it integrates the Muslim community. *Islamkunde*

¹²⁸ CDU, Personal Interview, 1 Jul. 2009.

¹²⁹ Johannes Nitschmann, “Koalitions-Streit um Islam-Professor,” [WRD.de](http://www.wdr.de/themen/kultur/religion/islam/konflikte/kalisch/081231.jhtml) 31 Dec. 2008, 25 Jul. 2009 <<http://www.wdr.de/themen/kultur/religion/islam/konflikte/kalisch/081231.jhtml>>. Professor Kalisch at the University of Münster is responsible for educating future *Islamkunde* teachers (and theoretically, future Islam RU teachers). However, in September 2007 he openly doubted the existence of the Prophet Mohammed. This comment, repeated multiple times, inflamed the Muslim organizations, who called for Professor Kalisch’s removal from the Islam teacher education program. If the Muslim organizations were recognized as a “religious community,” they would have the right to make such a request. The CDU state parliament leader Helmut Stahl made it clear that since the Muslim organizations are not recognized, they do not have this right, and the government must protect academic freedom. As he put it, “Einen Kotau vor den islamischen Verbänden darf es nicht geben.“

¹³⁰ CDU, Personal Interview, 1 Jul. 2009.

improves communication with Muslim parents because they no longer feel like outsiders due to their religion. Furthermore she said that it is necessary to have Islam in schools where the state can influence and control the teachings. If Islam is offered as a school subject, most children will no longer go to the mosque, where who knows what is being taught. Children feel more integrated when their religion is recognized and accepted as equal to Christianity. Islam instruction in school also introduces Muslim children to the hierarchy of German values according to my interviewee.

According to my interviewee, the CDU has been pressured by the churches to introduce Islam RU. While the SPD supports Islam RU, the party is skeptical of this new school trial. From the SPD's perspective, the announcement seems to be more political theater than substance. No one knows how this new school trial is supposed to work. The SPD has several questions: What is even the difference between *Islamkunde* as practiced in North-Rhine Westphalia and Islam RU? How is the content going to change? The SPD points out that the German state of Niedersachsen has not been able to move beyond its Islam instruction school trial. North-Rhine Westphalia will hopefully be able to move on, but it is doubtful due to the poor planning. The main problem the SPD sees is that in the CDU's push for Islam RU, the party failed to expand the existing *Islamkunde* school trial. Because of this, there are no where near enough teachers of Islam instruction of any sort. According to my interviewee, only two students of Islam education have graduated from the University of Münster, the university in charge of producing Islam teachers. Consequently, the SPD supports the move from *Islamkunde* to Islam RU but remains skeptical about the outcome.¹³¹

¹³¹ SPD, Personal Interview, 6 Jul. 2009.

FDP

According to the FDP staffer I interviewed, the FDP, like all parties – although it is rumored that there is some internal disagreements in the SPD –, supports *Islamkunde* and the announced Islam RU school trial. The FDP believes that all parties agree that Islam should be taught in public schools under German school supervision, in the German language, and with teachers educated in Germany. Islam instruction is a corner stone of integration according to the FDP. It is important that the over 300,000 Muslim students in North Rhine-Westphalia feel accepted and are treated equally.

The FDP sees the Muslim organizations as the main obstacle to the political will to introduce Islam instruction in German public schools. According to the FDP, the Muslim organizations do not like how the Islam instruction would be structured. They want Islam to be taught in Turkish by Imams instead of in German, with teachers educated in Germany, and under German school supervision. Regardless, the FDP supports *Islamkunde* and the announced Islam RU school trial and hopes that the Muslim organizations will not cause too much trouble.¹³²

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen

According to my Bündnis 90/Die Grünen interviewee, who sits on his party's workgroup that deals with Muslim affairs, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen is critical towards religion but does not reject it. More importantly, the party sees itself as the protector of minority rights, and Muslims in Germany are an important minority. For this reason, the North Rhine-Westphalia Bündnis 90/Die Grünen has created a Muslim workgroup. So far it is the only one of its type in all of Germany according to my interviewee.

¹³² FDP, Personal Interview, 1 Jul. 2009.

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen has supported *Islamkunde* from the very beginning because it is better than nothing, although Islam RU remains the ultimate goal. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen is pushing for Islam instruction in the name of equal rights and fair treatment. The party also is interested in Muslims integrating into German society. If integration does not occur, the far-right parties will be the only ones to gain. Therefore, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen believes young Muslim students need to learn about their faith in school, so that they can go around with it openly and do not need to feel ashamed of their religion. According to the party, this will lead to more trust which is absolutely necessary in the current climate.

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen sees that there is a lot of hidden distrust and fear in society and the political parties with regards to Muslims and the Muslim organizations. According to the party, the government's current two-pronged approach undermines trust-building and positive development. On the one hand, the government carries out a never-ending dialogue with the existing Muslim organizations, which seems to be going nowhere. At the same time, the government is trying to create a so-called "liberal Muslim" partner. The government always finds something to criticize about the Muslim organizations but it never gives the organizations a real chance. My interviewee gave the example of the state criticizing the Muslim organizations when they stepped out/boycotted the University of Münster's Islam teacher program, but he felt they were never sufficiently consulted about it in the first place. According to Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, in the end, it comes down to the fact that the German state wants to control and define Islam too much, which it constitutionally as a religious-neutral state should not be able to do. Germany tries to control Islam because it is afraid of it. Anything about Islam is always put in the Ministry of Interior's domain and is tied to Germany security. The party feels that these government actions do not breed an atmosphere of trust and understanding.

Nevertheless, my interviewee said that Bündnis 90/Die Grünen is doing its part to try to improve the situation. According to him, the party shares many ideas with the multi-party parliamentary working group for the Islam dialogue. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen is happy that North Rhine-Westphalia has an Integration Ministry and thinks that the Minister of Integration Laschet has good ideas, but the party is critical of how these ideas are carried out. Minister Laschet announced the new Islam RU school trial early to the press, but Bündnis 90/Die Grünen believes that the Muslim organizations will most likely cooperate because their ultimate goal is to receive government recognition. The announcement received a lot of good press, but the real question for Bündnis 90/Die Grünen is how the school trial will be carried out. It is possible that it is just symbolic politics. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen on the contrary, according to my interviewee, wants to truly and honestly tie in the Muslim organizations in the process and see a tangible development in Islam instruction in North Rhine-Westphalia.¹³³

Die Linke

Die Linke is against confessional religious instruction of any kind in German public schools and believes that religion is a private matter according to Die Linke representative. The party would prefer to have a general religion class that students of all faiths would attend together and in which they would learn the history and major beliefs of the major world religions. However, Die Linke believes that as long as there is RU in school, Islam should be treated equally to the other religions. There is nothing wrong with the contents of *Islamkunde* and Die Linke supports Islam RU in schools for the sake of equality. Furthermore, Die Linke thinks that it is better for children to learn about Islam in school than to go to the mosques, which the state cannot supervise and control.

¹³³ Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Personal Interview, 14 Jul. 2009.

Die Linke was somewhat shocked by Laschet's announcement of the new Islam RU school trial. The party would have expected such an announcement to come from the School Ministry and not the Integration Ministry. Furthermore, according to Die Linke, although the CDU was pressured into such an action by the Churches, the CDU is still not pro-Islam and is looking for excuses, such as the Muslim organizations, to fail in its endeavor. Die Linke does see the problem of the Muslim organizations as being very real. Die Linke feels that they are very conservative and do not even necessarily represent the majority of Muslims in Germany. According to Die Linke, it would be best to look elsewhere for a Muslim authority who could work with the government to set up Islam RU in school.

The School Ministry and *Islamkunde*

Although the government official responsible for the *Islamkunde* school trial was very excited about the previous week's cabinet decision to launch an Islam RU school trial, which would theoretically slowly replace *Islamkunde* starting in the 2010/11 school year, she admitted that it would not look much different than the current *Islamkunde* school trial. The main difference would be that the government would try to work more with Muslim religious organizations. In regards to the current relevance and future significance of the *Islamkunde* school trial, the government official elucidated its introduction, goals, assessments, and challenges.¹³⁴

Introduction of Islamkunde in North Rhine-Westphalia

According to the School Ministry, Muslim children and their families wanted Islam instruction in school. In addition to the Muslims, the Christian Churches supported the

¹³⁴ Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.

introduction of Islam RU as soon as possible for fear of losing their own RU, although such worries were completely unfounded according to the government official. Nevertheless, it was evident that the government of North Rhine-Westphalia was not getting anywhere with the Muslim organizations and therefore could not, at least at that time, introduce Islam RU. Therefore, the government introduced *Islamkunde* without consulting the Muslim organizations.

The State Institute for School and Further Education in Soest provided oversight for the school trial in the name of the School Ministry. The institute created the syllabi and trained the instructors. Instructors were recruited from two sources: Muslim teachers from the mother tongue instruction program and Muslim Islam studies scholars. The former, if they were determined to speak German sufficiently well, took courses on Islam. The latter were schooled in pedagogy and teaching methods. Schools that wished to introduce *Islamkunde* had to apply to the School Ministry. These requests were reviewed on an individual basis until 2006, when the expansion the *Islamkunde* school trial was halted due to the government's desire to replace it with real Islam RU.¹³⁵

The Goals of Islamkunde

The goals of *Islamkunde* or even of an eventual Islam RU are often misunderstood by Muslim organizations and German politicians alike, according to the School Ministry. The goal of RU is not to school children in the rituals of their faith:

Das ist nicht Aufgabe von Religionsunterricht, die Kinder in Ritualen der Religion zu schulen. Das ist es nicht. Sondern, es gibt viele Muslime, die fasten, es gibt aber auch Muslime, die nicht fasten, und so muss man den Kindern als Lehrkraft das auch

¹³⁵ Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.

freistellen. Also man darf sie nicht darauf verpflichten. Das ist nicht der Sinn unseres Religionsunterrichts.¹³⁶

The School Ministry admits that this runs counter to some Muslim parents' expectations, who expect the commandments to be explained and the children obligated to follow them.

Per the government official, the same confusion can be found in "German society" and even with some politicians. They believe that *Islamkunde*'s goal is to remove children from the Koran schools. However, it is not the school's responsibility to teach children the rituals and practices of their religion. 1st Communion, Confirmation, and Bar mitzvah lessons are all hosted by the respective religious organization outside of school. Likewise, Muslim children will continue to learn certain religious practices in the mosques.

The real government's goal of *Islamkunde* is two-fold, according to the School Ministry. First, *Islamkunde* is supposed to help children become more informed and thoughtful about their religion thereby reducing their risk of falling prey to radicals:

Wir möchten, dass mit ein kritischreflektierten Islamkundeunterricht möglichen Einfluss von sehr sehr konservativen vielleicht auch islamistischen Gruppen nicht bei den Kindern Fuß fasst sondern das es zur Reflexion angeht.¹³⁷

Second, the School Ministry is convinced that *Islamkunde* serves to integrate Muslim students. According to the government, many Muslim religious leaders in Germany come from abroad and do not understand German culture and the problems that the Muslim youth face. *Islamkunde* on the other hand always focuses on the children's reality of living in the Diaspora: "Islamkunde bietet ein Stück Integration, weil es immer von der Situation des Schülers in dieser Diaspora

¹³⁶ Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009. "The purpose of RU is not to school children in the rituals of the religion. It is not that. Instead, there are many Muslims who fast, but also Muslims, who do not fast, and so one must as an instructor leave it up to the children. So, one cannot require it of them. That is not the point of our RU."

¹³⁷ Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009. "We would like that with a critically reflective *Islamkunde* possible influences of very, very conservative and maybe even Islamist groups will not take root with the children, but that instead it leads to reflection."

ausgeht.”¹³⁸ *Islamkunde* also is supposed to provide an opportunity to transmit the values that are necessary for integration and communal life.

Assessments of the Islamkunde School Trial

When questioned about any type of assessment of the school trial, the government official referred to Michael Kiefer’s 2005 dissertation which included the results of a 2002 survey, performed in conjunction and with the support of the School Ministry, targeting parents of students enrolled in *Islamkunde*. She explained that this study indicated that most parents were satisfied with *Islamkunde*.¹³⁹

In Michael Kiefer’s study, 288 questionnaires were distributed to *Islamkunde* students at five schools to take home to their parents. 153 were filled out and returned.¹⁴⁰ Only 49% of respondents said that they had been informed about the goals or content of the course. Although the majority of respondents (61.4%) agreed that German should be the language of instruction, 53% believed that the instructors should have received their university education in an Islamic country. Most parents (90.2%) were satisfied that all Muslims, whether Shia, Sunni, or Turkish Alevi, were taught together. 42.5% of respondents believed that the state did not need to work and consult with Muslim religious organizations in regards to *Islamkunde*.¹⁴¹ Due to the low response rate, it would be difficult to conclude based on this study that most parents of *Islamkunde* students are satisfied with the course. Furthermore, with more than half of the respondents not having received any information on the course, it would not appear that the government truly values the parents’ informed opinions.

¹³⁸ Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.

¹³⁹ Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.

¹⁴⁰ Michael Kiefer, *Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, 196.

¹⁴¹ Michael Kiefer, *Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, 201-202.

Other than Michael Kiefer's 2005 dissertation, the only other type of assessment she could think of were local districts noticing that children who take part in *Islamkunde* speak better German because they have an additional two hours of class with German as the language of instruction.¹⁴² The idea that *Islamkunde* should improve students' German is also evident in some teaching materials such as the textbook Die Schöne Quelle: Islamunterricht in der Grundschule, Klasse 3: helfen und stärken. Every chapter in this book contains an activity in which the class discusses certain words and presumably their meanings. The words include terms such as lazy, earthquake, allowance, a little, profession, and perfume among others.¹⁴³

Challenges and Attempts to Address Them

The School Ministry faces many challenges with respect to *Islamkunde* and has and continues to respond to them in a variety of ways. The largest challenges are the shortage of qualified teachers, the general populace's lack of enthusiasm for and even hostility towards *Islamkunde*, and the difficulties in working with the Muslim religious organizations.

The government official would like to advertise the school trial more, especially the upcoming Islam RU school trial. Advertisement is important because schools have to request to take part. Nevertheless, she admits that the main reason that the School Ministry does not want to advertise too much is that in addition to budget constraints, there just are not enough qualified teachers:

Wir müssen natürlich vorsichtig sein, denn das kann auch ein mehr an Lehrerstellen erfordern und da muss ich immer mit dem Haushalt verhandeln ob wir mehr Lehrer dafür kriegen, denn normalerweise ist der Religionsunterricht in den Zuweisung der Lehrerstellen enthalten. Da kommt pro Kopf jedes Kindes zwei Stunden

¹⁴² Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.

¹⁴³ Havva Yakar et al., Die Schöne Quelle: Islamunterricht in der Grundschule, Klasse 3: helfen und stärken (Köln: Önel Verlag, 2008).

Religionsunterricht, aber wenn ich eine Schule habe, die hat pro Kopf Schüler zwei Stunden Religionsunterricht, dann muss ich aufteilen evangelisch, katholisch, islamisch, nicht getaufte Kinder und vom Religionsunterricht abgetakt, da habe ich schon vier Lerngruppen, die kriege ich mit einer Lehrerresource von zwei Stunden pro Kind garnicht hin. Das ist also fair. Also brauche ich da doch eigentlich ein bisschen mehr an Stellen. Das ist wohl klar. Ich würde mich freuen wenn ich Werbung dafür machen könnte. Ich muss aber auch realistisch sehen, dass wir relativ wenig muslimische Lehrkräfte haben, die dafür zum Einsatz kommen können. Wir haben 310.000 muslimische Schüler in NRW und ich würde in den nächsten zehn Jahren nicht so viele Lehrer ausbilden um alle zu versorgen.¹⁴⁴

However, the government official has developed a new idea to counter this dearth of teachers. Copying the set-up in the state of Baden-Württemberg, she would like to take Muslims that are already teachers in North Rhine-Westphalia and send them to some continuing education to qualify them as *Islamkunde* teachers. This *Zertifikatskurs* program in which teachers teach four days a week and spend one day a week at continuing education courses for a year to qualify to teach a new subject has already been long in effect in North Rhine-Westphalia. She points out that another benefit is that this would circumvent the current *Islamkunde* instructor training program at the University of Münster. Many Muslims do not wish to attend this program because Professor Kalisch, who leads it, has denied the historical existence of the Prophet Mohammed. The government official has contacted the Network of Teachers with Immigration Backgrounds and 100 Muslim teachers in North Rhine-Westphalia have already indicated their interest in participating in such a *Zertifikatskurs* for *Islamkunde*.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009. “Of course, we have to be very careful because it can lead to more teachers being required, and we have to negotiate with the budget office if we can get more teachers because normally RU is included in the allotment of teacher positions. Per head every student receives two hours of RU, but if I have a school, which has per student two hours of RU, and then I have to divide up the children into *evangelisch*, catholic, Islamic, un-baptized children, and those that have been deregistered from RU, then I already have four learning groups, which I cannot cover with the two-hours-per-child teacher allotment. This is fair assessment of the situation. So, I really need a little more in terms of teacher positions. That is obvious. I would be happy if I could advertise for it. However, realistically I must see, that we have relatively few Muslim teachers whom we could use. We have 310,000 Muslim students in North Rhine-Westphalia, and I would not train so many teachers in the next 10 years to serve them all.”

¹⁴⁵ Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.

