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Challenges to the development of Islam in Germany Post World War II

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Abstract:

This research aims to trace the development of Islam in Germany after World War II by examining the nexus between wartime devastation, economic reconstruction, and labor migration policies that eventually produced permanent Muslim communities. Islam is defined not merely as a migrant religion but as an integral part of Germany's modern historical transformation. The study employs a historical methodology consisting of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The scope covers the religious, social, and cultural dynamics of Muslim communities in Germany from 1945 to the early twenty-first century. The main findings reveal that Islam in Germany expanded through successive waves of migration, institutionalization of religious organizations, and increasing political and social engagement. The study also identifies key challenges, including organizational fragmentation, social discrimination, and societal

resistance to religious diversity. Practical recommendations emphasize the necessity of more inclusive policies in education, citizenship, and religious freedom. This research contributes conceptually by linking migration studies, social history, and religious pluralism, and practically by offering policy recommendations for German authorities in managing religious diversity.

Keywords: discrimination; Germany; identity; immigration; integration; Islam; pluralism; World War II.

INTRODUCTION

World War II, which raged between 1939 and 1945, represents one of the most catastrophic turning points in human history (Eckel, 2023). This global conflict mobilized more than one hundred million people from across the continents, involving nearly every major power of the time in two opposing alliances: the Allies and the Axis. The war not only obliterated geopolitical orders but also unleashed unprecedented human suffering, with death tolls estimated between fifty and seventy million lives, including the horrors of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Tripathi, 2024a). What made this war unique was the phenomenon of "total war," in which industrial, economic, and scientific resources were completely subordinated to the machinery of destruction, collapsing the traditional boundary between civilian and military spheres. Yet beyond the immediacy of the battlefield, the consequences of this colossal conflict were inscribed deeply into the demographic and socio-cultural fabric of the post-war world. One of the less frequently examined outcomes is how the devastation of Germany, the core of the Axis alliance, catalyzed a process of transformation that would eventually reposition the country as a magnet for immigration and, by extension, as one of the central stages for the encounter between Islam and Western Europe (King, 2018).

The collapse of the Nazi regime left Germany not only territorially divided and politically occupied but also economically devastated. The challenge of reconstruction required more than just rebuilding industries and infrastructures; it demanded an infusion of labor that the domestic population, decimated by war and weakened by the post-war crises, could not provide. In the 1960s, the West German government introduced policies to recruit foreign workers, known as *Gastarbeiter,* from Mediterranean countries, particularly Turkey, as well as from parts of the Middle East and North Africa (Dowlah, 2024). While originally envisioned as a temporary measure to accelerate industrial growth, this labor migration evolved into a permanent demographic shift. Many of the migrants chose to settle rather than return to their countries of origin, thereby sowing the seeds for the establishment of enduring Muslim communities within German society (Kirişci & Yıldız, 2023). In effect, the post-war economic vacuum created by WWII indirectly facilitated the expansion of Islam in a land where, historically, the religion had no deep cultural roots.

Over the subsequent decades, Islam in Germany grew from an immigrant religion into a visible and institutionalized presence. The construction of mosques, the formation of cultural associations, and the establishment of educational initiatives for younger generations marked the gradual embedding of Islamic life into the German urban and cultural landscape (Emmerich, 2025). According to recent demographic studies, Germany today harbors the second-largest Muslim population in Western Europe, surpassed only by France (Bergmann et al., 2024). This demographic reality has become a focal point of national debates on identity, multiculturalism, and the accommodation of religious pluralism. For some politicians, the permanence of these communities has led to the acknowledgement of Germany as a *country of immigration,* a radical departure from its self-image in the immediate post-war decades (Borevi, 2024).

The academic literature on Islam in Europe has attempted to make sense of these developments from multiple perspectives. Early scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s primarily concentrated on the sociological dimensions of migration, examining the processes of integration, adaptation, and the negotiation of Muslim identities within secular European contexts (Koenig, 2023). Works such as those by Cesari and Modood highlight the tension between cultural preservation and assimilation pressures, noting the persistence of religious identity among migrants despite systemic barriers. In the German context, scholars like Schiffauer and Mandel analyzed how Turkish immigrants developed community infrastructures that allowed Islam not only to survive but to flourish in an environment where it was initially perceived as foreign (Kuppinger, 2014a). These studies laid the foundation for understanding Islam in Germany through the lens of integration.

However, as the global political climate shifted especially after the events of September 11, 2001, the scholarly gaze turned increasingly toward security and radicalization discourses (Abbas, 2024). Research began to scrutinize the intersection of Islam with issues of national security, citizenship, and identity politics, often framing Muslim presence as a challenge to Western liberal values. Authors such as Bassam Tibi and Jonathan Laurence emphasized the dilemmas faced by European states in balancing multicultural tolerance with concerns over radicalization and social cohesion (Alaoui, 2022). In Germany, debates surrounding headscarves, mosque constructions, and Islamic education in public schools became sites of contention, reflecting broader anxieties about cultural integration and national identity (E. Becker, 2022).

More recently, scholarship has begun to nuance these discussions by focusing on the agency of Muslims themselves, particularly second, and third-generation individuals who navigate dual cultural landscapes. Researchers like Ayhan Kaya and others argue that these generations engage in hybridization processes, combining elements of German secular modernity with Islamic traditions to form new, dynamic identities (Yabanci, 2023). This scholarship highlights the creative strategies through which Muslims in Germany assert belonging and reshape both religious and national discourses.

Despite this rich and expanding body of literature, critical gaps remain. Much of the research foregrounds policy frameworks, integration challenges, or security concerns, often reducing the Muslim presence in Germany to a "problem" to be solved (Amin et al., 2024). This has overshadowed the historical dimension that links the catastrophic destruction of WWII with the structural need for labor and, consequently, with the entrenchment of Islam in Germany (Mocnik, 2024). Unlike France or Britain, where Muslim populations are often understood through the prism of colonial legacies, Germany's experience is unique: the Muslim presence emerged not from imperial entanglements but from the exigencies of post-war reconstruction (Falola, 2022). This distinct trajectory, however, remains underexplored. Moreover, existing studies rarely foreground the constructive contributions of Muslim communities, economic, cultural, intellectual, and social, to German society, privileging instead narratives of difference, conflict, or radicalization (Dahinden & Korteweg, 2023).

