

Can Germany's Newest Refugees Become "European?" Negotiating Self-Identity in the Wake of Psychological Trauma

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Across Europe, migrating Muslim refugees are transforming its profile; as Germany's Muslim population is set to quadruple to 20 million by 2020, will its newest arrivals become "European?" In other words, in this rapidly changing world, is identity the reproduction of cultural values, or do new personal narratives contest with old cultural values to create new identities? Psychological trauma may however, complicate the process of identity formation and adaptation in individuals and their children, often for generations. Distressing events endured by forced migrants fleeing war can negatively affect: how refugees from war-torn nations understand themselves; the nature of the debilitating symptoms they express and experience; whether or not they will assimilate to their host countries' cultural values, and how successfully their families will resettle.

This paper explores the factors shaping "identity" in Syrian and Afghani refugees in the early stages of integration using qualitative and quantitative data from three German cities, Berlin, Bonn, and Cologne. While religion and psychology are not unrelated, psychological traits of subject groups are more reliable indicators of future behavior than simple religious affiliation. The success or failure of refugee resettlement and integration may depend on a largely unexamined aspect: the effects of trauma on the psychology of individual refugees.

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