A current Muslim teacher in North Rhine-Westphalia pointed out though that not only are there not many qualified teachers to teach *Islamkunde*, there are not many Muslim teachers period. There are many reasons responsible for this under representation. In addition to the fact that a disproportionate number of Muslims in Germany do not attend college, those that do tend to pursue other careers. The School Ministry is not necessarily responsible for the low Muslim teacher numbers, but it does little to actively encourage more Muslims into the teaching profession. Not only do all teachers sign contracts to uphold North Rhine-Westphalia's Christian western tradition, many Muslim teachers have difficult relationships with the administration and their colleagues. The current Muslim teacher interviewed estimated that 7 in 10 Muslim student-teachers face big problems with the administration and their colleagues. The Network of Teachers with Immigration Backgrounds was founded presumably to address such issues. However, the Network tends to highlight success stories rather than addressing everyday difficulties.¹⁴⁶

In addition to teacher shortages, the School Ministry has to pursue *Islamkunde* in the face of the North Rhine-Westphalia population that is not particularly fond of the idea:

...[Islamkunde] ist wahrlich kein Thema mit dem man den Durchschnittswähler in NRW begeistern kann. Es gibt sehr viele Vorurteile und auch eine gehörige Portion Rassismus in unserem Land und es gibt viele, die sagen, "Warum sollen die auch noch Religionsunterricht erhalten."¹⁴⁷

The government official points out that perhaps many voters do not even know that RU is in the *Grundgesetz* and therefore is a constitutionally-protected basic right in Germany. The School Ministry cannot even convince all of the teachers that Islam RU is a good idea. Even at schools

¹⁴⁶ Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Personal Interview, 14 Jul. 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009. "...[Islamkunde] is truly not a topic with which one can excite the average voter in North Rhine-Westphalia. There are many stereotypes and also a decent amount of racism in our state and there are many, who say, 'Why should they get RU on top of everything else.'"

with high percentages of Muslim students, there is often a lot of resistance due to the difficulties in interacting with Muslim parents. According to the government official many Turkish women do not speak German despite having to pass a German test before immigrating, do not have a good understanding of the German school system, and do not transmit German values to their children. This situation prevents good teacher-parent cooperation.

In contrast to the general population, the political parties have never fought about the necessity of *Islamkunde* and Islam RU. The government official finds this laudable and a good counterbalance to the voters:

Das finde ich auch in Ordnung, dass man eben gerade weil es so viele Vorurteile und so offenen oder verdeckten Rassismus in der Gesellschaft gibt, dass alle politischen Parteien im Landtag da zusammen halten.¹⁴⁸

Of course, if the majority of voters are against *Islamkunde*, then why are the political parties so involved? Die Grünen representative, whom I interviewed, denied that the majority of the North Rhine-Westphalia population opposed *Islamkunde* and Islam RU. He admitted that perhaps the majority are wary and regard it with suspicion but that they are not truly against it. Furthermore, parties are trying to address issues of interest to Muslims since more Muslims are becoming voters.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, the representative of Die Linke pointed out that Germany has a long tradition, especially where school reforms are concerned, of following the top-down approach regardless of parental dissent.¹⁵⁰

Finally, the School Ministry has many problems in its interactions with the Muslim religious organizations. According to the government official the Muslim religious organizations disapprove of many of the *Islamkunde* practices including the fact that women teachers do not

¹⁴⁸ Official in the North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.
“I find this good, that especially because there are so many stereotypes and that there is open or hidden racism in society, that all political parties in the State parliament hold together on this subject.”

¹⁴⁹ Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Personal Interview, 14 Jul. 2009.

¹⁵⁰ Die Linke, Personal Interview, 3 Jul. 2009.

wear headscarves. However, the biggest problem is that the Muslim religious organizations turn everything into religious politics because they want to be recognized as equals to the Christian Churches. The government, however, refuses to recognize them as such. The government also does not recognize the Koordinierungsrat der Muslime, in which all the major Muslim religious organizations participate, as legitimate. Therefore, the School Ministry continues to negotiate with each organization individually.

Discussion

All five parties with representatives in the North-Rhine Westphalian parliament profess to desire the implementation of Islam RU, and all claim that they see *Islamkunde* as a good step in that direction. They support Islam instruction in schools out of a sense of fairness and equality to other religions and out of the desire to integrate the Muslim population. All of the parties agree that integration will improve when the Muslims feel that their religion is included in school and society on an equal footing to Christianity. The CDU and SPD highlight the importance of showing Muslim children that Islam's values and German values are in agreement. The SPD and Die Linke also emphasize one of the benefits of Islam instruction is that most children will no longer go to mosques, which the state cannot supervise and control.

All five parties wish that more progress was being made towards the introduction of Islam RU. The CDU and Die Linke, parties on different sides of the political spectrum, believe that the Muslim organizations are at least partly to blame. However, Die Linke and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen also believe that the government is also at fault. One must remember that neither of these parties is presently part of the government. Die Linke thinks that the government is looking for excuses to fail. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen thinks that the government is trying to

control and define Islam too much and does not create a trusting relationship with the Muslim organizations.

The School Ministry is responsible for implementing *Islamkunde* and theoretically will eventually be responsible for implementing Islam RU. The School Ministry believes that all of the political parties are in complete support of *Islamkunde* and an eventual Islam RU. The School Ministry sees two major goals for *Islamkunde*: First, by informing Muslim children about their faith, *Islamkunde* will prevent them from falling prey to those who wish to radicalize them. Secondly, by focusing on the children's life in the Diaspora and by transmitting values important for integration and communal life, *Islamkunde* will integrate the Muslim children. In contradiction to the SPD's and Die Linke's statements though, the School Ministry does not wish *Islamkunde* to replace Islam instruction in mosques. According to the School Ministry, the largest challenges that the *Islamkunde* school trial faces are the shortage of qualified teachers, the general populace's lack of enthusiasm for and even hostility towards *Islamkunde*, and the difficulties in working with the Muslim religious organizations.

Overall, the government and political parties seem to be in alignment on the issue of Islam instruction. Obviously, some of the parties not in government believe that *Islamkunde* is supposed to replace Koran schools whereas the government explicitly states that this is not a goal. The government and Die Linke believe that the Muslim organizations are to blame for a lack of progress in the Islam instruction issue. Parties in the opposition tend to believe that the government itself is at least partly to blame.

Religious Organizations

As part of this study, I interviewed the German Muslim organizations and Christian churches. These religious organizations are important not so much because they theoretically represent the Muslims and Christians in Germany – to what extent this is true is often debated, but rather because of their political role regarding religion in the public school system. In order to introduce denominational religious education in accordance with Article VII, Paragraph 3 of the German *Grundgesetz* the German state must work with and receive the agreement of the concerned religious community: “Unbeschadet des staatlichen Aufsichtsrechtes wird der Religionsunterricht in Übereinstimmung mit den Grundsätzen der Religionsgemeinschaften erteilt.”¹⁵¹

In this respect, the religious community becomes a partner to the state. Germany as of yet does not recognize any of the non-Alevi Muslim organizations as true “religious communities” as specified in the *Grundgesetz*. Therefore, Germany has not yet been able to introduce Islam RU. North Rhine-Westphalia has argued that the *Islamkunde* school trial, being a fact-based class instead of a faith-based one, does not legally require the participation and agreement of any Muslim community. Nevertheless, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia realizes that 1) the legality of their position is open to attack and 2) if they wish to take the *Islamkunde* trial to the next step, Islam RU, they will need the participation and agreement of a Muslim religious community. Therefore, the North Rhine-Westphalian government stays in contact with and theoretically attempts to work with four German Muslim organizations, DITIB, VIKZ, ZMD, and the Islamrat. Theoretically, eventually one or a combination of them will

¹⁵¹ Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland.
“Without prejudice to the state's right of supervision, religious instruction is given in accordance with the tenets of the religious communities.”

become the legally recognized “Muslim community” in Germany, which will open the door to Islam RU in accordance with the German *Grundgesetz*. Consequently, their perspectives on *Islamkunde*, the North Rhine-Westphalian government, and Islam RU are important in understanding Islam education in Germany.

The two largest, oldest, and most influential religious communities in Germany are the *Evangelische* and Catholic Churches. Due to this special status, the German state often consults with them on a variety of matters including *Islamkunde* and Islam RU. Because they have the ear of the government, their views on the matter are also worthy of consideration.

Muslim Organizations’ Positions Regarding *Islamkunde*

DITIB

The Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institute for Religion (Diyanet Isleri Türk Islam Birliği, shortened to DITIB) is the largest Muslim organization in Germany.¹⁵² DITIB was founded in 1984, is headquartered in Cologne, and represents about 870 congregations. According to DITIB, over 70% of Muslims living in Germany feel represented by DITIB.¹⁵³ This percentage is relatively high in comparison with other estimates. In a recent study published by the Deutsche Islam Konferenz in 2009, 15.8% of Muslims interviewed from a sample of 6000 felt that they were represented by DITIB. However, this study found that DITIB represented by far more Muslims in Germany than any other Muslim organization.¹⁵⁴

DITIB defines its goal and *raison d’être* to give Muslims a place to exercise their beliefs and to contribute to integration in addition to being deeply engaged in the social domain: “Unser

¹⁵² Michael Kiefer, “Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen,” 44.

¹⁵³ “Wir über uns,” DITIB 19 Jan. 2010 <www.ditib.de>.

¹⁵⁴ Haug 17.

Vereinsziel ist es, Musliminnen und Muslime einen Ort zur Ausübung ihres Glaubens zu geben und einen Beitrag zur Integration zu leisten. Darüber hinaus engagieren wir uns intensiv im sozialen Bereich.¹⁵⁵

While the North Rhine-Westphalian government sees them as a reliable partner with a relatively liberal religious outlook and good integration work, the government is not willing to recognize them officially as a “German religious community” because they are a Turkish organization.¹⁵⁶ DITIB has a close relationship with Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi (DIB), the Committee for Religious Affairs, which is under the direct control of the Turkish Prime Minister. The Committee, which was founded in 1924, has widespread control over how Islam is practiced in Turkey. Because DITIB looks to Ankara for directions and does not display independence, most Germans do not feel that it can be considered a “German religious community.”¹⁵⁷ While DITIB admits its cooperation with the Turkish Committee for Religious Affairs, the organization contends that the relationship is one of necessity. DITIB explains that it requires ties to Turkey in order to provide a sufficient number of Imams to cover its congregations.¹⁵⁸

DITIB’s position in regards to *Islamkunde* can be summed up with, “Es ist besser als nichts.”¹⁵⁹ DITIB argues that the German government could have recognized 20 years ago that the Muslim immigrants were not going to return to their countries of origin, that the children were going to stay, and that they needed Islam RU. The Muslim Organization believes that the

¹⁵⁵ “Wir über uns,“ DITIB.
„Our organization’s goal is to give Muslims a place to practice their faith and to contribute to integration. Moreover, we are intensely engaged in the social square.“

¹⁵⁶ Official in North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Kiefer, “Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen, ”44-45.

¹⁵⁸ DITIB, Personal Interview, 16 Jul. 2009.

¹⁵⁹ DITIB, Personal Interview, 16 Jul. 2009.

“It is better than nothing.”

North Rhine-Westphalian government was motivated to act by their “schlechtes Gewissen.”¹⁶⁰ According to DITIB, the government realized that it needed to attend to the Muslim children’s religious needs just as it does for the Christian and Jewish children. DITIB is happy that the North Rhine-Westphalian government is attempting to do something for the Muslim children and greets the *Islamkunde* school trial as a good first step.

While recognizing that *Islamkunde* has helped educate many Muslim children about their religion, DITIB is not entirely happy with *Islamkunde*. First and foremost, *Islamkunde* only reaches a minority of Muslim children in North Rhine-Westphalia. Furthermore, DITIB believes that the *Islamkunde* school trial has prevented the introduction of real Islam RU. DITIB wants Islam RU to be introduced as soon as possible. In addition to RU being a basic *Grundgesetz* right for Muslim children, DITIB feels that the introduction of Islam RU will enhance Islam’s reputation in Germany which has been hurt by the 9/11 attacks. Furthermore, DITIB believes that many German teachers still have misconceptions about Islam, and Islam teachers would be able to dispel some of these mistaken beliefs. Lastly, DITIB considers Islam RU necessary to prevent Muslim children from being manipulated by Islamists:

Es muss, es muss rasch geschehen. Also wir haben nicht mehr viel Zeit. Die Kinder verlassen die Schule ohne islamischen Religionsunterricht und wenn sie ihre Religion nicht gut kennen, dann können sie instrumentalisiert werden der eine oder der andere und das muss vorgebeugt werden durch einen guten islamischen Religionsunterricht.¹⁶¹

DITIB calls for quick action.

Nevertheless, DITIB is not very optimistic about the realization of Islam RU. The Muslim organization notes that there is a dearth of Islam teachers. This shortage is due to the

¹⁶⁰ DITIB, Personal Interview, 16 Jul. 2009.
“bad conscience”

¹⁶¹ DITIB, Personal Interview, 16 Jul. 2009.
“It must happen quickly. We do not have much more time. The children are leaving school without Islam RU, and if they do not know their religion, then they can be instrumentalized, and this must be prevented through a good Islam RU.”

fact that in addition to the general lack of educated Muslims, there is only one university in North Rhine-Westphalia where one can study to become an Islam teacher. DITIB feels that Muslim children do not receive appropriate advancement opportunities in comparison to their Christian counterparts and that a disproportionately low number are selected for the college track. DITIB is also not impressed with the North Rhine-Westphalian government's announcement to introduce Islam RU starting in the 2010/11 school year, which the organization labels a "leeres Versprechen."¹⁶² The organization believes that without the government having developed a curriculum or having worked with the Muslim organizations, the promise will not be realized.

DITIB announced, however, that it would like to work with the government to introduce Islam RU. As the representative I interviewed put it, "DITIB hat das [Islamkunde] sogar am Anfang unterstützt und will jetzt natürlich so wie man dieses Vorgehen unterstützt hat, dem entsprechend auch gewürdigt werden."¹⁶³ In other words, DITIB wants to be officially recognized as a "German religious community."

VIKZ

Although the *Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren* (VIKZ) is considered to be the third largest Muslim organization in Germany,¹⁶⁴ the 2009 Deutsche Islam Konferenz Study found that with 7.2% of Muslims interviewed feeling that they were represented by VIKZ, the

¹⁶² DITIB, Personal Interview, 16 Jul. 2009.
"an empty promise"

¹⁶³ DITIB, Personal Interview, 16 Jul. 2009.

"DITIB even supported Islamkunde in the beginning and, as one supported this procedure, now one wants to be appropriately respected."

¹⁶⁴ Peter Barth, "Islam und Islamismus: Eine Herausforderung für Deutschland," (München: Studiengesellschaft für Friedensforschung e.V., 2003) 213.

organization ranks second in terms of representation of German Muslims.¹⁶⁵ VIKZ is proud of this percentage and believes that the study shows that more Muslims feel represented by Muslim organizations than politicians want to admit.¹⁶⁶

The first *Islamische Kulturzentrum e.V.* was founded in 1973 in Cologne. More Islamic cultural centers followed and in 1980 they united to form the VIKZ. VIKZ was one of the founding members of the Islamrat but withdrew from the organization in 1988 and joined the ZMD instead. It withdrew from the ZMD in 2000, which, being the largest member, was a heavy loss for the ZMD.¹⁶⁷ Today VIKZ has over 300 congregations.¹⁶⁸ The organization continues to work with both the Islamrat and the ZMD in addition to DITIB.

VIKZ considers its first responsibility to be meeting the religious needs of Muslims living in Germany: “In erster Linie arbeitet der Verband für die religiösen Bedürfnisse der in Deutschland lebenden Muslime und unterstützt sie im Alltag bei auftretenden religiösen Fragen.”¹⁶⁹ VIKZ classifies its two areas of specialization as religious ministration and social work.¹⁷⁰

VIKZ is strictly apolitical. As the representative I interviewed put it, “Politik ist in unseren Moscheen Taboo.”¹⁷¹ According to Peter Barth, this apolitical position also holds true for developments in Turkey.¹⁷² Michael Kiefer contends that VIKZ, nevertheless, is not a truly independent German organization. VIKZ is considered to be an offshoot of the Süleymancilar

¹⁶⁵ Haug 179.

¹⁶⁶ VIKZ, Personal Interview, 2 Jul. 2009.

¹⁶⁷ Barth 212.

¹⁶⁸ “Selbstdarstellung des Verbandes der Islamischen Kulturzentren und dessen Gemeinden,” *VIKZ*, 20 Jan. 2010 <www.vikz.de>.

¹⁶⁹ “Selbstdarstellung des Verbandes der Islamischen Kulturzentren und dessen Gemeinden.” „Firstly, the organization works to cover the religious needs of the Muslims living in Germany and supports them in their daily life with religious questions that are raised.“

¹⁷⁰ “Selbstdarstellung des Verbandes der Islamischen Kulturzentren und dessen Gemeinden.“

¹⁷¹ VIKZ, Personal Interview, 2 Jul. 2009.

“In our mosques, politics is taboo.”