This research seeks to address these lacunae by recontextualizing the Muslim presence in Germany within a longer historical arc that begins with WWII. By connecting the dots between total war, post-war reconstruction, labor migration, and the consolidation of Muslim communities, the study illuminates Islam not as an alien import but as a consequence of Germany's modern historical path. In doing so, the research emphasizes the agency of Muslim communities in shaping Germany's cultural and political landscape while also interrogating the broader European debates about national identity, pluralism, and belonging (Faas, 2016). The central objective is therefore twofold: first, to historicize Islam in Germany as an outcome of global and national transformations triggered by WWII; and second, to explore the contemporary implications of this presence for Germany's evolving self-understanding as a pluralist democracy (Hoffmann & Cemgil, 2016).

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative perspective. While much of the existing scholarship compartmentalizes Islam in Germany into questions of integration or security, this study weaves together historical, social, and cultural threads to present a more holistic narrative. It challenges the reductive framing of Muslims as perpetual outsiders by foregrounding their embeddedness within Germany's post-war development. Furthermore, it positions Germany's experience as analytically distinct from that of other European countries, thereby contributing fresh comparative insights to the study of Islam in the West. By situating Islam in Germany as part of the unintended consequences of WWII a war that epitomized destruction but also precipitated reconstruction, this research underscores the paradoxical ways in which catastrophe and renewal are intertwined in shaping the trajectories of nations and religions alike.

METHOD

This study employs a historical research methodology, which is particularly suitable for investigating socio-cultural transformations that are deeply rooted in past events and their long-term consequences. The historical method emphasizes a systematic and critical engagement with sources in order to reconstruct narratives that are both empirically grounded and analytically rigorous. Following established traditions in historiography, the research process in this study was conducted through four principal stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Padilha et al., 2017).

The first stage, heuristics, refers to the systematic process of searching, collecting, and classifying relevant sources. Derived from the Greek term *heuriskein*, meaning "to discover," this stage involved gathering diverse forms of evidence, including archival records, official documents, memoirs, oral testimonies, and secondary scholarly works. In this study, sources were treated not as ends in themselves but as instruments to illuminate the historical context of post-World War II Germany and the subsequent emergence of Muslim communities. Without such primary and secondary sources, historical reconstruction would not be possible (Hjeij & Vilks, 2023).

The second stage, source criticism, was carried out to ensure the authenticity, reliability, and credibility of the materials collected. This stage encompasses both external criticism, which examines the origin, authorship, and material characteristics of a document or object, and internal criticism, which evaluates the consistency, plausibility, and trustworthiness of its content. Through this dual process of verification, the research sought to eliminate biases, inaccuracies, and distortions that might compromise the validity of historical reconstruction (Rosenqvist & Ekecrantz, 2023).

The third stage, interpretation, is central to transforming disparate data into coherent historical meaning. Interpretation entails both analysis the careful dissection of data to uncover underlying patterns and synthesis the integration of these patterns into a broader explanatory framework. While historical interpretation inevitably involves a degree of subjectivity, scholarly rigor requires transparency in how evidence is connected to conclusions (Brand et al., 2022). As Schwartz-Shea emphasizes, interpretation should not be arbitrary but rather anchored in verifiable evidence that can be revisited and reassessed by other scholars (Schwartz-Shea, 2015). Thus, in this research, interpretation served as the bridge between raw data and analytical insight, enabling an understanding of how post-war migration policies facilitated the establishment of Islam in Germany.

The final stage, historiography, refers to the act of writing history itself (Islam et al., 2025). In this phase, the verified and interpreted data were organized into a structured narrative that situates the phenomenon of Islam in Germany within the larger historical trajectory of World War II and its aftermath. The writing process required careful attention to both analytical clarity and narrative coherence, ensuring that historical facts were contextualized within a broader theoretical and comparative framework. As Campbell notes, historiography is not merely a mechanical compilation of facts but a scholarly effort to construct meaning from the past in a way that is intelligible and persuasive to readers (Campbell, 2024).

By adopting this four-stage methodology, the study ensures both methodological rigor and narrative depth. Heuristics guarantees the breadth of sources, criticism safeguards their reliability, interpretation transforms them into meaningful insights, and historiography communicates them in a coherent scholarly narrative. This methodological approach is particularly appropriate for the objectives of the study, namely, to trace the historical linkages between WWII, post-war labor migration, and the growth of Islam in Germany, while also situating these dynamics within broader debates on identity, pluralism, and cultural transformation in contemporary Europe.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

World War II

The end of World War I reshaped the geopolitical landscape of Europe in ways that created both opportunities and enduring tensions. The defeat of the Central Powers dismantled old imperial structures, most notably the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German Empire, and the Ottoman Empire (Bulutgil, 2017). In their place, new states emerged, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe, representing the political triumph of the principle of national self-determination. However, the disintegration of multi-ethnic empires did not automatically lead to stability; rather, it generated a fragmented region where irredentist claims and minority disputes became a perpetual source of friction (Mazower, 1999). The victorious Allied states such as France, Belgium, Italy, Greece, and Romania, meanwhile, expanded their territories, underscoring the asymmetry of the postwar settlement.

Central to this postwar reordering was the Treaty of Versailles (1919), which imposed severe conditions on Germany. The treaty stripped Germany of approximately 13 percent of its domestic territory, all its overseas colonies, and imposed crippling financial reparations (Liebenberg, 2011). Equally significant was the prohibition on German military expansion and the symbolic humiliation embedded in the "war guilt" clause. Such measures were rationalized as necessary to prevent future German aggression, yet they also sowed the seeds of revanchism by fostering a deep sense of injustice among Germans (Bekiroğlu, 2023). This resentment provided fertile ground for nationalist movements that capitalized on grievances about the loss of honor, land, and economic capability.

Simultaneously, the collapse of old empires produced revolutionary outcomes. The Russian Civil War culminated in the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922, marking the emergence of an ideological counter-model to Western liberal democracy (Herbert, 2007). To the west, Germany underwent the Revolution of 1918–1919, which toppled the monarchy and established the Weimar Republic (Lee, 2013). However, the republic faced chronic instability, buffeted by polarization between the radical left and right. On one hand, socialist and communist factions sought to push Germany toward a revolutionary future; on the other, nationalist and conservative forces sought to dismantle the new republic altogether (Maciejewski, 2022). In this climate, democracy was perceived not as a consensus-based solution but as a fragile compromise lacking legitimacy among significant sectors of society.

Italy, although counted among the victorious Allies, also experienced disillusionment in the postwar settlement. Italian nationalists believed that promises made by Britain and France regarding territorial expansion were betrayed. This "mutilated victory" narrative directly fueled Benito Mussolini's rise to power. Between 1922 and 1925, Mussolini consolidated a Fascist regime that rejected liberal democracy, suppressed opposition, and envisioned a revival of imperial glory under the banner of a "New Roman Empire." Italy's trajectory illustrated the broader disillusionment with parliamentary democracy across interwar Europe, where radical ideologies gained legitimacy amid perceived failures of liberal governments (Rota, 2025).

Against this background, Adolf Hitler's rise must be seen not as an isolated development but as a product of accumulated grievances and systemic weaknesses (Banai & Mayer, 2025). The failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 initially exposed the weakness of the Nazi movement, but the subsequent economic collapse of the late 1920s and early 1930s revitalized Hitler's appeal (Vydra, 2025). By 1933, upon becoming Chancellor, Hitler systematically dismantled democratic institutions and laid the foundation for a totalitarian state (Aguilera-Barchet, 2015). His radical rejection of the Versailles framework and pursuit of aggressive rearmament reflected not only ideological ambition but also a broader societal desire to restore German prestige and power.

Thus, the legacy of World War I cannot be reduced to the immediate territorial and political settlements alone. Its true significance lies in the long-term destabilization it generated (Van Assche & Gruezmacher, 2022). By imposing punitive measures without addressing the structural causes of conflict, the postwar order incubated resentment that nationalist and fascist leaders later weaponized (Kallis, 2021). The rise of authoritarian regimes in Germany and Italy was therefore not an aberration but a consequence of the failures of both the Versailles settlement and the broader liberal order that sought to enforce it.

The 1930s represented a critical turning point in European politics, where the fragile framework of collective security envisioned by the League of Nations unraveled in the face of rising authoritarian aggression (Strikwerda, 2024a). The rearmament program launched by Hitler, culminating in the reintroduction of conscription in 1935, signaled a clear violation of the Versailles Treaty (Suppan, 2022). Yet, despite this direct challenge to the postwar order, responses from Britain and France were muted. The reluctance to confront Germany militarily at this early stage reflected a complex calculus: war fatigue, economic depression, and the persistent hope that German grievances could be satisfied through limited concessions (Tripathi, 2024b). This policy of appeasement, while rationalized as pragmatic, in practice emboldened the Nazi regime.

The Saar plebiscite of January 1935 further illustrated the growing legitimacy of Hitler's nationalist agenda. Over 90 percent of voters in the Saar Basin chose reunification with Germany, an outcome celebrated domestically as a vindication of the regime's policies (Zahra, 2023). Internationally, the event reinforced the perception that the Versailles framework was both unsustainable and unpopular, particularly among populations subjected to territorial reassignments (Das, 2022). Hitler capitalized on this momentum by repudiating the Versailles and Locarno Treaties and remilitarizing the Rhineland in March 1936 (Overy, 2021). This was a gamble: had France intervened, German forces had orders to retreat. Yet no action was taken, highlighting the paralysis of the Western powers. The remilitarization of the Rhineland thus represented not merely a territorial adjustment but a symbolic collapse of the interwar security architecture (Thomas et al., 2015).

The League of Nations, designed to prevent precisely such unilateral aggressions, revealed its impotence during these years. Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 tested the credibility of collective security. Although the League imposed economic sanctions, they were partial and ineffective, failing to include vital commodities such as oil (Pemberton, 2019). Moreover, Britain and France hesitated to fully enforce sanctions, fearing that alienating Mussolini would push Italy closer to Germany (Sullivan, 2020). The Hoare–Laval Pact of December 1935, which effectively sought to partition Ethiopia in favor of Italy, underscored the cynicism with which the great powers approached the League's ideals (Fugazzotto, 2022). For many observers, the Ethiopian

crisis demonstrated that the League could not defend small nations against imperialist aggression, further eroding its authority.

Meanwhile, in Spain, the outbreak of the Civil War in July 1936 provided both Germany and Italy with a proxy battlefield to test military strategies and deepen their ideological alliance (Tur-Prats & Valencia Caicedo, 2025). German Condor Legion pilots honed aerial bombing techniques that would later devastate European cities, while Italian forces offered ground support to Francisco Franco's Nationalists (Alpert, 2019). The Soviet Union, on the other hand, supported the Republican government, transforming Spain into a microcosm of the ideological struggle between fascism and communism (Ruiz Carnicer, 2019). The Western democracies, notably Britain and France, chose a policy of non-intervention, which in practice favored the Nationalists by depriving the Republicans of crucial international support (Preston, 2012). The fall of the Spanish Republic in 1939 not only marked the triumph of fascism in Iberia but also foreshadowed the inability of liberal democracies to contain authoritarian expansionism.