¹⁷² Barth 212.

movement in Turkey. As the name suggests, adherents to this movement are followers of the Turkish theologian Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan. The main objective of the order he founded was to create opportunities for children to study the Koran in a largely secularized Turkey. Kiefer points out that in 2000 the Süleymancilar movement in Turkey experienced a leadership change, which corresponded to the VIKZ withdrawing from the ZMD and the VIKZ leadership being replaced by Turkish individuals. Kiefer believes that these events highlight VIKZ's dependence on its Turkish counterpart, making it ineligible to be a "German religious community."¹⁷³

In contrast to Kiefer's assessment, the North Rhine-Westphalian School Ministry believes that VIKZ is the most likely candidate amongst the Muslim organizations it works with to become a legally recognized "religious community."

Dann haben wir VIKZ, die wirklich eigentlich ein religiöser Verband sind. Also, die sind sehr streng religiös aber nicht islamistisch. Wenn die das [Religionsgemeinschaft] beantragen würden, ich glaube den müssten wir das genehmigen, weil die wirklich sehr religiös sind. Die haben auch schon mal Ärger gehabt mit – da wurden auch schon mal 850.000 Euro im Safe gefunden, die nicht versteuert waren und so, aber keine kriminelle Vereinigung im Sinne von Islamismus.¹⁷⁴

The appearance of religiosity and not having known links to Islamist organizations appear to be the two most important criteria in deciding upon "religious community" eligibility at least from North Rhine-Westphalia's point of view.

VIKZ would like to become a "religious community" and work as the state's partner in developing Islam RU although they emphasize the importance of the other Muslim organizations participating in the development process well. The organization has campaigned for the introduction of Islam RU since it first applied for it in 1979. Concerning *Islamkunde*, VIKZ did

¹⁷³ Michael Kiefer, "Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen," 49,50.

¹⁷⁴ Official in North Rhine-Westphalia, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.

"Then we have VIKZ, which is really actually a religious organization. They are very strictly observant but not Islamic. If they were to apply for recognition as a religious community, I think that we would have to approve because they really are very religious. They have also gotten into trouble before – 850,000 untaxed Euros have been found in a safe and the like, but no criminal union in the sense of Islamism."

not try to prevent the school trial, although it does not support it because VIKZ' goal is Islam RU: "Also, wir haben uns nicht dagegen gestellt, aber wir haben das auch nicht so favorisiert, weil wir an einem ordentlichen islamischen Religionsunterricht hängen."¹⁷⁵ While the VIKZ admits that Muslim children probably learn a lot in *Islamkunde*, they only recognize *Islamkunde* as a transition period. VIKZ believes that the government implemented *Islamkunde* because it could not at the time launch real Islam RU but at the same time wanted to educate Muslim children about their faith. VIKZ thinks that some politicians also had the ulterior motive of stopping children from attending Koran courses. VIKZ is completely opposed to this idea, which they deem to be "fatal"¹⁷⁶ and believes that instead Islam RU and Koran courses should complement each other.

Eventually, VIKZ, wants to see *Islamkunde* transformed into Islam RU. VIKZ is hopeful that Islam RU will be realized like the North Rhine-Westphalian government promised in 2009. Although VIKZ is somewhat disappointed with the amount of effort that went into launching *Islamkunde*, which in their opinion would have been better spent on Islam RU, they realize that it is a process:

Man hat sehr viel in dieser Islamkunde reingesteckt. Die Energie hätte man denke ich für den islamischen Religionsunterricht aufbrauchen können und wir wären viel weiter als heute, aber es ist ein Prozess, die Politik lernt, islamische Organisationen lernen vieles dazu und ich denke, dass das gemeinsam bewerkstelligt werden kann.¹⁷⁷

VIKZ is cautiously optimistic that Islam RU will be realized.

¹⁷⁵ VIKZ, Personal Interview, 2 Jul. 2009.

"We didn't oppose it, but we also did not favor it because we really want a normal Islam RU."

¹⁷⁶ "disastrous"

¹⁷⁷ VIKZ, Personal Interview, 2 Jul. 2009.

"One has put a lot into this *Islamkunde*. I think one could have used that energy for Islam RU and we would be much further along today, but it is a process, the politicians are learning, the Islamic organizations are learning a lot, and I think that together it can be brought about."

In addition to RU being a right guaranteed by the *Grundgesetz*, VIKZ believes that Islam RU will help with integration: “Wir sagen der islamische Religionsunterricht ist ein wichtiger Beitrag zur Integration.” According to VIKZ, religion and learning about their religion gives Muslims an identity, and with an identity, they can feel good about themselves in German society. If they do not learn about Islam, they also cannot differentiate between religious and cultural practices, which can also lead to problems. The VIKZ representative cited honor killings as unislamic and an example of such misconceptions. Nevertheless, VIKZ cautions that religion is only part of integration. They cite other factors such as education and economic levels as being at least as important if not more so. Finally, VIKZ recognizes that politicians tend to have a different definition of integration than they do. They believe that politicians think that assimilation is the best kind of integration. VIKZ opposes assimilation, although they support integration.¹⁷⁸

Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland

In 1988 the *Islamischen Arbeitskreises in Deutschland* (IAK) was founded. It morphed into the Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland (ZMD) in 1994.¹⁷⁹ The ZMD is headquartered in Eschwege.¹⁸⁰ At the moment it is comprised of 19 Muslim associations representing Islam’s diversity in Germany. The ZMD’s members come from Turkey, the Arab World, Germany, Albania, Iran, and Bosnia. All the legal schools of Islam are present including both Sunnis and Shiites.¹⁸¹ Although the ZMD publishes higher numbers, it is estimated that the ZMD has 200

¹⁷⁸ VIKZ, Personal Interview, 2 Jul. 2009.

„We say that Islam RU is an important contribution to integration.“

¹⁷⁹ Michael Kiefer, “Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen,” 55.

¹⁸⁰ Barth 223.

¹⁸¹ “Selbstdarstellung,” *Zentralrat*, 20 Jan. 2010 <<http://zentralrat.de>>.

congregations and between 10,000 and 15,000 members.¹⁸² This number would amount to less than 10% of all organized Muslims in Germany.¹⁸³ According to the Deutsche Islam Konferenz's study, the Zentralrat represents 2.7% of all Muslims (both organized and not organized) in Germany.¹⁸⁴

The ZMD considers its most important responsibility to foster Muslim life and Islamic spirituality in Germany and to enable and to facilitate Muslims in living their faith: "Unsere wichtigste Aufgabe ist es, das muslimische Leben und die islamische Spiritualität in Deutschland zu fördern und den Muslimen die Ausübung ihrer Religion zu ermöglichen und zu erleichtern."¹⁸⁵ According to the ZMD this includes calculating the times of prayer and Islamic holidays, setting up rules for Islamic slaughtering, constructing Islamic cemeteries and burial sites, improving Koran classes in the congregations, and participating in awareness and educational campaigns regarding security and terrorism.¹⁸⁶

Already in 1994, the IAK, the forerunner of the ZMD, petitioned to be recognized by North Rhine-Westphalia as a "religious community" and to introduce Islam RU. The North Rhine-Westphalian government did not decide in the IAK's favor. Therefore, the ZMD together with the Islamrat have tried to sue North Rhine-Westphalia. This attempt has failed twice so far, and at the moment the ZMD has not launched another legal procedure.¹⁸⁷

One of the largest obstacles that the ZMD faces in obtaining formal recognition is the fact that the North Rhine-Westphalian government suspects that the ZMD is connected to Muslim brotherhoods:

¹⁸² Barth 224.

¹⁸³ Michael Kiefer, "Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen," 57.

¹⁸⁴ Haug 179.

¹⁸⁵ "Selbstdarstellung," Zentralrat.

¹⁸⁶ "Selbstdarstellung," Zentralrat

¹⁸⁷ Michael Kiefer, "Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen," 57, 58.

Dann haben wir den Zentralrat der Muslime, der glaube ich auch nur aus 5 Leute besteht und da muss man immer aufpassen. Da sind auch Verbindungen zu Muslimbruderschaften und mit bestimmten Personen und das ist beim Islamrat auch. Das ist sehr heikel und da sind wir zurückhaltend. Wir reden aber auch mit denen. Herr Schäuble zeigt sich ja mit den Vorsitzende.¹⁸⁸

Although the government has not broken off all contact with the ZMD, the suspicions of Muslim brotherhood involvement hinder close cooperation. German authorities believe, for example, that Dr. Nadeem Elyas, former leader of the ZMD and currently an honorary board member, is a supporter of the Arab Muslim brotherhood, although Dr. Elyas has repeatedly denied these accusations.¹⁸⁹

I contacted the ZMD multiple times by phone and by e-mail, but was not granted an interview. According to Michael Kiefer, the organization is completely against the Islamkunde school trial. The ZMD believes that it is a case of the state trying to define religion. The organization thinks that Islamkunde is essentially Islam RU without the Muslim religious community's input and as such unconstitutional.¹⁹⁰ The ZMD wants the government to look at the Islam RU curricula developed by the ZMD and presented to the government in 1999.¹⁹¹

Islamrat

The Islamrat was founded in 1986 in Berlin.¹⁹² The Islamrat's headquarters are in Cologne. The Islamrat consists of 37 associations with about 40,000-60,000 members.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Official in North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009. "Then we have the Zentralrat der Muslime, which I believe is only made up of 5 people, and one must always be careful there. There are ties with Muslim brotherhoods and with certain people, and this is also the case for the Islamrat. It is very tricky and we are cautious here, but we also talk with them. After all, Mr. Schäuble shows himself with their leader."

¹⁸⁹ Barth 224.

¹⁹⁰ Michael Kiefer, "Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen," 102.

¹⁹¹ Michael Kiefer, "Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen," 58.

¹⁹² "Selbstdarstellung." *Islamrat*. 20 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.islamrat.de>>.

According to the Deutsche Islam Konferenz study, about 2.2% of Muslims in Germany feel that they are represented by the Islamrat.¹⁹⁴

The Turkish Milli Görüs Islamic Association (IGMG) is the largest association in the Islamrat and thus dominates the organization.¹⁹⁵ Many of the Islamrat's board members are from the IGMG including the Islamrat's current leader, Ali Kizikaya.¹⁹⁶ These strong ties to the IGMG are problematic for the North Rhine-Westphalian government: "Ja da haben wir mit dem Islamrat Milli Görüs Probleme. Einige sitzen in Untersuchungshaft im Moment und da ist der Verfassungsschutz beobachtet sie."¹⁹⁷ IGMG is a European Muslim organization which has ties to the Turkish Islamist movement led by Mehmet Sabri Erkaban.¹⁹⁸ In the beginning, the IGMG was openly anti-Semitic, antidemocratic, and against unbelievers. Since the 1990s such statements have become rarer. Nevertheless, the *Verfassungsschutz* (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution) continues to monitor the IGMG and has labeled the organization as "extremist."¹⁹⁹

Meanwhile the Islamrat aspires to receive official recognition as a "religious organization" equal to the Christian churches. The Islamrat claims that its main responsibility is the religious, social, and cultural mentoring of Muslims living in Germany: "Aufgabe des Islamrates ist insbesondere die religiöse, soziale und kulturelle Betreuung der in der

¹⁹³ Hildegard Becker, "Der organisierte Islam in Deutschland und einige ideologische Hintergründe," in *Schriftenreihe Migration, Flüchtlinge, und Integration – Band 14*, Ed. Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Bonn: Bernd Brümmer, 2005) 62-85: 66.

¹⁹⁴ Haug 179.

¹⁹⁵ Barth 225.

¹⁹⁶ Michael Kiefer, "Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen," 54, 55.

¹⁹⁷ Official in North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009.

"There we have problems with the Islamrat Milli Görüs. Some at the moment are sitting in custody, and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution is watching them."

¹⁹⁸ Michael Kiefer, "Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen," 46, 47.

¹⁹⁹ Barth 214-216.

Bundesrepublik Deutschland lebenden Muslime.²⁰⁰ This care includes amongst other teaching the faith, protecting Islamic cultural values, carrying out religious services, burials, and celebrations, representing the interests of Muslims living in Germany, explaining Islam and its cultural tradition to the public, and protecting Islamic holy sites. Interestingly, the Islamrat also includes its support of Islam RU in its summary of responsibilities:

Der Islamrat tritt für die Einführung eines islamischen Religionsunterrichtes in deutscher Sprache als ordentliches Lehrfach an den öffentlichen Schulen und für ein akademisches Fach an deutschen Hochschulen zur Ausbildung von islamischen Gelehrten und Religionslehrern in Deutschland ein und verpflichtet sich, dabei sowohl die Interessen der Betroffenen als auch der Schulgesetzgebung der Länder Rechnung zu tragen.²⁰¹

As mentioned above, the Islamrat launched two failed legal attempts in conjunction with the ZMD to force the North Rhine-Westphalian government to implement Islam RU.²⁰²

In my interview with a representative of the Islamrat this push to implement Islam RU was quite apparent. Clearly stated, *Islamkunde* is not what the Islamrat wants, and it thinks that Muslims deserve better: “Also Islamkunde ist nicht das was wir als Religionsgemeinschaft uns wünschen und es steht den Muslimen mehr als Islamkunde zu.”²⁰³ Although the state maintains that it implemented *Islamkunde* because it lacked a Muslim partner in terms of a legally recognized “religious community,” the Islamrat believes that it does fulfill the definition of a “religious community” and thinks that the state is just using this legal discussion as an excuse to control religion. From the Islamrat’s point of view, in *Islamkunde* the state defines what religion

²⁰⁰ “Selbstdarstellung,“ Islamrat.
„The Islamrat’s primary mission is providing religious, social, and cultural care for the Muslims living in the Federal Republic of Germany.“

²⁰¹ “Selbstdarstellung,“ Islamrat.
„The Islamrat advocates for the introduction of Islam RU taught in German as a normal school subject in public schools and for an academic major at German colleges in order to educate Muslim scholars and RU-teachers in Germany and commits itself to take into account both the interests of those affected as well as the states’ school codes.“

²⁰² Michael Kiefer, “Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen,” 54, 55.

²⁰³ Islamrat, Personal Interview, 15 Jun. 2009.

is, what should be taught, and what should be prioritized. The organization considers such actions to be in contradiction to the supposed religious neutrality of the state.

Unlike some other Muslim organizations, the Islamrat does not think that *Islamkunde* is “better than nothing.” In addition to being unconstitutional from the Islamrat’s perspective, the organization sees several other problems with *Islamkunde*. The Islamrat believes that *Islamkunde* is a source of inequality. It sees *Islamkunde* as an inferior version of RU. According to the *Islamrat*, Muslims notice this unequal treatment, Germany’s lack of appreciation for Islam, which is not conducive to the culture of democracy where everyone is supposed to be equal:

Islamkunde ist keine, keine Würdigung des Islams, keine, keine, die gleichbar wäre wie bei anderen Religionsgemeinschaften. Wenn sie die jüdische Religionsgemeinschaft oder die christliche Religionsgemeinschaft die Möglichkeit einräumen ihr Bekenntnis an die Schülerschaft weiter zu geben und die muslimischen Religionsgemeinschaft oder die muslimischen Schüler, Schülern das vorenthalten wird ist es eine Ungleichbehandlung. Sie geben dann die Muslimen eine Sonderrolle, eine, ja fast schon, eine mindere Rolle, auch ihrer Religion, wenn sie eine höherwertige Veranstaltung für andere Religionen haben und eine mindere für muslimische Schüler und das entgeht die Muslimen nicht, auch nicht, das ist natürlich auch nicht förderlich für, für, für, für die Demokrat, Demokratiekultur wo Menschen dann auch alle gleich sein sollen.²⁰⁴

Furthermore, the Islamrat questions the qualifications of the teachers of *Islamkunde*. The criteria to be a teacher of *Islamkunde* do not specify that one must be a practicing Muslim, who believes everything that he or she is teaching the children. In the eyes of the Islamrat, such teachers are not acceptable.

²⁰⁴ Islamrat, Personal Interview, 15 Jun. 2009.

“*Islamkunde* is no, no honoring of Islam, no, not one that would be equivalent to what other religious communities receive. If they grant the Jewish or the Christian religious communities the opportunity to transmit their confession to the students, and they deprive the Muslim religious community or the Muslim students of this, it becomes an inequality. Then, they assign the Muslims a special role, a, indeed almost, a lesser role, also their religion, when they have a higher course for other religions and a lower one for Muslim students, and this does not escape the Muslims’ notice, also it is not, it is also of course not conducive of, of, of, of democracy, the culture of democracy where all people are supposed to be the same.”

Therefore, the Islamrat desires the introduction of Islam RU in accordance with the *Grundgesetz* as soon as possible. The Islamrat believes Islam RU would lead to equal treatment and equal rights for Muslim children. It would also help integration because Muslim children would identify more with their school, since they would see that even their religion has a place in school. In addition to the benefits that Muslim children would derive from Islam RU, the entire society would benefit because religions endow people with values, which are useful for living together.²⁰⁵

Christian Churches and *Islamkunde*

Evangelische Kirche

The *Evangelische Kirche* in Germany is composed of 22 Lutheran, Reformed, and United regional churches.²⁰⁶ I interviewed a representative of the regional church, “the *Evangelische Kirche* in the Rhineland” (EKiR). This church is the second largest of the 22 regional churches with 767 congregations and 2.82 million members. It covers parts of the four German states of North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, and Hesse. All of my *Islamkunde* research was conducted in those areas of North Rhine-Westphalia covered by the EKiR. The church has its administrative headquarters in Düsseldorf.²⁰⁷

Questioned about their political influence, the EKiR representative admitted:

..normalerweise läuft das so bei solchen Sachen, die auch die Kirchen betreffen, weil es ähnliche Regelungen sind oder so, gibt’s immer die Anfrage: „Was sagt Ihr dazu?“ Das bedeutet nicht, dass wenn wir sagen „Das ist doof,“ dass der die Regierung das auch nicht macht oder so, aber es gibt so zu sagen das Anhörungsrecht in Deutschland und das gerade bei so sensiblen Fragen. Das ist für die Regierung immer ganz gut, wenn sie sagen können: „Ja, die Religion, die Kirchen wollen das auch“ oder so. Also es ist eher eine

²⁰⁵ Islamrat, Personal Interview, 15 Jun. 2009.