By the mid-1930s, a new alignment was taking shape in Europe and beyond. The Rome-Berlin Axis, formalized in 1936, cemented the partnership between Hitler and Mussolini (Hamre, 2025). Soon after, the Anti-Comintern Pact between Germany and Japan extended the axis of authoritarian powers, united by hostility to Soviet communism and liberal democracy (Haigh & Morris, 2018). Italy's accession to the pact in 1937 confirmed the consolidation of a fascist bloc (Goeschel, 2024). This strategic realignment demonstrated that the global order was bifurcating: authoritarian states were not only expanding territorially but also institutionalizing their cooperation against existing international norms.

The United States, though geographically distant, also played a role through its neutrality legislation of 1935 and subsequent years. Intended to prevent American entanglement in foreign wars, the Neutrality Acts prohibited arms sales and loans to belligerent states (Schandler, 2005). While domestically popular, these measures inadvertently weakened potential allies of liberal democracy, such as the Spanish Republic and Ethiopia, by constraining their ability to secure material support (Yusuf, 2022). In effect, American isolationism, combined with European appeasement, left aggressor states unchallenged, enabling the steady erosion of the interwar peace order (Doyle, 2023).

Thus, the second half of the 1930s revealed the collapse of collective security as a meaningful principle. The League of Nations was discredited, the Western powers were paralyzed by fear of renewed conflict, and authoritarian states exploited these weaknesses to expand their influence (Gooch, 2025). The convergence of Germany, Italy, and Japan into a cohesive bloc marked not only a geopolitical realignment but also an ideological challenge to the liberal order (Avdaliani, 2022). By the eve of 1938, the conditions for continental war were firmly in place, not through sudden rupture, but through a steady accumulation of concessions, failures, and misplaced hopes (Grinin, 2022).

The year 1938 marked the definitive collapse of the post–World War I settlement. Hitler, emboldened by earlier successes and the Western powers' consistent reluctance to intervene, moved decisively to absorb Austria into the German Reich (Strikwerda, 2024b). The Anschluss of March 1938 was presented as a unification of German-speaking peoples, fulfilling a long-standing nationalist aspiration (A. Becker, 2021). Though technically prohibited by the Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of Saint-Germain, the annexation proceeded virtually unopposed. Britain and France, wary of confrontation and persuaded by the argument of self-determination, offered no military resistance (Günther, 2024). For Germany, the Anschluss represented not merely a territorial gain but also the integration of Austria's military and economic resources into the Reich, significantly strengthening its strategic position (J. Thompson, 2023).

The Anschluss also revealed the fragility of the European order. Austria's incorporation exposed the hollowness of collective security guarantees and emboldened Hitler to press further territorial claims. The next target was Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland, a region with a significant ethnic German population (Spenser, 2025). Hitler framed his demands in the language of national self-determination, echoing principles enshrined in Wilsonian rhetoric but weaponizing them for expansionist ends (Donert et al., 2024). The crisis escalated rapidly, with Czechoslovakia mobilizing its forces and seeking assistance from France and the Soviet Union. Yet at the Munich Conference in September 1938, Britain and France chose appeasement once again, compelling the Czechoslovak government to cede the Sudetenland to Germany (Sobelman, 2023).

The Munich Agreement has since become a symbol of the dangers of appeasement. At the time, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain famously proclaimed that the settlement secured "peace for our time." Yet in

practice, the agreement undermined Czechoslovakia's security, dismantled its defensive fortifications, and emboldened Hitler to pursue further aggression. For the Czechoslovak people, the decision was a betrayal by allies who had guaranteed their sovereignty (Austin, 2021). For Hitler, it was a validation of his belief that the Western democracies lacked the resolve to resist his ambitions. Within months, in March 1939, German forces occupied the remainder of Czechoslovakia, establishing the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and creating a client Slovak Republic (Tripathi, 2024a). Unlike the Sudeten crisis, which could be cloaked in ethnic arguments, the destruction of Czechoslovakia exposed the naked expansionism of the Nazi regime (Mazower, 1998).

This sequence of events fundamentally altered the strategic calculus in Europe. The Western powers, humiliated by their earlier concessions, began to recognize the futility of further appeasement. Hitler's demands now extended beyond the rhetoric of self-determination, revealing an agenda of imperial conquest (Goddard, 2015). The occupation of Prague in 1939 demonstrated that the Nazi threat was not limited to revising Versailles but aimed at remaking the entire European order (Frey, 2016). Britain and France, belatedly aware of the danger, offered security guarantees to Poland, Romania, and Greece. These moves were intended to draw a red line against further German aggression, but they also created the conditions for wider conflict once Hitler turned his attention eastward (Overy, 2013).

From a structural perspective, the Munich Agreement illustrated the deep miscalculations of liberal democracies in dealing with authoritarian regimes (Wilkinson, 2021). The policy of appeasement was driven by domestic constraints, war fatigue, economic depression, and fear of another devastating conflict, but it ignored the ideological and strategic ambitions of fascist leaders (Wendt, 2021). Chamberlain and Daladier misread Hitler as a rational actor seeking limited revisions, when in reality his agenda was revolutionary and unlimited. This misalignment of perceptions contributed to the rapid escalation toward war (Karlsson, 2024).

Moreover, the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia had far-reaching consequences for European geopolitics. It not only weakened the balance of power by eliminating a potential regional counterweight to Germany but also provided the Reich with substantial industrial capacity, particularly the Skoda armaments works (Lough, 2021). By integrating these resources, Germany enhanced its military readiness for the larger conflicts ahead. Thus, Munich did not prevent war; it merely postponed it while strengthening Germany's capacity to wage it.

By the spring of 1939, the illusion of peace was shattered. The Western democracies, once hopeful that concessions could contain Hitler, now confronted the reality of an emboldened and militarized Reich (Muñoz, 2025). The guarantees extended to Poland signalled a new phase: a recognition that war was increasingly inevitable. Yet, even at this late stage, the lack of coordination with the Soviet Union and the persistence of mistrust between potential allies limited the effectiveness of deterrence (Zubok et al., 2021). In this sense, the Anschluss, Munich, and the destruction of Czechoslovakia were not isolated events but steps in a continuum of failed strategies, each compounding the vulnerability of the European order.

By mid-1939, the European balance of power had reached a breaking point. The destruction of Czechoslovakia convinced Britain and France that Hitler's ambitions extended far beyond revising Versailles (Crawford & Vu, 2021). When Germany turned its attention to Poland, the Western democracies sought to draw a definitive line. In March and April 1939, both London and Paris issued guarantees of Polish independence, pledging military support in the event of aggression (Korbel, 2015). These commitments represented a significant departure from the policy of appeasement, signalling a new willingness to confront German expansion. Yet the guarantees also revealed strategic weaknesses: while intended as deterrence, they lacked clear operational plans for immediate support, leaving Poland vulnerable to German military superiority (W. R. Thompson, 1997).

Poland held particular significance for Hitler. The city of Danzig (modern-day Gdańsk), a semi-autonomous territory under League of Nations supervision, became the focal point of German demands (O'Connor, 2019). Framed as a question of self-determination, the issue concealed broader strategic ambitions. Hitler sought not only the reintegration of Danzig but also the construction of a corridor connecting East Prussia with the rest of Germany, effectively dismantling Polish sovereignty (Kennedy, 2019). The Polish government, aware of the fate of Austria and Czechoslovakia, refused to yield. Its resistance, combined with Western guarantees, set the stage for confrontation.

In the summer of 1939, diplomatic maneuvering intensified. Britain and France pursued negotiations with the Soviet Union, recognizing the necessity of Soviet cooperation in deterring Hitler (Ellenthal, 2019). Yet mutual suspicion, historical grievances, and divergent strategic aims undermined these talks. Stalin, wary of Western intentions and seeking to avoid encirclement, instead turned to Germany. On August 23, 1939, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was signed, a non-aggression treaty between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (Fancher, 2024). Its secret protocol

divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence, granting the Soviets control over the Baltic states and eastern Poland, while enabling Germany to proceed with its invasion plans without fear of a two-front war.

The pact shocked the world. Ideological enemies Nazism and communism had forged a pragmatic alliance, revealing the limits of ideological consistency in international politics. For Hitler, the agreement secured his eastern flank, providing the strategic freedom to strike Poland without Soviet interference (Muñoz, 2025). For Stalin, it bought time to strengthen Soviet defences while expanding territorial influence. The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact demonstrated the cynicism of great power politics in the late 1930s, where survival and expansion outweighed ideological commitments (Friot, 2023).

On September 1, 1939, Germany launched its invasion of Poland, employing the strategy of *Blitzkrieg* a combination of rapid mechanized advances, air superiority, and coordinated attacks (Sheffield, 2021). Within weeks, Polish defenses crumbled under the weight of superior German firepower. On September 17, the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east, sealing the country's fate in accordance with the secret protocol of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (Soroka, 2021). Poland was partitioned between the two powers, its sovereignty extinguished in a matter of weeks.

The Western response was immediate but limited. On September 3, Britain and France declared war on Germany, honoring their guarantees to Poland (Schäfer, 2025). Yet despite this declaration, neither power launched significant military operations to relieve Poland, a period known as the "Phoney War" (*Sitzkrieg*). This inaction revealed the gap between diplomatic commitments and military preparedness. The fall of Poland exposed the strategic vulnerabilities of the Allied powers: while willing to oppose Hitler rhetorically, they lacked the capacity to mount effective resistance at that stage (Overy, 2013).

The invasion of Poland thus marked the formal outbreak of the Second World War, but it was more than a regional conflict. The involvement of Britain and France transformed it into a global war, setting in motion alliances and rivalries that would draw in nations across Europe, Asia, Africa, and eventually the Americas (Stoler, 2022). The rapid collapse of Poland also reshaped perceptions of modern warfare, demonstrating the effectiveness of mechanized strategy and signalling the obsolescence of static defences reminiscent of World War I (Unterseher, 2022).

In broader perspective, the Polish crisis revealed the culmination of two decades of failed diplomacy. The Treaty of Versailles, intended to secure peace, had fostered resentment and instability. The League of Nations, designed to uphold collective security, had proven ineffective. The Western powers' reliance on appeasement had emboldened aggression. By 1939, the convergence of these failures left Europe on the brink of catastrophe. The Polish campaign thus symbolized not only the beginning of global conflict but also the bankruptcy of the interwar order (Borowiec, 2023).

The German invasion of Poland in September 1939 set off a chain reaction that rapidly expanded into a global war. Although Britain and France had declared war on Germany, the early months in Western Europe were characterized by relative inactivity (Murray, 2021). This "Phoney War" concealed the profound shift in strategic dynamics underway. Hitler, emboldened by his swift victory in Poland, prepared to expand German hegemony across Europe. The first decisive blow fell in April 1940, when Germany invaded Denmark and Norway, securing vital access to the North Atlantic and iron ore supplies from Sweden. By May, a larger offensive was launched against France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. The *Blitzkrieg* tactics that had overwhelmed Poland now shattered the Western front. Within six weeks, France collapsed, leaving Britain as the sole power confronting Nazi Germany in Europe (Overy, 2013).

The fall of France transformed the war into a truly global conflict. The British Empire mobilized resources from across its vast colonial holdings India, Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand illustrating how imperial networks globalized a conflict that had begun as a European crisis (Paul, 2021). At the same time, the Axis alliance expanded: Italy entered the war in June 1940, seeking to carve out its Mediterranean empire, while Japan advanced its imperial ambitions in East Asia. By 1941, the war had spread across multiple theaters: North Africa, the Balkans, the Atlantic, and Asia, underscoring its transformation into what historians term a *total war* a conflict encompassing continents, economies, and civilian populations alike (Walter, 2023).