²⁰⁶ “EKD & Kirchen,” *EKD*, 20 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.ekd.de>>.

²⁰⁷ “Rheinland,” *Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland*, 23 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.ekir.de/>>.

atmosphärische Geschichte. Die müssen, die Regierungen müssen das nicht tun, aber wir werden bei vielen Dingen gefragt nach unsere Meinung und so.²⁰⁸

The government often consults the Churches on issues such as *Islamkunde* or Islam RU, but the Churches only are asked for their opinions, which the government can disregard.

The *Evangelische* Church was rather skeptical, when *Islamkunde* was introduced because the Church wants an Islam RU equal to the Christian RUs to be established. Although Islam RU is still the ultimate goal, the *Evangelische* Church agrees that the *Islamkunde* school trial has been well received by the schools, parents, and children. Therefore, the *Evangelische* Church no longer opposes *Islamkunde*, although it would still like to see it eventually evolve into Islam RU.

There are two aspects, which explain the Churches' interest in Islam RU. First, it is in both the *Evangelische* and Catholic Churches best interest that RU continues to be offered in the same way and under the same legal specifications as it historically has been even in the face of societal change, and "...je klarer alle die Religionsunterricht anbieten nach der selben Regeln verfahren, so sicherer ist es das es so bleibt."²⁰⁹ By ensuring that Muslims obtain RU as well, the Churches are cementing the institution of RU. However, the *Evangelische* Church maintains that it supported Islam RU even before it became clear that various groups in society had begun questioning the continued existence and importance of RU: "Schon da hat die evangelische Kirche gesagt „Wir wollen, dass Muslime auch so ein Unterricht haben,“ so, unabhängig davon wie da jetzt, was für Auswirkungen das jetzt auf den eigenen Unterricht hat, auf der eigenen

²⁰⁸ EkiR, Personal Interview, 13 Jul. 2009.

"...normally it works like this with such things that also affect the Churches because they are similar regulations or the like, and there is always the inquiry, "What do you say about it?" That does not mean that if we said, "That is stupid," that the government will then not do it or something like that, but there is so to speak a right to be consulted in Germany – especially with such sensitive issues. It is always really good for the government when they can say, "Yes, the religion, the Churches also want it" and such. So, it is more of a question of ambiance. They have to, the government does not have to do it, but we are asked about our opinions about a lot of things etc."

²⁰⁹ EkiR, Personal Interview, 13 Jul. 2009.

"The more obvious it is that all those who offer RU play by the same rules, the more certain it is that it will continue like this."

Form.²¹⁰ Therefore, self-interest does not fully explain the Church's support of Islam RU, according to my interviewee. The more important aspect is the *Evangelische* Church's defense of religious freedom. The *Evangelische* Church has a long history of being the victim of religious persecution and, therefore, protects the rights of religious minorities. The *Evangelische* Church highlights that this aspect is by far the more important. In fact, the Church believes that if RU were to change, such a change would occur independently to whether or not the Muslims receive RU.

As mentioned above, however, the *Evangelische* Church has noticed many benefits of the *Islamkunde* school trial. Having *Islamkunde* teachers in the schools has improved ties to the Muslim organizations because it gives the German authorities, Churches, and Muslim organizations an official contact person, who can act as a go-between to smooth out problems and conflicts. Of course, in those cases where the Muslim organizations did not approve of the particular *Islamkunde* teacher, this disapproval in itself generated new problems and conflicts. Nevertheless, overall the *Evangelische* Church observed an improvement in relations. Furthermore, the *Evangelische* Church believes that *Islamkunde* supports integration efforts by making religion no longer only a private matter but instead part of public life. Since *Islamkunde* is taught in German, it also provides Muslim children the tools to discuss their religion. According to the *Evangelische* Church, the Churches have always felt that religion is an important part of integration. Therefore, immigrants need to be able to build mosques and feel at home with their religion. The *Evangelische Kirche* admits that many Christian Germans have reservations and stereotypes with regards to Muslims. However, the Church believes that overall

²¹⁰ EkiR, Personal Interview, 13 Jul. 2009.
“Even then the evangelische Kirche said, “We want Muslims to also have such a class,” independent from what is now, what for effects that now has on our own class, on our own structure.”

schools that have introduced *Islamkunde* have had very good experiences with everyone involved.

The *Evangelische Kirche* has made the observation that there is not really a difference between the way *Islamkunde* is taught and Islam RU. As the Church puts it, *Islamkunde* is only “Mogelpackung,” a deceptive packaging for legal reasons of what is essentially Islam RU.²¹¹ The parents realize that it is basically Islam RU and therefore are satisfied. The Church recognizes that the Muslim organizations probably see the issue more critically because they want to have the same legal rights of helping to decide what is taught and who may teach, as the Churches do.

In fact, the *Evangelische Kirche* sees the legality of *Islamkunde* and Islam RU to be the most pressing issue. According to my interviewee the fundamental problem is that the German laws were originally only based on the Churches. In his opinion, a real breakthrough will not be made until these laws are modified, not in substance but in form, so as to allow religious communities with other structures to be officially recognized:

Ich glaube bundesweit wird man einfach irgendwann gucken müssen wie kann man eigentlich diese Regelungen, die auf die Weimarer Republik zurückgehen eigentlich so transformieren, sodass auch der die Substanz so bleibt wie sie jetzt ist, aber bestimmte Kriterien auch angepasst werden auch an andere Religionsgemeinschaften. Damals hatten sie nur die christlichen Kirchen vor Augen und man kann nicht Muslimen sagen „Macht mal ne Kirche so wie die Christen“ ne? Also, geht einfach nicht... So lange wird da nix draus. Das ist ja die Situation, dass eigentlich seit 2 Jahrzehnten Muslimen sagen, “Wir wollen Religionsunterricht haben“ und der Staat immer sagt, „Ja, aber ihr müsst eine Organisation ein Ansprechpartner und so weiter.“ Ich glaub das das irgendwann nicht so weiter führt, ich denk das jetzt diese Lösung von Nordrhein-Westfalen nochmal vielleicht ein bisschen Drive reinbringt.²¹²

²¹¹ EkiR, Personal Interview, 13 Jul. 2009.

“deceptive packaging”

²¹² EkiR, Personal Interview, 13 Jul. 2009.

“I believe that eventually one will have to just look nationwide how one can actually transform these regulations, which go back to the Weimar Republic, so that the essence stays the way it is now, but that certain criteria are adopted to other religious communities. Back then, they were only looking at the Christian Churches and one can’t

He mentions the North Rhine-Westphalian government's announcement of starting a Islam RU school trial in 2010/11 as giving the issue a new push in the right direction. The *Evangelische Church* supports this new attempt, unlike the Catholic Church, which is more critical of it.

Nevertheless, the *Evangelische Kirche* also has reservations. This Islam RU school trial is supposed to be another transitional step towards constitutional Islam RU. However, the *Evangelische Kirche* points out that *Islamkunde* was also only supposed to be a transitional step, and was also supposed to be transformed into real Islam RU after two or three years. This transformation failed to occur. The *Evangelische Kirche* emphasizes that the legality of Islam RU needs to be tackled:

...so kann man eigentlich auf Dauer nicht mit der Verfassung umgehen. Ja, das ist so das Problem, das rechtliche Problem. Es sind alle zufrieden und wir als Kirchen haben das auch nicht zu laut gesagt, weil wir sagten „Ach Mensch, es kommt ja, es ist gut für die Schülerinnen und gut für die Muslime und deshalb okay, aber es ist keine richtige Lösung. Das ist so.“²¹³

The *Evangelische Kirche* would like a real legal solution to be found.

Catholic Church

The Catholic Church in Germany is comprised of many congregations and groups and is connected to the Pope in Rome and the worldwide Church.²¹⁴ I contacted the Cologne

say to the Muslims, “Make a church like the Christians,” right? That just can't be done...As long as that is done, nothing will come of it. This is the situation, that Muslims have been actually saying for two decades now, “We want to have RU,” and the state always says, “Yes, but you need an organization, a contact, etc.” I think that eventually it cannot continue. I believe that now this solution from Northrhine-Westfalia will maybe give it a little more drive again.”

²¹³ EkiR, Personal Interview, 13 Jul. 2009.

“One cannot treat the Constitution like this in the long run. Yes, this is the problem, the legal problem. Everyone is satisfied, and we as the Churches have not said it too loud because we said, “Oh, come on, it's working, it's good for the students and good for the Muslims and therefore okay, but it is not a real solution. And that's the truth.”

²¹⁴ “Katholische Kirche.“ Katholische Kirche. 20 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.katholische-kirche.de>>.

Archbishopric, which covers Cologne and its surroundings (6,181 km²). The Cologne Archbishopric has 2.2 Million members, 43% of the area's population.²¹⁵ The Cologne Archbishopric did not grant me an interview with one of their representatives, but sent me two e-mails detailing their position on *Islamkunde* and Islam RU.

The Catholic Church has no contact with *Islamkunde* teachers and has no direct knowledge of what has happened in *Islamkunde*. Therefore, the Church is unwilling to make any comments.²¹⁶ However, from the Catholic Church's point of view, *Religionskunde*, i.e., fact-based religion class, cannot replace RU, i.e., faith-based religion class, not even for Muslims. RU is anchored in the *Grundgesetz*, whereas *Religionskunde* and *Islamkunde* are not.²¹⁷ The Catholic Church believes that *Islamkunde* has failed to be implemented statewide. Therefore, it hopes that a statewide Islam RU school trial will be introduced. However, the legality of such a school trial is not yet assured.²¹⁸ The Catholic Church believes that it is necessary to introduce Islam RU at schools with high Muslim populations as soon as possible.²¹⁹

Discussion

The goal of all of the German religious organizations discussed here is the implementation of Islam RU as soon as possible. Nevertheless, the religious organizations are split between those that do not actively oppose the *Islamkunde* school trial and those who will settle for nothing less than the immediate introduction of Islam RU.

²¹⁵ "Kirchengemeinden im Erzbistum Köln." *Erzbistum Köln*. 23 Jan. 2010 <www.erzbistum-koeln.de>.

²¹⁶ Erzbistum Köln, "AW: Mastersprojekt ueber Islamkundeunterricht," E-mail to author, 12 Jun. 2009.
Erzbistum Köln, "AW: Mastersprojekt ueber Islamkundeunterricht," E-mail to author, 10 Jul. 2009.

²¹⁷ Erzbistum Köln, "AW: Mastersprojekt ueber Islamkundeunterricht," E-mail to author, 10 Jul. 2009.

²¹⁸ Erzbistum Köln, "AW: Mastersprojekt ueber Islamkundeunterricht," E-mail to author, 12 Jun. 2009.

²¹⁹ Erzbistum Köln, "AW: Mastersprojekt ueber Islamkundeunterricht," E-mail to author, 10 Jul. 2009.

DITIB, VIKZ, and the *Evangelische* Church all agree that Muslim children probably learn a lot about their religion in *Islamkunde*. They believe that the government's reasons for launching *Islamkunde* were honorable for the most part in that the government wanted to address Muslim children's needs but did not believe that it could legally introduce Islam RU at the time. VIKZ assumes that some politicians were also trying to stop Muslim children from going to mosques, which the organization maintains would be an illogical result of *Islamkunde* or Islam RU for that matter. DITIB, VIKZ, and the *Evangelische* Church agree that *Islamkunde* is better than nothing and that it is alright as a transitional phase. Nevertheless, all three organizations want Islam RU to be introduced as soon as possible because RU is a constitutionally guaranteed right that Muslim children are currently being deprived of. Islam RU would have several other beneficial effects such as enhancing Islam's reputation, helping to break down stereotypes, preventing Muslim children from being manipulated by Islamist extremists, and integrating Muslim children by strengthening their identity.

In contrast, the ZMD, Islamrat, and Catholic Church are very against *Islamkunde* even as a transition step. The ZMD and Islamrat believe that the state really introduced *Islamkunde* because it wanted to control and define Islam. The ZMD, Islamrat, and Catholic Church believe that *Islamkunde* is unconstitutional and constitutional Islam RU needs to be introduced as it is a basic right. The Islamrat also believes that Islam RU would help integration because Muslim students would identify more with their schools.

Grade School Teachers, Students, and Parents

In addition to talking to the politicians and the School Ministry, the Muslim organizations and the Churches, all of whom theoretically represent the people affected, I wanted to hear what

the latter had to say themselves. In the larger controversy surrounding *Islamkunde*, it is important to remember that the people, who are the most directly concerned by the school subject or lack thereof, are the school communities: the principals, the teachers, the students, and the parents. Do they share the opinions of the politicians, School Ministry, and/or religious organizations or do their judgments differ?

Therefore, I visited two grade schools that participate in the *Islamkunde* school trial and one that does not. I chose to concentrate on grade schools because Germany has four main types of high schools with an unequal distribution of Muslim students between the types. This also leads to an unequal number of high schools of each type that participate in the school trial. Out of the 82 secondary schools participating in North Rhine-Westphalia, 53 are *Hauptschulen* and only 2 are *Gymnasiums*.²²⁰ Furthermore, I wanted to hear the parents' perspectives. Until a child is 14 years-old and considered to be religiously of age,²²¹ only the child's parent can unenroll the child from RU.²²² Therefore, parents are directly concerned with their children's religious instruction during the grade school years.

The School Ministry breaks down the participating schools into five regions. The three schools in this study come from the Greater Cologne region, which has the most grade school participants in the school trial (1,132 students). Six of the 16 Greater Cologne grade schools participating in the school trial are in Cologne proper. These six grade schools account for 376 of the participating students.²²³ Both schools in this study participating in the *Islamkunde* school

²²⁰ "Anzahl der Schulen, erteilter Unterricht und Anzahl der Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer an *Islamkunde* in deutscher Sprache im Schuljahr 2008/09," (Düsseldorf: NRW Schulministerium, 2009).

²²¹ Germany, Gesetz über die religiöse Kindererziehung, Absatz 5.

²²² Schulgesetz NRW (Stand 15.4.2011), Paragraph 28.6

²²³ "Anzahl der Schulen, erteilter Unterricht und Anzahl der Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer an *Islamkunde* in deutscher Sprache im Schuljahr 2008/09."

trial are located in Cologne proper. The school not participating in the *Islamkunde* trial is located in a city in the Greater Cologne region that has no participating grade schools.

The purpose of this third school was to represent the reality of the majority of grade schools in North Rhine-Westphalia, which do not participate in *Islamkunde*. I chose a school outside of Cologne because in more rural North Rhine-Westphalia, parents have less choice of where to send their children. They generally send their children to the closest grade school. In Cologne in contrast, parents have more options. They can send their children to confessional schools if they do not want to send their children to a *Gemeinschaftsgrundschule*. This ability to choose leads to a level of religious segregation, though not always out of religious reasons. For this study, I wanted a third school that did not participate in the *Islamkunde* school trial but that had a high percentage of Muslim students, who did not have the choice of attending a school that offered *Islamkunde*.

Procedure

I e-mailed the principals of the schools that participate in the *Islamkunde* school trial in Cologne to request their participation in my study. Principals of two schools, from now on referred to as Schools A and B, responded positively. The principals made the teachers at these schools aware that I was conducting a study on *Islamkunde*. I interviewed the teachers, including the principals, who consented. I also distributed consent forms and parent questionnaires to all of the 4th grade students at Schools A and B. I gave questionnaires to the 4th graders, for whom I received parental consent for the child's participation in addition to the child's consent. The interview questions and examples of the parent and child questionnaires are in the appendix. The interviews and the questionnaire distributions and collections took place

between the 16th and 26th of June, 2009, at School A and between the 9th and 23rd of June, 2009, at School B. The same procedure took place at School C, which does not offer *Islamkunde*, from the 15th-30th of June, 2009. School C had shortened interviews and questionnaires since *Islamkunde* was not offered at the school. Examples of School C's materials can also be found in the appendix.

In the past, many studies on *Islamkunde* have only sought to illicit the opinions of Muslim parents. I, however, thought that the non-Muslim parents' and children's point of views were also important for several reasons. First, Germany is a democratic society and the decisions and laws that affect the *Islamkunde* school trial and will establish Islam RU, are made by politicians and government officials that theoretically represent all the people living in Germany. Many of the decisions about Islam instruction in fact are being made by non-Muslims. Secondly, *Islamkunde* is a school subject and as such it at least possibly affects the school atmosphere and climate, and in this way, all members of the school community. In turn, the school community and its attitude toward *Islamkunde* could theoretically affect the class itself.