Britain's survival during the *Battle of Britain* in 1940 marked a turning point. The Royal Air Force's resistance against the Luftwaffe not only preserved Britain as a base for future Allied operations but also demonstrated the importance of air power in modern warfare (Wood & Dempster, 2020). Winston Churchill's leadership galvanized

British morale, framing the struggle as one of civilization itself against barbarism. Yet Britain alone could not defeat Germany; the entry of new powers was decisive (Manchester, 2025).

In June 1941, Hitler launched *Operation Barbarossa*, the largest invasion in history, against the Soviet Union. This decision opened a brutal Eastern Front characterized by unprecedented violence, ideological warfare, and staggering casualties (Ellis, 2018). Despite initial successes, the German advance stalled by late 1941, exposing the limits of Blitzkrieg when faced with vast distances, harsh climates, and resilient resistance (Mack-Jackson, 2025). The Eastern Front became the decisive theater of the war, absorbing the majority of German resources and inflicting catastrophic losses. Stalin's Soviet Union, once a partner in partitioning Poland, emerged as a central Allied power, illustrating the fluidity of wartime alliances where survival dictated pragmatism over ideology (Howard, 2014).

Simultaneously, the conflict expanded into the Pacific. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, prompting the United States to declare war on Japan the following day (Burtness & Ober, 2017). Germany and Italy, bound by the Tripartite Pact, declared war on the United States, fully globalizing the conflict. With American industrial capacity and manpower joining the Allied cause, the balance of power began to shift. The Second World War had now truly become a global conflagration, involving every major power across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas (Spykman, 2017).

The war's expansion also intensified its character as a *total war*. Civilian populations were not only collateral victims but active targets, as seen in the German bombing of London, the Allied bombing of German cities, and Japan's atrocities in China (Garon, 2020). Economic mobilization became essential: entire industries were repurposed for military production, while rationing and propaganda campaigns reshaped daily life across societies. Ideological dimensions also sharpened: Nazi racial policies escalated into the Holocaust, transforming the war into both a geopolitical struggle and a genocidal project (Segal, 2018).

By 1942–1943, the tide began to turn. The Soviet victory at Stalingrad, the Allied success in North Africa, and the American triumph at Midway marked the beginning of Axis decline. Yet these outcomes cannot be understood without tracing the road from appeasement to war (Arquilla, 2020). The rapid escalation from regional crisis to global conflict underscored the systemic failures of the interwar order and the inability of diplomacy alone to contain aggressive revisionist powers (Overy, 2014). The Second World War thus emerged not simply as the continuation of European rivalries but as the collapse of an entire international system, giving birth to a conflict unprecedented in scope, scale, and destructiveness.

As a visual synthesis of the complex dynamics of the Second World War discussed in the preceding sections, it is important to highlight a representation that captures the multidimensional nature of the conflict. The war unfolded not only in the trenches and on battlefields, but also through the deployment of heavy artillery, the destruction of urban centers, the intensity of aerial combat, and large-scale naval operations. Ultimately, the conflict culminated in diplomatic closure through the signing of surrender documents. Taken together, these elements underscore the character of World War II as a "total war" in which military, political, economic, and technological instruments were mobilized on a global scale.

Figure 1. Infobox collage for World War II

September 1, 1939 – September 2, 1945 (*Source: Wikipedia*)

The Development of Islam in Germany After World War II

The Federal Republic of Germany is one of the largest countries in Western Europe and is the heart of the countries in Europe. Since 2021 Germany has been led by Chancellor Olaf Scholz is a German politician. He has served as Chancellor of Germany since December 2021, replacing Angela Merkel. Germany is a federation consisting of 16 states (Kruk & Molo, 2023).

Figure 2. Olaf Scholz in 2023 (*Source: Quirinale*)

Islam in Germany has a long history, even since the Ottoman era. When the Ottoman Turks invaded Vienna (Austro-Hungary) in 1683, many Turkish soldiers were imprisoned in the kingdom of Prussia (now Germany). Since then, Muslim communities in Germany have existed and continued to exist until the following century (Mestyan, 2021). The arrival of the next wave of Muslims in Germany was in the 18th century, when King Friedrich Willem I of the Kingdom of Prussia established cooperative relations with the Ottoman Turkish dynasty in the military field (Scheffler, 2013). The Ottoman Turks sent a number of soldiers to Prussia for military studies. As a form of respect for the presence of Turkish Muslim soldiers, in 1732, King Friedrich Wilhelm I built a mosque in Potsdam, a city in the Brandenburg Bundesland, as their place of worship (Alamshah et al., 2024).

The cooperative relationship in the military field between the two kingdoms continued during the next reign, namely King Friedrich II (1740-1786) (Black, 1999). In 1945, King Friedrich II formed a Muslim unit in the Prussian army called the "Muslim Riders", which consisted of 1,000 ethnic Muslim Bosniaks, Albanians and Tatars (Anwar et al., 2004). In 1798, a Muslim cemetery was built in Berlin in honour of the 3rd Turkish Ambassador Ali Aziz Efendi and in the 1980s, a mosque was built next to it with the name Sehitlik mosque (Turkish: martyr).

Entering the beginning of the 20th century, relations between Germany and Ottoman Türkiye became increasingly close. In 1912, Enver Pasha, the Ottoman Minister of War, collaborated with Germany to send a number of German diplomats and officers to train Ottoman Turkish soldiers (Tanvir Wasti, 2020). After the Balkan War (1912-1913) ended, Turkey was involved in World War I (1914-1918) and became an ally of Germany (Lendzhova, 2025). In this war, the German side suffered defeat and many soldiers from Ottoman Turkey became prisoners of war and chose to settle in Germany, especially in Berlin, rather than returning to their home country, Turkey. In 1922, a number of Muslims from 44 ethnic groups built a Muslim community in Berlin, although in the end they failed to build a mosque due to financial problems (Motadel, 2014). The first mosque in Germany was only built by the Ahmadiyah community (Lahore) in 1925 (Jonker, 2022). Hundreds of thousands of Ottoman Turkish soldiers were brought back to Germany during the Nazi leadership to help Germany in World War II. In this war Germany suffered defeat which resulted in the destruction of the German economy.