In the questionnaires, participants are asked to state their religion and whether they or their children attend any school religious instruction. Although this may seem to be a personal question, the North Rhine-Westphalian government keeps track of the confession of each of its students as the table below shows:²²⁴

²²⁴ Das Schulwesen in Nordrhein-Westfalen aus quantitativer Sicht. 2008/09. Statistische Übersicht 369 (Düsseldorf: Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nord Rhein-Westfalen, 2009) 25.

Konfession der Schüler(-innen) an Bekenntnisschulen:

Schülerinnen und Schüler an Bekenntnisschulen 2008/09	Grundschule				
	evang.	jüdisch	röm-kath.	Gemein- schafts- schule	insg.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Schulen	103	2	1.034	2.127	3.266
Schülerinnen und Schüler	19.687	220	216.975	458.454	695.336
davon					
röm.-katholisch	3.479		132.588	144.485	280.552
evangelisch	9.544	1	36.180	145.184	190.909
islamisch	2.079		17.885	79.121	99.085
syrisch-orthodox	15		420	725	1.160
sonstige orthodox	181	1	1.762	3.828	5.772
jüdisch	8	186	45	264	503
andere Konfession	1.247	1	4.962	15.628	21.838
ohne Konfession	3.134	31	23.133	69.219	95.517
darunter vom Religionsunterricht abgemeldet (sind oben bei den Konfessionszugehörigen)					
evangelisch (abgemeldet)	18		28	653	699
röm.-kath. (abgemeldet)	5		206	286	497

Neither this table nor the answers in my questionnaires should be construed as showing that someone is or is not religious. For example, there are 280,552 Catholic grade school students in North Rhine-Westphalia. Do they all go to Church? Do they all believe in the teaching of the Catholic Church? One would have to ask each individual. All it really means is that 280,552 of the grade school students have been baptized and at least one of their parents pays Catholic “Church taxes.” Furthermore, these children have a right to Catholic RU and are automatically enrolled in it at schools that have at least 12 Catholics attending. Similarly, the 99,085 Muslim grade school students would have a right to Islam RU if it were ever introduced. I have asked people to state their religion because of this connection between one’s religious membership and one’s right to enrollment in school religious instruction.

Teachers were not asked about their religion. However, by definition all *Islamkunde* teachers must be Muslim and all RU teachers must be of the confession about which they are teaching. Some non-religious instruction teachers brought up their religion while answering the questions. I have drawn attention to their religion, when it seemed pertinent.

School A

School A is a *Gemeinschaftsgrundschule* meaning that outside of RU, students should only be exposed to ecumenical Christian values and ideas rather than Catholic or *Evangelisch* specific ones. School A shares its schoolyard with a Catholic grade school. School A is located in Cologne and has participated in the *Islamkunde* school trial since 2006. School A has 174 students, the large majority of whom are Muslim, and 11 teachers. There were about 45 4th-graders divided into two classes. Again, the majority of 4th-graders were Muslim. The principal was very active in requesting and implementing the *Islamkunde* school trial at School A. Although she was not Muslim or particularly religious according to her, she had lived in Turkey several years during her childhood, has an open attitude with regards to other cultures, and strongly believes that every child should learn about his or her faith to form a healthy self-identity. School A does not have a sufficient number of *Evangelische* or Catholic children to offer *Evangelische* or Catholic RU. *Islamkunde* is taught Friday afternoons. Children, who do not attend *Islamkunde*, are released early.

Teachers

Six teachers, including the *Islamkunde* teacher, took part in this study. All of the teachers had heard of the *Islamkunde* school trial that was taking place at their school.

Teacher A1 did not see any difference between *Islamkunde* and RU except for the Prophet. Teacher A1 felt that *Islamkunde* was a good alternative to Koran schools. According to Teacher A1 many moderate Muslim parents think that *Islamkunde* is good because they do not want to send their children to Koran schools. Non-Muslims get out an hour earlier, but Muslim children still like to go, according to Teacher A1, because students in grade school like to stay in

school longer. The teachers support the school trial. Teacher A1 was at School A before *Islamkunde* was introduced and has not noticed any problems since its introduction. When asked whether it helps with integration, Teacher A1 felt that it might but at least not noticeably. Teacher A1 mentioned that the teachers spend a lot of time in class doing integration work anyway like talking about the differences between mosques and churches.

Teacher A2 was a long-term substitute teacher at School A and had been at the school about a semester at the time of the interview. Teacher A2 was trained as a Catholic RU teacher, although she did not teach Catholic RU at School A because it was not offered. Teacher A2 believed that it was important for children to learn about their faith as well as other religions. Teacher A2 believed that Muslims have a right to be taught their religion in school and that it might lead to integration, if they are taught about other religions, too. Teacher A2 thought that children were happy enough to go to *Islamkunde* and had not heard of any problems from parents. However, teacher A2 admitted to having no idea what actually happens in *Islamkunde*.

Teacher A3 thought that *Islamkunde* was taught in Turkish and that *Islamkunde* had been offered at School A for more than 20 years. The only difference that Teacher A3 saw between *Islamkunde* and RU was that one focused on the Koran and the other on the Bible. Teacher A3 felt that the children enjoyed going to *Islamkunde*, that the parents had no problem with it, and that the teachers supported it. Teacher A3 did not believe that it did anything for integration. The only way that it would further integration, according to Teacher A3, would be if non-Muslims also attended and learned about Islamic culture.

Teacher A4 was a Muslim who taught Turkish at School A in the school's German-Turkish bilingual program introduced in 2008. Teacher A4 knew that the difference between *Islamkunde* and RU is that the former is fact-based instruction on religion whereas the second is

faith-based religious instruction. Teacher A4 believed that the reason for introducing *Islamkunde* was to counterbalance extremist, radical Islam. The purpose of *Islamkunde* was to teach children that Islam is not against democracy, to show them the dangers of such thought, to make them aware of where the dangers in the interpretation of Islam lie, how to live Islam in today's age, and how to be tolerant of other cultures. Teacher A4 believed that *Islamkunde* helps integration by providing Muslim students a healthy self-identity and knowledge about their own religion, which in turn would allow them to be more tolerant towards other cultures and religions. According to Teacher A4 most parents are happy with *Islamkunde* although not all Muslim parents send their children to it. Teacher A4 is satisfied with *Islamkunde* and does not want to see Islam RU.

Teacher A5 knew the difference between *Islamkunde* and RU is that the former is fact-based and the latter a faith-based approach to religious education. Teacher A5 thought that it is important that children learn about their religion and its background. Teacher A5 reported that almost all Muslim children were participating and learning about their religion and other religions. According to Teacher A5, the children were pretty happy to attend *Islamkunde* and there were no problems concerning the parents or teachers. Teacher A5 would be happy to see all children take part because they could learn a lot about Islam. Teacher A5 believed that *Islamkunde* certainly assists in integration because first, all knowledge helps with integration and second, the students learn about common Islamic-Christian roots in the Bible and religious holidays.

Teacher A6 was the *Islamkunde* teacher and a mother-tongue Turkish instructor. This was Teacher A6's third year of teaching *Islamkunde* in German. Teacher A6 was happy to teach *Islamkunde* because it improved her German. Teacher A6 believed that the reason for

introducing *Islamkunde* was to provide Islamic instruction to non-Turkish Muslims. Turkish Muslims had previously received some Islamic instruction as part of their mother-tongue instruction. Teacher A6 thought that it was important to have Islam taught in school because here it was overseen by school authorities and, therefore, was not fanatical like in some mosques. Teacher A6 believed that *Islamkunde* was the children's main source of information on Islam. According to Teacher A6, the students happily came to class, the teachers at School A at least did not appear to oppose it, and the parents admired her knowledge. Teacher A6 believed that *Islamkunde* will help integrate children over time because in *Islamkunde* they learn about their own religion and learn to respect other religions. According to Teacher A6, if people are religious, there is no problem with integration because religious people do not hate but are tolerant and love others. "Und weiter, für jedes Kind sagen, du bist integriert weil du Islamkunde hast, wir wünschen es so wird. Dafür geben wir Mühe."

It is interesting to note that only half of the teachers interviewed at School A, which had offered *Islamkunde* for three years before this study took place, had a clear idea of what *Islamkunde* was all about. The three teachers, who were knowledgeable about *Islamkunde*, all believed that *Islamkunde* fostered integration, whereas none of the other teachers were particularly convinced that it affected integration. Nevertheless, all of the teachers supported *Islamkunde*. Three of the teachers, including two Muslims, mentioned *Islamkunde* as being a good alternative or counterbalance to the type of Islam the children would be exposed to outside of school.

4th Grade Students

Six students took part in this study: four Muslims, one *Evangelische*, and one unreligious student. All the students had heard of the *Islamkunde* school trial that was taking place at their school.

Of the four Muslim students, three participated in *Islamkunde* and one did not attend any sort of religious instruction at school. All of the Muslim children said that in *Islamkunde* one learns about Islam, or phrased slightly differently, one learns about “unserem Prophet” (our prophet). When asked what the difference was to RU, the children mentioned that Christians learn about Jesus. All of the Muslim students felt that *Islamkunde* was a good idea. One mentioned that it allows Muslims to learn about their faith earlier, so it is not so hard later. One mentioned that there are many Muslims at the school, and one mentioned that one can learn what God gave them as an assignment.

All of the Muslim students said that students enjoyed going to *Islamkunde*. The three who attended *Islamkunde* said that their friends attended as well. The Muslim student who did not attend *Islamkunde* said his/her friends also did not attend.

When asked what sort of impact *Islamkunde* had on them, two said that they did not know. One said that he/she learns how to adapt to Islam. The Muslim student who did not attend *Islamkunde* remarked that that one has to stay at school longer.

Of the two non-Muslims, the *Evangelische* student did not attend religious instruction of any kind at school, while the unreligious student attended *Islamkunde*. Both students defined *Islamkunde* as a class in which one learns about Islam. When asked about the difference between *Islamkunde* and RU, the unreligious student mentioned that Christians go to Church during RU.

When asked if *Islamkunde* was a good idea, both answered that it was although the *evangelische* student emphasized that it would be good if the school offered *evangelische* and Catholic RU as well. Both said that their classmates and friends attended *Islamkunde*. As for the impact *Islamkunde* has on them, the unreligious student said that he/she knows more, and the *evangelische* students said that his/her friends have to stay at school longer.

The six students all appear to have positive feelings towards *Islamkunde*. They believe that *Islamkunde* is a good idea, and two mention that they have learned something in class. Some of their answers may simply reflect their inability at their age to think more abstractly. When asked the difference between *Islamkunde* and *evangelische*/Catholic RU, they seem to have interpreted the question to be asking the difference between Islam and Christianity rather than *Religionskunde* and RU. When asked about the impact that *Islamkunde* has on them, the two who do not attend both mentioned that those who attend must stay at school longer. Again, this seems to be a very literal interpretation.

Parents of 4th Grade Students

Eight parents of 4th-graders took part in this study: five Muslims, one Catholic, one *Evangelische*, and one unreligious parent. All of the parents had heard of the *Islamkunde* school trial that was taking place in their children's school.

Of the five Muslims, four had children who attended *Islamkunde* while the fifth's child did not attend any religious instruction at school. The Muslim parents all said that in *Islamkunde* students learn about and get to know Islam. One mentioned, "Man kann betten lernen und koran [sic]. Another wrote, "Man kann Islamkunde gleichsetzen mit Reli-unterricht."

Two Muslim parents answered that *Islamkunde* is not different from RU. One did not answer the question. One mentioned that the difference was the religion or confession. One wrote, “Bei kath. und evang. Religionsunterricht hat man Bibel in der Hand, der Lehrer/in und die Kinder lesen aus der Bibel. Bei Islamkunde lernen die Kinder Das Buch Koran gar nicht.”

As for the reasons for introducing *Islamkunde*, two Muslim parents simply mentioned that there are many Muslims in North-Rhine Westphalia. Two mentioned the ideas of “*Gleichstellung*” (equal treatment) and “*Gleichberechtigung*” (equal rights). One of these two also brought up religious freedom, recognition of Muslims, and integration as additional reasons. One mentioned that Muslim children are told that they can live peacefully in a society which has multiple beliefs.

When asked whether the introduction of *Islamkunde* was a good idea, two Muslim parents answered yes (including the parent whose child does not attend), one parent did not answer, and two parents answered no. The positive responses explained that it was good that *Islamkunde* was taught in German because all Muslims could partake together (although *Islamkunde* is not sufficient) and that RU takes place in schools everywhere in the world. One of the parents, who responded negatively, explained that he/she prefers Ethics class.

When asked if *Islamkunde* assists with integration, one Muslim parent answered yes that it assisted in integrating various Muslim children with one another, three parents responded no, and one did not reply to the question.

When asked if parents were satisfied with *Islamkunde*, three Muslim parents answered positively although one said that it was not sufficient, one parent said that he/she could not make a judgment since his/her child did not participate, and one did not believe that the parents were

satisfied. Finally, when asked whether *Islamkunde* has changed anything for them or their children, two Muslim parents mentioned that their children had learned more about Islam.

Of the three non-Muslim parents, two had children that did not attend RU of any kind and the unreligious parent's child attended *Islamkunde*. All three defined *Islamkunde* as religion for Muslims or the Islamic religion and none of them felt that there was any difference between *Islamkunde* and RU.

When asked for the reasons of introducing the school trial, the non-religious parent answered, "Forschungszwecke!"²²⁵ and the *Evangelische* parent felt that it was due to the high percentage of Muslim children at some schools and an attempt to prevent extremism. When asked whether the introduction of *Islamkunde* was a good idea, the unreligious parent felt that it was not a good idea, the *evangelische* parent thought it was although more research should be done, and the Catholic parent had no opinion. The non-religious parent did not believe that it helped with integration, the Catholic parent had no opinion, and the *evangelische* parent thought that it did in that people now feel that Muslims are taken seriously and are not disadvantaged.

The Catholic parent thought that parents were satisfied with *Islamkunde*. The *evangelische* parent was not happy because he/she felt that *evangelische* and Catholic RU should be offered at the school, too. The non-religious parent only sends his/her child to *Islamkunde* because the child wants to go, and he/she does not want his/her child to feel excluded from what the rest of his/her classmates are doing. Other than that, the class is of no importance to the unreligious parent.

Based on these questionnaires, there are clearly many different reasons that parents send or do not send their children to *Islamkunde*. One Muslim parent, who believes that *Islamkunde* is good, does not send his/her child to it, whereas a different Muslim parent, who opposes

²²⁵ "research purposes"

Islamkunde, does send his/her child there. Furthermore, one unreligious parent sends his/her child to *Islamkunde* just so that he/she does not feel excluded from the class community.

Although *Islamkunde* is offered at their children's school and five of the eight parents send their children to the class, none of the parents knew enough about *Islamkunde* to be able to explain the difference between it and real RU. This lack of knowledge suggests that they were either not sufficiently informed about *Islamkunde* by the school authorities or that the school authorities purposely downplayed this difference. Furthermore, it indicates that Muslim organizations are unlikely to receive much parental support in their quest for Islam RU since the parents do not see a difference between *Islamkunde* and Islam RU.

When asked for the reasons of introducing *Islamkunde*, parents listed the high number of Muslims in North-Rhine Westphalia, equal treatment and equal rights, religious freedom, integration, peaceful coexistence, research purposes, and as an attempt to prevent extremism. While "integration" made the list, only two parents felt that it helped with integration. One Muslim parent felt that it helped integrate different Muslims with each other and the *Evangelische* parent felt that it helped with integration because people now feel that Muslims are taken seriously and not disadvantaged. While both explanations can be seen to express "integration" in their way, neither, I would argue, fits with the classic definition and neither represents any kind of "assimilation" process on the part of Muslims.

School B

School B is a *Gemeinschaftsgrundschule*. Like School A it shares its schoolyard with a Catholic grade school. School B is also located in Cologne and has participated in the *Islamkunde* school trial since 2006. The school has a total of 167 students, out of which 125 are

Muslim. The fourth grade has two classes with a combined number of 37 students: 30 Muslims, 4 *Evangelische*, 2 without a religion, and 1 Jehovah Witness. The principal was very active in requesting and implementing the *Islamkunde* school trial at School B. The principal is educated as an *Evangelische* RU teacher, although she does not teach RU at School B. She strongly believes in the importance of school religious education. Therefore, she wanted to ensure that the majority of School B's students, who are Muslim, receive some form of religious education. In addition to *Islamkunde*, the school also offers *Evangelische RU*.

Teachers

Eight teachers elected to participate in the study, including the *Islamkunde* and *Evangelische* RU teachers. All of the teachers said that they had previous knowledge about *Islamkunde*. Teacher B1 felt that the reasons *Islamkunde* was introduced included integration, “*Entwicklung der Persönlichkeit der Kinder*”²²⁶ since religion is a part of who people are, “*Gerechtigkeit*”²²⁷ since RU is in the *Grundgesetz*, and “*Verständigung*”²²⁸ since people who know their background and origins are able to talk to others about them. Teacher B1 believed the difference between *Islamkunde* and RU was that the former is not missionary-like, it seeks to inform, and it is not confessional. According to Teacher B1, *Islamkunde* helps children by teaching them about themselves, their families, and the world. They are offered a religious world interpretation that is monitored by the state. Teacher B1 thinks that Muslim students feel better about themselves and experience less discrimination because of *Islamkunde*. Teacher B1 also believes that non-Muslims benefit from *Islamkunde* through *Islamkunde*-RU cooperation and by learning that Islam is normal. According to Teacher B1 Muslim students feel good about

²²⁶ “development of the children’s personality”

²²⁷ “justice”

²²⁸ “communication/ reaching an understanding”

Islamkunde because it forms a connection between the home and school, parents are happy because the state takes their beliefs seriously, and the other teachers value the integration work that is accomplished by *Islamkunde*. Teacher B1 feels that since the introduction of *Islamkunde* at School B, parents have become opener and more accepting, and children know more and are more self-confident as Muslims in Europe. Furthermore, Teacher B1 has learned that the overwhelming majority of Muslims like the overwhelming majority of Christians are not fundamentalists, but rather believers, who want the best for their children.