After World War II, especially in the 1960-1970s, a wave of immigrant workers from Türkiye, North Africa and the former Yugoslavia began to be imported to help develop infrastructure in Germany (Jonker, 2022). Although initially the majority were men, at a later stage they could bring their families. Since the 1980s, the number of Muslim immigrants seeking asylum in Germany has begun to increase, especially ethnic Turks (Kurds, Yezidis and Assyrians). The majority of Turkish Muslims in Germany today are the 3rd and 4th generations born in Germany, although not all of them are German citizens (Adam, 2015). In addition, the Muslim community from Iran is considered the most able to integrate in Germany because the number of academics and business people continues to increase above average (Sadeghi, 2018). Because the history of Islam in the country is quite long, it is not surprising that Angela Merkel (German Chancellor/Head of German Government 2005-2021) said that “Islam is part of Germany”.

Figure 3. Wunsdorf Mosque, the first large mosque in Germany, was built in 1915. In 1930, the land was repurposed as a military area.

(Source: Wikiwand.com)

The last wave of Muslims who came to Germany came from the Middle East and Africa conflict areas in the 2010-2016 period (Kalmar & Shoshan, 2020). Prolonged conflicts in the Middle East and Africa due to the Arab Spring and ISIS have led to large numbers of migrants and political asylum seekers in developed countries in Western Europe. Although some victims of conflict in the Middle East and Africa also seek migration and political asylum in prosperous countries in the Middle East, the majority make Western Europe their destination. In Western Europe, several countries "opened" themselves to accept migrants from conflict countries such as the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Germany, etc. In Germany, Angela Merkel welcomed more than 1 million migrants, the majority of whom were Muslims, with open arms (Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, 2022). This humanitarian policy and attitude have not escaped criticism from various politicians in the most prosperous European Union country. However, some groups worry that the number of Muslims will continue to increase and reach 20 million by 2020.

Historically, Muslims came to Germany in several waves, and the population continues to increase significantly in Western Europe's largest country. Apart from the Muslim immigrant factor, another factor influencing the increase in the Muslim population in this country is the increasing birth rate of babies from Muslim families who have settled in Germany and the conversion of some of them to native German (Caucasian) families (Jikeli, 2023).

In the 21st century, Germany has become a country with religious diversity. Several rounds of population movements that have occurred since the 50s have formed an increasingly strong ethnic plurality

and religious beliefs. Currently, around 5% or around 4,100,000 of Germany's population is Muslims. Cities such as Berlin, Cologne and Hamburg, apart from having representative mosque buildings, are also centers of Islamic life and culture in Germany (Kuppinger, 2014a). In contrast to many other countries where Muslims are the majority of the population, in Germany, they are part of a religious minority group in the midst of a secular majority society.

The contemporary presence of Muslims in Germany is reflected in the establishment of nearly 2,500 mosques across the country, of which approximately 140 are equipped with domes and minarets. These mosques are often constructed through the initiatives of Muslim communities with occasional support from local governments, symbolizing both the rootedness and visibility of Islam in German public life (Kuppinger, 2014b). Historically, the first mosque in Germany was built in Berlin in 1924 by the Ahmadiyya Lahore community, marking the beginning of a physical and spiritual infrastructure for Islam in the heart of Europe (Nasr, 2025). Despite significant diversity among Muslims in Germany in terms of ethnicity, schools of thought, and sectarian affiliations, the religious landscape tends to be organized along communal lines. This is evident in the existence of multiple Islamic organizations that cater to specific ethnic or doctrinal constituencies, shaping the mosaic of Islam in Germany (Mukaddam, 2024).

One of the earliest organizations is the *Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren* (Union of Islamic Cultural Centers, VIKZ), founded in 1973 (Şahin, 2023). Rooted in Sufi traditions, particularly the Sulayman order, VIKZ has built a strong institutional network of more than 300 branches and hundreds of mosques, offering imam training programs, Qur'anic education, and Sharia courses (Vikør, 2021). Its apolitical stance and independence from specific political movements have enabled VIKZ to act as a bridge between Muslims and wider German society. The organization actively participates in the "Day of Open Mosque" initiative, an annual event designed to foster dialogue and visibility for Muslims in Germany (Herding, 2013).

The largest Islamic organization in Germany is the *Diyanet İşleri Türk-İslam Birliği* (DITIB), established in 1984 as an extension of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs. Representing primarily Turkish Muslims, DITIB unites more than 300 associations and supervises between 800 and 900 mosques across the country (Mushaben, 2008). Beyond its religious services, DITIB also oversees the accreditation of imams, the construction of mosques, the provision of Islamic education in public schools, and the organization of German language training for immigrant communities (Öcal, 2024). Although it is known for promoting a moderate, reformist form of Islam influenced by Kemalist principles, its aspiration to be officially recognized as the representative institution for all Muslims in Germany has not been realized, since the German state perceives its scope as limited to the Turkish community (Amiraux, 2001).

In contrast, the *Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş* (IGMG), founded in 1985, represents a more politically assertive strand of Turkish Islam in Germany (Okyay, 2015). With approximately 26,500 members and several hundred mosques and schools, IGMG has maintained close ties with Islamist parties in Türkiye (Boukhars, 2009). Although its members are often well-integrated into German society, speaking fluent German and participating in civic life, the organization has been criticized for promoting anti-Western sentiments and attempting to shape an Islamic social order in Europe (Betz, 2016). These ideological tensions have raised concerns about its impact on younger generations, who are sometimes exposed to discourses that challenge liberal democratic values.