Teacher B2 believes that *Islamkunde* was introduced because more than 90% of School B's student population is made up of Muslim immigrants. Teacher B2 is aware that *Islamkunde* can only transmit truly objective information about Islam in contrast to RU. According to Teacher B2, *Islamkunde* helps Muslim students by increasing their self-knowledge and self-confidence and helps non-Muslim students by affirming the equality between Islam and *Evangelische* and Catholic religion. Teacher B2 has noticed that the parents support *Islamkunde* and seem opener with respect to teachers and the school administration. Nevertheless, teacher B2 feels that integration is a long process and contingent on many other factors.

Teacher B3 thinks that *Islamkunde* was introduced because of the high percentage of Muslim students and the need to teach students tolerance. Teacher B3 mentioned that *Islamkunde* is different than RU. It is oriented towards Muslim students and taught by Muslim teachers. It discusses the contents and interpretations of the Koran. According to Teacher B3, *Islamkunde* helps Muslim students by developing their Muslim identities in a mainly Christian-influenced society. Furthermore, other children are helped by learning about and accepting different religions. Teacher B3 explained that *Islamkunde* fosters integration by showing all children that *Islamkunde* is as much a part of school as RU is. Furthermore, Teacher B3 had

noticed that non-Muslim and Muslim students had become more tolerant of each other. Teacher B3 believes that Muslim students, their parents, and School B's teachers all support *Islamkunde*.

Teacher B4 believes that *Islamkunde* was introduced because some schools have high percentages of Muslim students. Teacher B4 thinks of *Islamkunde* as a class about Islam. Teacher B4 believes that *Islamkunde* helps Muslim students learn about their own religion, but thinks that an "Ethics" course for all students would be better. On the one hand, Teacher B4 believes that *Islamkunde* hurts children by teaching them more about their own religion instead of teaching them to become more tolerant of other religions, but on the other hand, Teacher B4 believes that *Islamkunde* helps with integration by teaching children about world themes and not only the one religion. According to Teacher B4, Muslim students, their parents, and School B's teachers all support *Islamkunde*. Although Teacher B4 was not at School B4 before the introduction of *Islamkunde*, Teacher B4 thinks that the introduction of it has improved cooperation between Muslim children.

Teacher B5 also thinks that *Islamkunde* was introduced because of the high Muslim student population at School B. Teacher B5 has no idea how *Islamkunde* is different than RU. According to Teacher B5 Muslim students and their parents are happy with *Islamkunde*, and the course helps the Muslim students learn about their religion and culture. On the other hand, Teacher B5 does not think that the other students are interested in it and does not think that all teachers at School B support it. Still, when asked about integration, Teacher B5 thought that *Islamkunde* fostered integration because Muslim students were more appreciated with respect to their religion. Teacher B5 only recently moved to School B after *Islamkunde* had already been introduced.

Teacher B6 feels that *Islamkunde* was introduced because the majority of students at School B are Muslim and because *Islamkunde* is monitored by the state unlike Islam instruction in the Koran schools. Teacher B6 did not see any difference between *Islamkunde* and RU except the religion. Teacher B6 thinks that *Islamkunde* helps Muslim students as much as RU helps Christian students. According to Teacher B6, both Muslim students and their parents are excited about *Islamkunde* and only very few Muslim parents do not send their children to the course. Teacher B6 has only been at School B for a short time; *Islamkunde* had already been introduced before Teacher B6's arrival.

Teacher B7 is the *Evangelische* RU teacher. Teacher B7 believes that the point of *Islamkunde* is to achieve openness in Islam instruction. Teacher B7 cannot see any difference between *Islamkunde* and RU. Teacher B7 feels that Muslim children, their parents, and the teachers at School B are all interested in *Islamkunde*. Teacher B7 believes that *Islamkunde* fosters integration because the parents' approval of *Islamkunde* is felt above and beyond the class itself and since the introduction of *Islamkunde* at the school, there are joint celebrations and an attempt to discuss shared stories. On certain themes, Teacher B7 works with the *Islamkunde* teacher to have joint religion class. The introduction of *Islamkunde* has also made Teacher B7 more interested, understanding, and tolerant with respect to other religions.

Teacher B8 is the *Islamkunde* teacher. Teacher B8 has taught *Islamkunde* for 8 years and also teaches Turkish mother-tongue instruction. Teacher B8 believes that the *Islamkunde* school trial was launched, so that Muslim students, who did not speak Turkish, could also receive Islam instruction. Teacher B8 thinks that *Islamkunde* helps Muslim children by teaching them about their own religion and showing them that all religions receive equal treatment. According to Teacher B8, Muslim students, their parents, and the other teachers all support

Islamkunde. Teacher B8 has noticed that the other teachers are very curious and ask him many questions. Teacher B8 works with the *Evangelische* RU teacher to hold joint classes together on certain themes and celebrations. According to Teacher B8, he teaches his students democratic values and gives them the feeling that their religious roots are accepted in society. Furthermore, Teacher B8 emphasizes the similarity of believers of different religions. Teacher B8 is very happy with the current form of Islam instruction and does not want real Islam RU because that would mean that he would have to work with “Konservative Moscheevereine.”²²⁹

Out of the eight teachers who participated in the study, only three, including the *Islamkunde* teacher, knew how *Islamkunde* differs from RU. Perhaps most surprisingly, Teacher B7, who teaches *Evangelische* RU and interacts with the *Islamkunde* teacher, did not know the difference between *Islamkunde* and RU. It is also noteworthy that the *Islamkunde* teacher prefers *Islamkunde* to a possible Islam RU. The three teachers, who moved to School B after the introduction of *Islamkunde*, all could not explain the difference between *Islamkunde* and RU. In fact, out of all eight teachers, only two teachers had any negative comments towards *Islamkunde*, and both of these had recently moved to the school. This difference could indicate that those who were present during the implementation process were more involved with *Islamkunde*, know more about it, and had more time to observe its positive effects. On the other hand, one of the teachers who were somewhat critical towards *Islamkunde* appears to be an “Ethics” class supporter, who opposes school religious class in general. Such a view may be little changed by more knowledge of *Islamkunde* or more time spent at the school.

Four of the teachers remarked that they had seen positive influences since the introduction of *Islamkunde* at School B. Two remarked that the parent-teacher cooperation had improved. One noticed that Muslim and non-Muslim student cooperation had improved. Two

²²⁹ “conservative Mosque organizations”

observed that they themselves had become more tolerant and knowledgeable. The *Islamkunde* teacher also mentioned that many teachers ask him questions and that he cooperates with the *Evangelische* RU teacher to hold joint lessons. One could construe all of these observances as steps towards integration. However, these steps seem to be being taken from both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

4th Grade Students

Eight students took part in the study: 6 Muslims, 1 Evangelisch, and one “other religion.” All of the students had heard of *Islamkunde*, which is taught at their school. All knew classmates and had friends that attended *Islamkunde* class. All believed that *Islamkunde* was a class in which one learned about Islam and only differed from RU in the religion taught.

The six Muslim students all believed that *Islamkunde* was a good idea because one learned about Islam in it. All but one of the Muslim students said that students enjoy going to *Islamkunde* class. The one, who said no, attends the class. This student said that he or she did not know if *Islamkunde* had influenced him or her in any way. The Muslim student, who did not attend *Islamkunde*, said that *Islamkunde* had no impact on him or her. The other four said that they had been impacted by *Islamkunde*. One had become more interested. One had learned more about the prophets. One thinks more about him or herself and others. One learned that one should show respect to one’s elders.

The “other religion” student did not know if *Islamkunde* was a good idea. The *Evangelische* student thought that *Islamkunde* was a good idea because one learned about God. The *Evangelische* student thought that he or she was not impacted by *Islamkunde* and the “other religion” student was unsure.

All of the students who partook in the study were well aware of *Islamkunde*. They all either attended the class themselves or had friends that did. From their perspective, *Islamkunde* was equivalent to RU. All of the Muslims and one of the non-Muslims believed that *Islamkunde* was a good idea. The other student was unsure. Overall, the students appear to have a positive attitude towards *Islamkunde*.

Parents of 4th Grade Students

Nine parents elected to take part in the study: 6 Muslims, 1 *Evangelisch*, and two who marked “other religion.” All nine parents had heard of *Islamkunde*, which was taught at their children’s school. Five of the six Muslim parents sent their children to *Islamkunde*. All of the Muslim parents believed that *Islamkunde* was a course in which Muslim children learned about their religion. All of the Muslim parents believed that *Islamkunde* differed from RU only in the religion. Two Muslim parents had no idea why the *Islamkunde* school trial was introduced. One mentioned that many Muslim children live in North Rhine-Westphalia. Three Muslim parents said that Muslim children should learn about their religion, one of whom also mentioned that all children should learn about other religions and learn to live in peace with each other. All of the Muslim parents felt that *Islamkunde* was a good idea because it allowed Muslim students to learn about their religion.

When asked about integration, two of the six had no comment. The other four all believed that *Islamkunde* fostered integration. One explained that it did so because it taught the children what was good and what was bad, another explained that every religion likes people, the third explained that one learns about Islam, and the fourth gave no explanation.

All six of the Muslim parents said that they were satisfied with *Islamkunde*, but the parent whose child did not attend said that he or she felt that the class was too religious. Other than the parent of the child, who did not attend the class, all of the others felt that *Islamkunde* had had a good influence on their children. One mentioned the child had learned more about Islam, one said that the child had learned more about Islam and other religions, one explained that the child had learned to differentiate between good and bad, one stated that the child had a good relationship with his or her parents, and one parent thinks that he or she talks more with the child about daily and youth problems including drugs and cigarettes.

The three non-Muslim parents all knew students who attended *Islamkunde*. The only difference they saw between *Islamkunde* and RU was the religion. Two of them did not know why the *Islamkunde* school trial was launched. One of the “other religion” parents said that it was introduced to foster integration. When specifically asked about integration, the *Evangelische* parent did not know if *Islamkunde* helped with integration. The other two believed it did because with *Islamkunde* one knows more and stereotypes can be dispelled. One of the “other religion” parents did not know if *Islamkunde* was a good idea, but the other two non-Muslim parents felt that it was a good idea for Muslim students. However, when asked later, the *Evangelische* parent did not think that *Islamkunde* was beneficial for students.

All the parents had heard of *Islamkunde*. None of the parents saw any difference between *Islamkunde* and RU. The Muslim parents had very positive views towards *Islamkunde*. Although the majority answered that they felt that *Islamkunde* fostered integration, when asked, none of their explanations seemed to be similar to what the government means with the term. While none of the non-Muslim parents seemed to openly oppose *Islamkunde*, they seemed less sure about it. Two were unsure why the school trial was launched, one was unsure if it fostered

integration, one was unsure if *Islamkunde* was a good idea, and one did not think that it benefitted students.

School C

School C is a *Gemeinschaftsgrundschule* like Schools A and B. However, unlike Schools A and B, School C is not located in the direct vicinity of a Catholic grade school. School C is one of nine grade schools in a small city located about 65 km west of Cologne. The city has 40,842 inhabitants. Its population density is 667 inhabitants per km². Overall, it is a small city like many others in rural North-Rhine Westphalia.

290 children are enrolled at School C and attend grades 1 through 4. They are taught by 21 teachers, including two mother-tongue teachers, one for Spanish and one for Turkish. There are about 55 4th-graders, out of whom at least a fourth is estimated to be Muslim. School C, like the overwhelming number of schools in North-Rhine Westphalia, does not participate in the *Islamkunde* school trial. Both Catholic and *Evangelische* RU are offered at the school. The principal allowed the study to take place at the school because he felt that he really exerted himself in ensuring that foreign students, especially Turkish students, received the additional support they needed in order to achieve academic success. Nevertheless, the principal warned that not many parents and teachers were likely to participate, in part because he doubted that most had ever heard of the school trial *Islamkunde*.

Teachers

Four teachers decided to take part in the study, one of whom taught *Evangelische* RU. Teacher C1 had never heard of *Islamkunde* before, but felt that theoretically at least everyone

should be taught their religion in school. Teacher C1 felt that the school trial was probably introduced out of a desire for “*Gleichberechtigung*.”²³⁰ Furthermore, Teacher C1 felt that *Islamkunde* would help Muslims build their “*religiöse Identität*.”²³¹

Teacher C2 had heard that there had been many “*kontroverse Debatten*”²³² on the subject and felt that integration was the main impetus behind the school trial. However, Teacher C2 also felt that *Islamkunde* would help Muslims develop their identity and that it should be introduced in School C because of this identity issue.

Teacher C3 had heard of *Islamkunde* as a supplement to mother-tongue instruction, albeit a course taught in German. Teacher C3 felt that the motivations for the school trial were integration and religious identity formation. Teacher C3 was unsure if *Islamkunde* really benefits Muslim students. According to Teacher C3, the hope would be that *Islamkunde* fosters “*gegenseitige Toleranz und Verständnis*”²³³ for both Muslim and Christian school children. Teacher C3 was also skeptical about introducing *Islamkunde* in School C because although it would be good for integration and religious identity *formation*, it would also be a potential source of conflict due to the many religious “*Splittergruppen*”²³⁴ in town.

Teacher C4 taught *Evangelische RU*. Teacher C4 had heard that *Islamkunde* was taught by qualified teachers and that it was well integrated into the rest of the curriculum. The goals of *Islamkunde* from Teacher C4’s point of view were to integrate Muslim students and to serve as a counterpoint to “*Islamistisches Gedankengut*.”²³⁵ Teacher C4 believed that it would help Muslim students by providing them with objective information about their religion so long as the teachers

²³⁰ “equal rights”

²³¹ “religious identity”

²³² “controversial debates”

²³³ “mutual tolerance and understanding”

²³⁴ “splinter groups”

²³⁵ “Islamist ideas”

were well trained and well “*kontrolliert*”²³⁶ by the state. Furthermore, Teacher C4 believed that *Islamkunde* would benefit Christian children because they would recognize Islam as a real religion that is openly taught instead of being hidden away in Koran schools. Teacher C4 was for the introduction of *Islamkunde* at School C and would be happy to cooperate with the *Islamkunde* teacher and organize “*gemeinsame Feiern, Feste*”²³⁷ if the *Islamkunde* teacher were willing. Teacher C4 also believed that the *Evangelische* Church supported *Islamkunde* out of “*Gleichberechtigung*”²³⁸ motivations.

Three of the four teachers who participated in the study had heard of *Islamkunde* before. Of course, one should not generalize this level of knowledge to the rest of the teachers. Many teachers may have chosen not to participate precisely because they had never heard of *Islamkunde*. The three teachers, who were somewhat informed about *Islamkunde*, all believed that integration was at least one of its goals. Other goals they mentioned were religious identity formation and a counterpoint to outside Islamic teachings to which the children are exposed. Two of the three mentioned that they would like to see *Islamkunde* introduced at School C, and the other, although more hesitant, was not completely opposed.

4th Grade Students

Four 4th grade students, two Catholics and two Muslims, participated in the study. Both Catholic students attended Catholic RU. One of the students had never heard of *Islamkunde*. The other defined it as “*Türkischer Religionsunterricht +MSU*.”²³⁹

²³⁶ “monitored”

²³⁷ “joint celebrations”

²³⁸ “equal rights”

²³⁹ “Turkish RU and mother-tongue instruction”

Neither of the two Muslim students attended any RU offered at the school. Both had heard of *Islamkunde* before. One described it as the “*kennenlernen des Religiones Islam*.”²⁴⁰ The other said that in *Islamkunde* Muslim children learn their faith like Catholic and *Evangelische* children do in RU. Furthermore, *Islamkunde* is good but only if the teacher has “*Ahnung*.”²⁴¹ Finally, the second Muslim student said that it was only fair that Muslim children should have a RU.

Although participation was very low, the responses of these four students would seem to suggest that Muslim children are more likely to have heard of *Islamkunde* and are more informed about it than their peers. Therefore, one can infer that their parents and other members of their religious community discuss *Islamkunde* in their presence and that *Islamkunde* is an important topic for Muslims in Germany in general. Furthermore, due to their overall positive comments, it seems that they were exposed to positive opinions with regards to the introduction of *Islamkunde*.