Another influential body is the *Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland* (Central Muslim Council, ZMD), founded in 1994. With funding links to the Muslim World League in Saudi Arabia and ideological ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, ZMD oversees around 400 mosques and unites 18 affiliated associations across eight German federal states (Tenney, 2020). Under the leadership of Ayyub Axel Köhler, the ZMD has positioned itself as a significant voice within German Muslim life, although its external affiliations have drawn scrutiny from German authorities and the wider public (Schiffauer, 2010).

Taken together, these organizations demonstrate the complex institutionalization of Islam in Germany. On the one hand, they provide essential infrastructure for religious practice, cultural preservation, and social support among Muslim communities. On the other hand, their ethnic and ideological divisions illustrate the fragmentation that characterizes Islam in Germany, complicating efforts to establish a single representative body for the Muslim population (Tenney, 2020). The organizational landscape not only reflects the diversity of Muslim communities but also raises fundamental questions about integration, identity, and recognition in contemporary German society.

Constitutionally, the relationship between religion and the state in Germany is guaranteed by the Grundgesetz, the basic law created in 1949 (Robbers, 2024). In this case, the Grundgesetz has two

functions: on the one hand, it provides guarantees for the role of religion by respecting the beliefs of its adherents as citizens, namely guaranteeing the human rights of individuals to receive equal treatment and not to be discriminated against based on religion. On the other hand, constitutional rules determine the state's relationship with the various religious communities in Germany (Suharsono, 2024). One part of religious freedom also concerns individual freedom not to be bound by one particular religion or not having a god. This freedom of religion does not only apply to German citizens, but also to everyone living in that country. Apart from that, each religious community also has the right to provide religious education as one of the basic rights of citizens.

Fig. 4. Ahmadiyah Mosque Berlin 1925, Designed by K. A. Hermann

(Source: Axel Mauruszat)

Even though Islam is the religion with the second largest following after Christianity, many Muslims in Germany still receive discriminatory treatment in various socio-cultural, media and political domains. This proves that Islamophobia is still quite widespread in a country where religious freedom is protected by the constitution and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The most common and widespread discrimination, as in other European Union countries, is the issue of the hijab. The issue of the hijab is still a matter of debate in Germany's central government (Ab Halim et al., 2022). Half of the 16 states in Germany prohibit the use of symbols of all religions, namely Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hesse, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Saarland. For example, the states of Berlin, Brandenburg, and Hesse implemented “neutral laws” by prohibiting teachers and officials in public schools and courts from wearing religious symbols. This neutral idea of religious symbols in public spaces and free in private spaces seems unreasonable for Muslim women who consider the hijab as a necessity in public spaces (Burchardt & Griera, 2019). The hijab problem is also experienced by many Muslim women in Germany and the European Union in general who want to get a job or rent an apartment.

The Wusndorf Mosque in Germany was founded during World War I for Muslim prisoners of war, held in the Wünsdorf prisoner of war camp outside Berlin, called Halbmondlager (Crescent Camp). It was the first mosque erected on German soil, completed in 1915 and demolished a decade later. Designed by Hermann (Chaim Aaron ben David) Struck was born in 1876 in Germany. With all the calculations made, in the end only a few Muslim prisoners from German camps went into battle against the Allies (Baer, 2020). This German-made project also failed miserably. After 15 years of existence, the Wunsdorf Camp Mosque was demolished.

Some German citizens who were not happy with the presence of Muslims in the country then formed several movements against Muslims, one of which is the well-known Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA). In early 2015, around 18,000 German citizens who joined Pegida demonstrated in Dresden, the capital of the state of Saxony, protesting religious fanaticism and Islamic radicalism in Germany (Hanafi, 2017). One of the reasons for this demonstration was the results of a poll conducted by Stern magazine which stated that 30% of German citizens thought that Islam had a big influence in the lives of German society. 52 This action is not the first time the Pegida group has carried out this action. Previously, in December 2014, around 10,000 Pegida sympathizers also carried out the same action. Apart from the reasons for the increasing strength of Islam in Germany, they also reject the German government's policies, which are known to be liberal

regarding immigration issues. Meanwhile, in a number of other cities such as Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne and Stuttgart, around 22,000 people took action against the Pegida group. Tabloid Bild on its main page also carried a headline entitled “No to Pegida.”

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the trajectory of Islam in Germany cannot be understood without reference to the profound historical rupture of the Second World War. The devastation of war created a demographic and economic vacuum that paved the way for large-scale labor migration, especially from Türkiye, the Middle East, and North Africa. These processes not only reshaped German society but also provided fertile ground for the institutionalization of Islam through mosques, cultural associations, and religious organizations. The key finding of this research is that Islam in Germany is not an alien presence imposed from outside, but rather a consequence of the structural transformation of post-war Europe.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study underscores the importance of linking migration studies with historical sociology. It challenges reductionist narratives that view Islam merely through the lenses of integration or security, demonstrating instead how global conflicts, demographic movements, and national reconstruction intersect to produce enduring religious pluralism. Practically, the findings highlight the need for German policymakers to recognize Muslim communities not as temporary minorities but as integral contributors to the cultural and economic fabric of the nation. This implies designing inclusive policies on education, religious freedom, and citizenship that move beyond suspicion and marginalization.

Nevertheless, this research faces limitations. The reliance on historical sources and secondary literature, while methodologically rigorous, may underrepresent the lived experiences of contemporary Muslim communities, particularly women, youth, and converts. Moreover, the scope of the study is largely national, which leaves unexplored the comparative dimension of Muslim trajectories in other European contexts, such as France or the United Kingdom.

Future research should therefore adopt a more interdisciplinary and comparative approach. Ethnographic studies could complement historical inquiry by foregrounding the voices of Muslims themselves, while cross-national analyses could illuminate the similarities and differences in how European states have engaged with religious diversity. By pursuing such directions, scholarship can better capture the evolving role of Islam in shaping the pluralist democracies of twenty-first-century Europe.

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