Parents of 4th Grade Students

Two Catholic parents of 4th-graders took part in this study. Both parents had children that attended Catholic RU at School C. One had not heard of the *Islamkunde* school trial. The other believed that it was RU for Muslim children taught in Turkish or Arabic for the purpose of the “*Vermittlung islamischer Werte*.”²⁴² The parent was against *Islamkunde* because the parent felt that RU should not be taught in a foreign language. If it were taught in a foreign language, the state would not be able to monitor and check the contents. Additionally, it would hinder

²⁴⁰ “the getting to know of the Islam religion”

²⁴¹ “a clue”

²⁴² “relaying of Islamic values”

integration. Finally, the parent believed that Islamic values stood in contradiction to Christian values and “*wir sind ein christliches Land!*”²⁴³

Again, although few parents responded, the answers of the two parents who did would indicate that non-Muslims, especially those whose children do not attend schools that offer *Islamkunde*, do not know very much about the *Islamkunde* school trial. Some parents may oppose it simply because they are unaware what it actually is. The parent above seemed to be mostly against it, for example, because the parent incorrectly believed that it was taught in a foreign language. Furthermore, one must be careful not to over generalize the opposition of the second parent because of response bias, i.e., people who feel strongly about an issue are more likely to respond to a questionnaire than those who have less strong feelings.

Discussion

Obviously, it is unfortunate that I did not have enough participants to do any statistical analysis. I would have preferred for more schools to participate, at least one more school that did not offer *Islamkunde*. However, there were no other principals who allowed their schools to participate. The most common reasons for negative responses to my inquiry were a lack of time due to the business of the end of the school year or other projects and the “controversialness” of my topic. One must remember that schools have always had to request to take part in the *Islamkunde* school trial. This means that either the school’s administration, a majority of the parent body, or both had to push for *Islamkunde* to be introduced at their school. It appeared that principals of schools that do not offer *Islamkunde* were reluctant because they did not want to broach the subject and possibly spark a debate in the school community.

²⁴³ “we are a Christian land!!”

The principals at the three schools that did participate were very supportive of my endeavor and several of the teachers were willing to take time out of their busy schedules. In contrast, student and parent participation was very low. Some of this may be blamed on the fact that student's carried the burden of remembering to bring the parent questionnaires and the consent forms home and then to bring both back to school. The children at least seemed very willing to participate but often remarked that they had "forgotten" the necessary forms.

Notwithstanding the low participation, we can make some preliminary observations. All of the teachers who work at schools that offer *Islamkunde* are aware that it is taught at their school. However, only about half of the teachers at Schools A and B knew enough about the course to be able to distinguish it from RU. Interestingly, being a RU teacher does not guarantee that one is well informed about *Islamkunde*. The well-informed teachers strongly believe that *Islamkunde* fosters integration. The ideas about how this integration takes place vary greatly but generally include both steps that Muslims and non-Muslims take. Explanations given include the idea that Muslim students integrate by forming healthy religious identities, their parents are happy with *Islamkunde* and are more open towards the school administration, non-Muslims see that Islam is equal to other religions and has a place in school, and people become more tolerant by learning about each other's faiths.

Another goal of *Islamkunde* mentioned by several teachers was the idea of it serving as a counterbalance to more fundamentalist interpretations of Islam that the students could be exposed to outside of school. Two Muslims, including one *Islamkunde* teacher, cited this goal. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that two Muslims, including one *Islamkunde* teacher, do not want to see *Islamkunde* transform into Islam RU, but would rather continue indefinitely with *Islamkunde*.

Only two teachers at Schools A and B had any negative comments toward *Islamkunde*. Both of these teachers had only been at School B for a short time. Overall, it seems that the teachers at schools that offer *Islamkunde* support the course.

In contrast, one of the teachers from School C, where *Islamkunde* is not offered, had not even heard of *Islamkunde* before. The three teachers who had heard of *Islamkunde* all felt that integration was one of its goals in addition to religious identity formation and its serving a counterpoint to outside Islamic teachings. Two of the teachers expressed their desire to see *Islamkunde* introduced at their school. As could be expected, the teachers at schools without *Islamkunde* seem much less informed about it to the extent of never having heard of it. Those who are somewhat informed seem to understand the goals of *Islamkunde* similarly to the teachers at schools who do offer *Islamkunde*. None of the teachers who participated were completely opposed to the idea of *Islamkunde*.

All of the students at Schools A and B were very aware of *Islamkunde* and either attended themselves or knew friends and classmates that did. None of the students saw any difference between *Islamkunde* and RU. All but one of the students felt that *Islamkunde* was a good idea; one was unsure. Overall, the students appear to have a positive attitude towards *Islamkunde*.

The non-Muslim students at School C were much less informed than their Muslim peers and all the students at Schools A and B. The Muslim students at School C seemed fairly informed and had generally positive attitudes towards *Islamkunde*.

All of the parents of the 4th-graders at Schools A and B had heard of *Islamkunde*, but none of them knew enough about it to explain how it differs from RU. When asked for the reasons and goals of *Islamkunde* parents listed the high number of Muslims in North-Rhine

Westphalia, equal treatment and equal rights, religious freedom, integration, peaceful coexistence, research purposes, and as an attempt to prevent extremism. While integration made the list, only about half of the parents agreed that *Islamkunde* fostered integration. What each parent meant by integration differed widely. Explanations of how integration was accomplished included that *Islamkunde* teaches children what is good and bad, every religion likes people, students learn about Islam, different Muslims integrate with each other, and people now feel that Muslims are taken seriously and not disadvantaged. These explanations do not appear to mirror the standard definitions for integration used by the teachers and school authorities. Regardless of this fact, all of the Muslim parents were very positive towards *Islamkunde*, and while some of the non-Muslim parents were less sure about it, none appeared to actively oppose it.

The responses of the parents from School C indicate that non-Muslim parents whose children attend schools that do not offer *Islamkunde* know next to nothing, or nothing, about *Islamkunde*. Some may oppose *Islamkunde* simply because they are not well informed.

Overall, one must highlight the fact that while *Islamkunde* is a controversial topic, the majority of those most directly concerned are ill-informed. First, none of the students and parents at even the schools that offered *Islamkunde* knew the difference between *Islamkunde* and RU. This would seem to strike a blow against the Muslim organizations since it would seem impossible to rally common Muslims to attack a difference of which they are unaware. Secondly, those that are uninformed are generally more critical towards *Islamkunde* than the others. Therefore, it would behoove supporters of *Islamkunde* to educate the general population instead of keeping it quiet. Finally, the teachers, parents, and students at schools with *Islamkunde* are very positive about it as are the Muslims at schools without it. It would seem

that *Islamkunde* has been a success with those most directly affected, and it seems a pity that more schools and students are not allowed to participate.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Findings

***Islamkunde* as a Source of Integration**

This study sought first to answer the question: Do NRW inhabitants believe that “integration” is the goal of *Islamkunde*? If not, what is the goal? How does *Islamkunde* promote integration?

The School Ministry considers integration to be one of the two main goals of *Islamkunde*, the other being to fight and prevent Islamic Extremism. As predicted, the political parties represented in the *Landtag* and the Muslim and Christian religious organizations interviewed also agreed that integration was one of the goals of *Islamkunde* or a future Islam RU. The well-informed teachers of the two schools offering *Islamkunde* believed strongly that *Islamkunde* fosters integration, and the three teachers who had heard of *Islamkunde* at the school that does not offer *Islamkunde* also agreed that integration was one of the goals. Other goals often mentioned by the parties, religious organizations, and teachers included combating Islamic Extremism, religious identity formation, the state’s attempt to control and define Islam, and for the sake of equality. As for the parents, while integration made the list, only about half of the parents at schools offering *Islamkunde* agreed that *Islamkunde* fosters integration, while out of the two parents who participated from the school that does not offer *Islamkunde*, one had not heard of the school trial and the second felt that it actually hindered integration. Parents also listed the high number of Muslims in North-Rhine Westphalia, equal treatment and equal rights, religious freedom, peaceful coexistence, research purposes, and the prevention of Islamic Extremism as other goals of *Islamkunde*.

Overall, it appears that those North Rhine-Westphalia inhabitants who are better informed about the school trial *Islamkunde* believe that integration is one of its goals. Out of the groups who participated in this study, the parents seemed least convinced about this goal. One could argue that they also comprise one of the least informed groups. None of the parents knew enough about *Islamkunde* to differentiate it from Islam RU. Furthermore, the only parent who believed that *Islamkunde* actually hindered integration did not even know that *Islamkunde* was taught in German.

Of course, there are always people who question whether Islam and Muslims can ever be integrated into Germany's "Christian-Occidental" society.²⁴⁴ The statement of the parent who saw *Islamkunde* as a hindrance to integration is a case in point: "*wir sind ein christliches Land!!*"²⁴⁵ However, this study indicates that the majority of well-informed North Rhine-Westphalia inhabitants believe that integration is one of the goals of *Islamkunde*. The question is whether a mutual understanding about how the different actors define the difficult concept of "integration" exists.

The VIKZ representative brought up this point in my interview with him. He believed that politicians viewed assimilation as the best type of integration. VIKZ opposes assimilation, although they support integration.²⁴⁶ It is true that at least historically it would appear that most Germans expect assimilation instead of being open to multiculturalism.²⁴⁷ After all, cultural

²⁴⁴ Christian Joppke, „State Neutrality and Islamic Headscarf Laws in France and Germany,“ Theory and Society 36.4 (2007), 337.

²⁴⁵ "we are a Christian land!!"

²⁴⁶ VIKZ, Personal Interview, 2 Jul. 2009

²⁴⁷ Claus Mueller, "Integrating Turkish Communities: A German Dilemma," Population Research and Policy Review 25.5/6 (2006), 420.

assimilation is the main idea behind German *Leitkultur*. In the *Leitkultur* context, foreign cultures and religions are considered inferior.²⁴⁸

If Muslims, as the VIKZ representative stated, do not want assimilation, what other types of acculturation exist? There are in fact four types of acculturation strategies depending on a “foreigner’s” desire to maintain his original culture versus his desire to contact the host society. Integration is defined as the desire to maintain one’s original culture while interacting with the host society at the same time. Separation is the maintenance of one’s original culture at the detriment of interacting with the host community. Assimilation is foregoing one’s original culture for that of the host society, and marginalization occurs when someone rejects his culture of origin but does not successfully make contact with the host culture.²⁴⁹ According to Hanna Zagefka and Rupert Brown’s 2002 study of 321 Ruhrgebiet secondary school students (Hauptschule and Gesamtschule students), 95% of Turkish students prefer integration to the other acculturation strategies.²⁵⁰ While the majority of the German students in the study, 61%, preferred “foreigners” to employ the integration strategy, 18% preferred assimilation and 19% marginalization. In other words, 37% of German students preferred “foreigners” to forsake their culture of origin completely.²⁵¹ Such results would suggest that “integration” may have different meanings for different people in the present study.

The German government defines integration as a long-term process. It’s [sic] aim is to include everyone in society who lives in Germany on a permanent and legal basis. Immigrants should have the opportunity to participate fully in all areas of society on an

²⁴⁸ Mueller 425.

²⁴⁹ Hanna Zagefka and Rupert Brown, „The Relationship between Acculturation Strategies, Relative Fit and Intergroup Relations: Immigrant-Majority Relations in Germany,“ European Journal of Social Psychology 32 (2002), 171/172.

²⁵⁰ Zagefka 179.

²⁵¹ Zagefka 178.

equal standing. Their responsibility is to learn German and to respect and abide by the constitution and its laws.²⁵²

This definition of integration makes no mention of immigrants' cultures of origin and their maintenance or disregard thereof, but it does provide the minimum "contact" they are expected to make with their German host culture: They are expected "to learn German and to respect and abide by the constitution and its laws."²⁵³ The German government promises equality in return.

At least theoretically the School Ministry official accepts this definition of integration when she explains how *Islamkunde* promotes integration, "Islamkunde bietet ein Stück Integration, weil es immer von der Situation des Schülers in dieser Diaspora ausgeht."²⁵⁴ She continues that *Islamkunde* transmits the values necessary for integration and communal life. Although this explanation appears in accordance with the German government definition of integration in that the values transmitted could be respect for the constitution and its laws, she does seem to be referring to the maintenance of the students' original culture as well when she mentions the Diaspora.

The political parties and the *Evangelische Kirche* appear to at least in part agree with the government's understanding of integration. The political parties stress that the students will learn that Islam is in agreement with German values in *Islamkunde* class and the *Evangelische Kirche* highlights that since *Islamkunde* is taught in German, they will acquire the language better. However, they both emphasize that *Islamkunde* also signifies a recognition of Islam on the part of the state and that this recognition in itself contributes to integration. One could make the case that this recognition by the state is an enactment of the promised equality since the

²⁵² Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, "Integration," *Integration Encyclopedia* 7 Jul. 2011 <http://www.integration-in-deutschland.de/cIn_178/nm_282400/SubSites/Integration/EN/04__Service/Lexikon/__Function/glossar-catalog.lv2=282428,lv3=419560.html>.

²⁵³ Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, "Integration."

²⁵⁴ Official in North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009. "Islamkunde provides a bit of integration because it is founded on the idea of the students living in this Diaspora."

German state recognizes various religions, but I would argue that it points to a broader understanding of integration.

While it is debated whether or not respect and mutual knowledge and recognition are necessary for integration,²⁵⁵ I would argue that when discussing the integration of Muslims into German society, one is talking about more than each Muslim's navigation between balancing his religion and culture of origin with the German language and values. Johan Galtung defines integration as "the process whereby two or more actors form a new actor. When the process is completed, the actors are said to be integrated."²⁵⁶ In addition to each individual Muslim integrating his religious identity with his German identity, German's traditionally Christian-Occidental society is also integrating Islam, and when the process is completed, German culture will be at least slightly different than it was before. At least subconsciously Europeans and Germans understand that integration means change on their part as well. The fear of this change explains why 80% of Europeans want Muslims in the West to assimilate to their culture and why 50.1% of former East Germans feel threatened by foreign cultures and nations.²⁵⁷

Obviously fear is a negative reaction to the understanding that integration is at least to an extent a two-way street. Especially the teachers and the non-Muslim parents stress how *Islamkunde* promotes integration and change on the part of the host culture. They stress that *Islamkunde* is a recognition of Islam and Muslims and that this recognition not only makes the Muslims feel more self-confident and a part of German society, but that it also is important for non-Muslims to realize that Islam is equal to Christianity. Furthermore, they say that non-Muslims learn more about Islam because of *Islamkunde*, and in this way it dispels stereotypes.

²⁵⁵ Joppke 339.

²⁵⁶ Johan Galtung, "A Structural Theory of Integration," *Journal of Peace Research* 5.4 (1968), 377.

²⁵⁷ Mechthild Küpper, „In Deutschland starke Vorbehalte gegen den Islam,“ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 3 Dec. 2010, 7 Jul. 2007 < <http://www.faz.net/artikel/C30923/integration-in-deutschland-starke-vorbehalte-gegen-den-islam-30321063.html>>.

Finally, they stress that both Muslims and non-Muslims learn to become more tolerant and respectful of each others religions, they learn about shared religious roots, and that they partake in joint religious celebrations and even joint religious class on occasion.

On the other hand, the Muslim religious organizations and the Muslim parents focus more on Muslim students when discussing how *Islamkunde* promotes integration. They focus on how the class teaches the students morals and tolerance and respect for other people. The Muslim religious organizations also emphasize that *Islamkunde* helps with religious identity formation, although the political parties and teachers also list this as one of the ways *Islamkunde* promotes integration. In this way, Muslims in this study focus on *Islamkunde*'s ability to help integrate the individual students rather than the non-Muslims broader interpretation of how *Islamkunde* promotes the integration of Islam into German society. However, I would argue that these two interpretations do not stand in contradiction of each other and that it is very possible that *Islamkunde* could fulfill both roles at the same time.

In addition to language acquisition, Muslim students also need to develop intercultural and interreligious competencies in order to integrate well into German society.²⁵⁸ They need to preserve their religion identity while interacting with German culture. *Islamkunde* class in German schools provides a good environment to attain this goal. As for Germany, the state is trying to integrate Islam into German society.²⁵⁹ The fear exists that supporting Muslim institutions or Muslim rights for recognition and the state's support of their cultural differences and identity could foster separatist tendencies and could weaken social cohesion and lead to

²⁵⁸ Frank Gesemann, „Die Integration junger Muslime in Deutschland,“ Islam und Gesellschaft Nr. 5 (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2006), 20.

²⁵⁹ Riva Kastoryano, „Religion and Incorporation: Islam in France and Germany,“ International Migration Review 38.3 (2004).

disintegration.²⁶⁰ However, Germany's RU tradition, and *Islamkunde* must be seen as a temporary substitute for Islam RU, provides a way for the state to recognize religious differences of students, while uniting them in one school community.

Level of Acceptance of *Islamkunde*

This study's second main question was: Do NRW inhabitants support *Islamkunde*?

Some jurists claim that the lack of progress in the field of *Islamkunde* and Islam RU is not due to legal hurdles so much as the Islamophobic climate in Germany.²⁶¹ Indeed, according to a representative polling conducted by the opinion research institute TNS Emnid in summer 2010, fewer Germans have positive attitudes towards Muslims than other Europeans. The poll found that 62% of the Dutch, 56% of the French, and 55% of the Danes had positive attitudes towards Muslims whereas only 34% of West Germans and 26% of East Germans had positive attitudes towards Muslims. Additionally it was found that 42% of Germans want to severely restrict Muslims from practicing their religion, and only about half of the Germans polled felt that all religions should enjoy the same rights.²⁶²

Despite these anti-Islam sentiments present in the German population, all five political parties represented in the North Rhine-Westphalian government supported *Islamkunde* as a step towards the implementation of Islam RU. However, the School Ministry official I interviewed

²⁶⁰ Mueller 422/423.

Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham, „Challenging the Liberal Nation-State? Postnationalism, Multiculturalism, and the Collective Claims Making of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Britain and Germany,“ *American Journal of Sociology* 105.3 (1999), 658.

²⁶¹ „Unbehagen am Islam‘ verhindert Entwicklungen im Bereich Religionsunterricht,“ *Islamische Gesellschaft Milli Görüs* 22. Jan 2011, 7 Jul. 2011 <<http://www.igmg.de/nachrichten/artikel/2011/02/16/unbehagen-am-islam-verhindert-entwicklungen-im-bereich-religionsunterricht?L=.html.html.html%2Fphprojekt%2Flib%2F%2Finclude%2Flib.inc.php.html>>.

²⁶² Küpper.

warned that this does not reflect the sentiments of the North Rhine-Westphalian population on this subject:

...[Islamkunde] ist wahrlich kein Thema mit dem man den Durchschnittswähler in NRW begeistern kann. Es gibt sehr viele Vorurteile und auch eine gehörige Portion Rassismus in unserem Land und es gibt viele, die sagen, "Warum sollen die auch noch Religionsunterricht erhalten."²⁶³

She explained that the School Ministry could not even convince many of the teachers that Islam RU is a good idea, and that even at schools with high percentages of Muslim students, there is strong resistance to the implementation of *Islamkunde* due to the difficulties of interacting with Muslim parents.

Despite these warnings, my study found that on the contrary most students, parents, and teachers supported *Islamkunde* especially at the schools where it was taught. All the students, both Muslim and non-Muslim, at Schools A and B, except for one who was unsure, thought that *Islamkunde* was a good idea. The Muslim students at School C, where *Islamkunde* was not taught, also seemed relatively well informed and had generally positive attitudes towards *Islamkunde*. All of the Muslim parents at the schools where *Islamkunde* had very positive attitudes towards the subject, and while the non-Muslim parents were less sure about it, none appeared to actively oppose it. As for the teachers, only two from School A and B had any negative comments towards *Islamkunde*, and two of the three teachers, who had heard of *Islamkunde*, at School C expressed their desire to see *Islamkunde* introduced at their school.

My study found that those who did have negative attitudes towards *Islamkunde* had less exposure to and knowledge about *Islamkunde* and possibly Muslims in general. The non-Muslim parents at School C, where *Islamkunde* was not taught, knew next to nothing about

²⁶³ Official in North Rhine-Westphalia School Ministry, Personal Interview, 7 Jul. 2009. "...[Islamkunde] is truly not a topic with which one can excite the average voter in North Rhine-Westphalia. There are many stereotypes and also a decent amount of racism in our state and there are many, who say, 'Why should they get RU on top of everything else.'"

Islamkunde. The two teachers who voiced negative sentiments toward *Islamkunde* had only been at School B for a short time. These findings support the idea found in the TNS Emnid poll that 60% of the minority of Germans, who have contact to Muslims, find this contact to be „very“ or „rather“ pleasant.²⁶⁴ Overall, this study indicates that *Islamkunde* finds a high level of acceptance where it is introduced and the more the North Rhine-Westphalia population comes into contact with it and learns about it.

The German religious organisations' stance on *Islamkunde* was also noteworthy. As expected, all of the Muslim and Christian religious organisations support the implementation of Islam RU as soon as possible. However, this attitude did not translate to full support of *Islamkunde*. While DITIB, VIKZ, and the *Evangelische Kirche* support *Islamkunde* as a step towards Islam RU, the ZMD, Islamrat, and Catholic Church opposed *Islamkunde* even as such a transitional step. Based on the study though, it seems unlikely that the latter organisations will receive much support from the general or even the Muslim North Rhine-Westphalian population in their fight for Islam RU because the study showed that many teachers and all of the parents and students, who participated, could not distinguish between *Islamkunde* and Islam RU. Furthermore, two Muslim teachers, who could distinguish between the two forms of religious education, specified that they in fact do not want to see *Islamkunde* transform into Islam RU but would rather continue indefinitely with *Islamkunde*. These results suggest that German politicians rather than the general German population will be the religious organisations' best ally in their fight for Islam RU, and that the implementation of Islam RU will be a top-down process. This is not to say that the general population will oppose Islam RU. On the contrary, since *Islamkunde* is well accepted and the average North Rhine-Westphalian inhabitant does not see a difference

²⁶⁴ Küpper.

between *Islamkunde* and Islam RU, Islam RU, when implemented, is likely to meet with wide acceptance.

Future Developments and Research

Developments in North Rhine-Westphalia Since Completion of Study

The CDU Integrations Minister announced the decision to introduce an Islam RU school trial on June 1st, 2009, following the suggestions of the Islamkonferenz. Various Muslim organisations were to participate on an individual basis in creating the syllabi.²⁶⁵ Since November 9th, 2010, the School Minister Sylvia Löhrmann and the Koordinationsrat der Muslime (KRM), in which all of the Muslim organisations in the study are represented, have held three discussions about the possibilities of introducing confessional Islam RU,²⁶⁶ and on February 22nd, 2011, they finally signed a joint declaration on the introduction of confessional Islam RU.²⁶⁷

The declaration includes an agreement on the creation of an advisory council composed of the KRM and some non-organised Muslim members. All members must be Muslim,²⁶⁸ and the advisory council will fulfill the role of the German religious community, similar to the role of the Churches, and the role of the necessary religious partner to the state in the implementation of

²⁶⁵ „Durchbruch für islamischen Religionsunterricht in NRW,“ Katholische Nachrichtenagentur 22 Feb. 2011, 7 Jul. 2011 <<http://kirchensite.de/aktuelles/news-aktuelles/datum/2011/02/22/durchbruch-fuer-islamischen-religionsunterricht-in-nrw/>>.

²⁶⁶ Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen and Koordinationsrat der Muslime, „Gemeinsame Erklärung des Koordinationsrat der Muslime (KRM) und der Ministerin für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen über den Weg zu einem bekenntnisorientierten Islamunterricht,“ Düsseldorf, 22 Feb. 2011.

²⁶⁷ Sylvia Löhrmann, „Die Zukunft des islamischen Religionsunterrichts in NRW,“ Rede der Ministerin für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 6 May 2011.

²⁶⁸ Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen and Koordinationsrat der Muslime, „Gemeinsame Erklärung.“

Islam RU process to include participation in creating syllabi and selecting teachers.²⁶⁹ The advisory council solution will only last until the Muslims achieve the legal recognition of a true German religious community.²⁷⁰ Despite the general acceptance of the advisory council solution, there are some dissenting voices in the Muslim North Rhine-Westphalia community. Lamya Kaddor, leader of the *Liberal-Islamischen Bundes* (LIB) and experienced *Islamkunde* teacher, rejects the state's agreement with the „conservative“ KRM and demands a seat on the advisory council. The Alevi Community in Germany also criticized the KRM's role as the partner to the state. However, the School Ministry maintains that the council will not only be composed of KRM representatives but rather of various Muslim streams in North Rhine-Westphalian society.²⁷¹

The joint government-KRM decision to implement Islam RU carries with it legal ramifications. On March 31st, 2011, the *Landtag* unanimously passed the resolution entitled „Der Islam ist ein Teil Deutschlands und Nordrhein-Westfalens,“ which includes the declaration of the *Landtag*'s commitment to the implementation of Islam RU.²⁷² On June 29th, 2011, the bill to implement Islam RU as a regular school subject in North Rhine-Westphalia, was read in front of the *Landtag* and as June 30th. It stipulates for the insertion of paragraph 132a to the North Rhine-Westphalia school code:

Schaffung einer Übergangslösung, die es dem Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung erlaubt, Religionsunterricht für Schüler islamischen Glaubens als ordentliches Lehrfach einzuführen, ohne dass sämtliche im Grundgesetz und in der Verfassung für das Land Nordrhein-Westfalen geltenden Voraussetzungen erfüllt sind²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Dominik Reinle, „Islamunterricht ab 2012 in ganz NRW,“ *WDR*, 2 Mar. 2011, 7 Jul. 2011 <<http://www.wdr.de/themen/kultur/religion/islam/religionsunterricht/beirat.jhtml>>.

²⁷⁰ „Durchbruch für islamischen Religionsunterricht in NRW.“

²⁷¹ Reinle.

²⁷² Löhrmann.

²⁷³ North Rhine-Westphalia, Gesetz zur Einführung von islamischem Religionsunterricht als ordentliches Lehrfach (6. Schulrechtsänderungsgesetz), Gesetzentwurf, 21 Jun. 2011.

The bill is still in debate.²⁷⁴

The Islam RU subject will start at the around 130 schools, where *Islamkunde* is already being taught. At the end of the 2010-2011 school year, there are about 80 *Islamkunde* teachers.²⁷⁵ On July 20, 2011 an additional 50 teachers completed the *Islamkunde* certification course.²⁷⁶ These teachers will be joined by graduates of the University of Münster's Islam RU education program. From there, Islam RU will slowly expand to cover all of the North Rhine-Westphalia.²⁷⁷ Mr. Korchinde, who is responsible for the University of Münster's program estimates that the complete coverage of North Rhine-Westphalia will require an additional 800 teachers.²⁷⁸ The school minister cautions that there will not be a huge increase in teaching positions since the allotment of teachers for religion class is calculated based on two hours per child. Of course, adding a new RU option, introducing in other words parallel classes, will add to the required teacher numbers, but the School Minister is confident that this increase will be manageable.²⁷⁹ In any case, North Rhine-Westphalia is looking forward to introducing the first confessional Islam RU as early as the 2012/2013 school year at schools currently offering

“The creation of a transitional solution, which allows the School and Continuing Education Ministry, to introduce RU for students of the Muslim faith as a normal school subject, without having fulfilled all the applicable requirements in the *Grundgesetz* and in the North Rhine-Westphalia constitution”

²⁷⁴ North Rhine-Westphalia, Gesetz zur Einführung von islamischem Religionsunterricht als ordentliches Lehrfach (6. Schulrechtsänderungsgesetz), Detailansicht, 20 Oct. 2011 <http://www.landtag.nrw.de/portal/WWW/Webmaster/GB_II/II.2/Landtagsdokumentation/Suche/Suchergebnisse_Ladok15.jsp?w=native%28%27+%28+ID+ph+like+%27%271501943/0100%27%27++%29+%27%29&order=native%28%27DOKDATUM%281%29%2FDescend+%27%29&view=detail>.

²⁷⁵ „Löhrmann: ,Wir wollen einen modernen, schülerorientierten Islamischen Religionsunterricht,“ Islamische Gesellschaft Milli Görüs 10 May 2011, 7 Jul. 2011 <<http://www.igmg.de/nachrichten/artikel/2011/05/10/loehrmann-wir-wollen-einen-modernen-schuelerorientierten-islamischen-religionsunterricht.html>>.

²⁷⁶ “Erste Islamkundelehrer mit unbefristeter Unterrichtserlaubnis Allah und Mohammed in der Schule,” Bezirksregierung Münster Zentrale, 21 Jul. 2011, 20 Oct. 2011 <http://www.bezreg-muenster.de/startseite/presse/pressearchiv/2011/20110721_Erste_Islamkundelehrer_mit_unbefristeter_Unterrichtserlaubnis_Allah_und_Mohammed_in_der_Schule/index.html>.

²⁷⁷ Löhrmann.

²⁷⁸ Reinle.

²⁷⁹ Löhrmann.

Islamkunde.²⁸⁰ In this way, *Islamkunde* will complete its transitional stepping-stone role in bringing about Islam RU.

Future Research

One of the disadvantages of my study is its small scale. Only three schools participated and the non-response rate among the children and parents was great. Even in Michael Kiefer's study only five schools participated, three of which were in Cologne,²⁸¹ and his study only achieved a response rate of 53.1%.²⁸² Obviously a large scale study, including more schools outside of Cologne, would be more representative of the North Rhine-Westphalian population.

Furthermore, there are many issues related to *Islamkunde* and Islam instruction in general that need to be explored in more detail. These include the legal issues that surround Islam RU as well as the *Islamkonferenz*'s suggestions with respect to these laws, the general debate in society of whether RU should be continued at all or whether Ethics class would be better for all students, the new Alevi RU, the proposed North Rhine-Westphalian implementation of Islam RU, and an in-depth comparison between the school trials in the different German states as well as Germany's solutions in comparison to other European countries.

²⁸⁰ Reinle.

²⁸¹ Michael Kiefer, *Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, 195.

²⁸² Michael Kiefer, *Islamkunde in deutscher Sprache in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, 196.

APPENDIX
QUESTIONAIRES

Fragebogen für Schüler aus der 4. Klasse [Schule ohne *Islamkunde*]

1. Zu welchem Glaube gehörst du?
katholisch
evangelisch
muslimisch
jüdisch
keinem

2. Gehst du zum Religionsunterricht?
Ja – katholischer Religionsunterricht
Ja – evangelischer Religionsunterricht
Ja – anderer
Nein

3. Hast du von *Islamkunde* gehört?
Ja
Nein

4. Was ist *Islamkunde*?

5. Worin unterscheidet sich *Islamkunde* von katholischem und evangelischem Religionsunterricht?

6. Glaubst du, dass *Islamkunde* eine gute Idee ist? Warum? Warum nicht?

7. Würde die Einführung von *Islamkunde* in deiner Schule etwas für Dich ändern? Wenn ja, was würde sich ändern? Wenn nein, warum würde sich nichts ändern?

Fragebogen für Schüler aus der 4. Klasse [Schule mit *Islamkunde*]

1. Zu welchem Glaube gehörst du?
katholisch
evangelisch
muslimisch
jüdisch
keinem
2. Gehst du zum Religionsunterricht?
Ja – katholischer Religionsunterricht
Ja – evangelischer Religionsunterricht
Ja – Islamkunde
Ja – anderer
Nein
3. Hast du von *Islamkunde* gehört?
Ja
Nein
4. Was ist *Islamkunde*?
5. Worin unterscheidet sich *Islamkunde* von katholischem und evangelischem Religionsunterricht?
6. Glaubst du, dass *Islamkunde* eine gute Idee ist? Warum? Warum nicht?
7. Gehen deine Klassenkameraden zur *Islamkunde*?
8. Gehen deine Freunde zur *Islamkunde*?
9. Mögen die Schüler, die zur *Islamkunde* gehen, das Fach?
10. Welche Auswirkungen hat *Islamkunde* auf Dich?

Fragebogen für die Eltern der Schüler aus der 4. Klasse [Schule ohne *Islamkunde*]

1. Zu welchem Glaube gehört Ihr Kind?
katholisch
evangelisch
muslimisch
jüdisch
anderer
keinem
2. Geht Ihr Kind zum Religionsunterricht?
Ja – katholischer Religionsunterricht
Ja – evangelischer Religionsunterricht
Ja – ein anderer
Nein
3. Haben Sie von *Islamkunde* gehört?
Ja
Nein
4. Was ist *Islamkunde*?
5. Worin unterscheidet sich *Islamkunde* von katholischem und evangelischem Religionsunterricht?
6. Warum glauben Sie, dass *Islamkunde* in einige Schulen in Nordrhein-Westfalen eingeführt wird?
7. Glauben Sie, dass *Islamkunde* eine gute Idee ist? Wenn ja, warum? Wenn nein, warum nicht?
8. Glauben Sie, dass *Islamkunde* die Integration fördert? Wenn ja, warum? Wenn nein, warum nicht?
9. Möchten Sie, dass *Islamkunde* in der Schule Ihres Kindes eingeführt wird? Wenn ja, warum? Wenn nein, warum nicht?
10. Würde die Einführung von *Islamkunde* für Sie oder ihr Kind etwas ändern? Wenn ja, was? Wenn nein, warum nicht?

Fragebogen für die Eltern der Schüler aus der 4. Klasse [Schule mit *Islamkunde*]

1. Zu welchem Glaube gehört Ihr Kind?

- katholisch
- evangelisch
- muslimisch
- jüdisch
- anderer
- keinem

2. Geht Ihr Kind zum Religionsunterricht?

- Ja – katholischer Religionsunterricht
- Ja – evangelischer Religionsunterricht
- Ja – Islamkunde
- Ja – anderer
- Nein

3. Haben Sie von *Islamkunde* gehört?

- Ja
- Nein

4. Was ist *Islamkunde*?

5. Worin unterscheidet sich *Islamkunde* von katholischem und evangelischem Religionsunterricht?

6. Warum glauben Sie, dass *Islamkunde* in einige Schulen in Nordrhein-Westfalen eingeführt wird?

7. Glauben Sie, dass die Einführung von *Islamkunde* eine gute Idee ist? Wenn ja, warum? Wenn nein, warum nicht?

8. Glauben Sie, dass *Islamkunde* die Integration fördert? Wenn ja, warum? Wenn nein, warum nicht?

9. Kennen Sie Schüler, die zur *Islamkunde* gehen?

10. Gehen die Freunde Ihres Kindes zur *Islamkunde*?

11. Ist *Islamkunde* von Vorteil für Schüler?

12. Sind Eltern zufrieden, dass *Islamkunde* an der Schule Ihres Kindes angeboten wird?

13. Hat die Einführung von *Islamkunde* etwas für Sie oder ihr Kind etwas verändert? Wenn ja, was? Wenn nein, warum nicht?

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