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## Integration between Yezidis and German Society: Yezidis' Understanding of the Current Two-Way Integration Process in Germany

Integracja między Jezydami a społeczeństwem niemieckim: rozumienie przez Jezydów obecnego dwutorowego procesu integracji w Niemczech

### ABSTRACT

Since the mid-20th century, Germany has served as a hub for the migration of diverse ethnic and religious minorities, including the Yezidis, an ethno-religious group expelled from their ancestral homeland. Beginning in the 1960s, Yezidis settled in the Federal Republic of Germany, established in 1945, navigating a complex social landscape. Over the past sixty years, and particularly since the 1990s, Yezidis have increasingly integrated into German society. This study explores the degree to which Yezidis have integrated, proposing the hypothesis that Yezidis demonstrate a more proactive approach to integration compared to other immigrant groups in Germany. To address this hypothesis, the research examines several critical questions: How do Yezidis perceive Germany's integration policies? Do they view these policies as forms of assimilation or as opportunities for socio-cultural advancement? This analysis situates Yezidi integration within a two-way integration process framework, supported by inductive methods, including interviews conducted in Germany and comprehensive textual analysis. The study concludes that Yezidis approach integration with notable sensitivity, shaped by their expectations for political, legal, and constitutional acknowledgment within German society.

**Keywords:** Yezidis, Germany, integration, two-way process

## INTRODUCTION

Military *coup d'états*, discrimination policies, and economic disasters in the Middle East brought a Yezidi immigrant community to Germany within decades. The initial interaction with the "host society" occurred from the 1960s onwards. This interaction, which had a one-way character until the 1980s, accelerated to a two-way character with the establishment of the two main Yezidi cultural centers in Bielefeld and Oldenburg in 1992 and 1993 respectively. Yezidis' initial interaction was on the individual level. However, it gained a new dimension from the 1990s onwards since Yezidis got involved in German society. They became visible in many aspects of life and were known by a big portion of German society. Once the integration between Yezidis and Germans became in a character of a two-way process (between Yezidis and the host or "receiving" society), German society did not remain unaffected. The size of the Yezidi population has risen and the host country had to bring new institutional arrangements into existence to fulfill both Yezidis and German citizens and institutions' contemporary social, political, and cultural needs from the 1990s onwards.

The first generation of Yezidis in Germany consists of former labor workers, and a low percentage of intellectuals, who migrated to Germany during the 1960s and 1970s. They could retain their good knowledge of homelands and their traditions. The second generation is the offspring of the first generation, who were born and raised in Germany. They are those who are both familiar with German society and Western culture, and with their traditions. The third generation, those who have been to Germany from the 2000s onwards, studies at German schools with good knowledge of the German language, culture, and liberal values. They have little knowledge of their mother tongue (Kurdish). So, the Yezidi population in Germany has been formed in three generations as highlighted above. In addition to these three layers, there is a layer of the Yezidi population of asylum seekers and those who came to Germany legally via the humanitarian aid projects of the German Federal States in the last ten years [Lehmann 2019]. This social division in the Yezidi community of Germany makes the realm of the IP complex and slow-moving. The IP between Yezidis and Germans though, has characteristics of a one-way process, a two-way process, and a partly three-way process[1] depending on the political stance adopted by each Yezidi group regarding the Kurdish issue.

In this context, research questions can be stressed as follows: how and when did the presence of Yezidis appear in Germany? How did Germany adopt an integration policy and when did it evolve into a two-way integration policy? How do Yezidis evaluate the ongoing Yezidi IP in Germany, for example, as an assimilation, or an opportunity for development? Since the Yezidi population in Germany comes from

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[1]  A three-way process appears partly since the role of the countries of origin (Iraq for now) has been seen in support of the ongoing integration of Yezidis in German society.

different geographical regions and different cultural influences, the German authorities seem not to adopt a monolithic integration method. In order to answer research questions, the posed hypothesis is Yezidis' strong tendency to engage in German society in terms of social and cultural aspects has led integration process. To verify the hypothesis, the article aims to analyze the process within the framework of the two-way integration process.

Studies in the field of integration focus on only individual levels and individual migrants' issues (housing, job, education, etc.) before the 1980s. However, since the 1990s studies have paid attention to the structural factors of the receiving countries [Garces-Mascarenas, Penninx 2016]; to the institutional level (laws, regulations, executive organizations, etc.,); and, the role of migrants' organizations in mobilizing resources and guiding the group in the integration processes of host countries (the collective level). The year 1990 is likely to be a starting point of shifting approaches of integration research from a one-way process to a two-way process in the world. The earlier studies mention the reaction of the receiving societies to immigrants' ideas and behaviors with fear or hostility. Integration of newcomers was presented as a must, and the newcomers were supposed to change completely to conform to the values of mainstream society (Anglo-conformity). This process is known as "the assimilation process of immigrants" in a nutshell. Most of the initial literature in this field [Brubaker 1992; Andreas, Nina 2002], therefore, interest in national traits mentions immigrants with the concept of "culturally distant". In German society, there was a counter-discourse at the opposite pole of this discourse. This counter-discourse argued that immigrants were never assimilated, that immigration would be costly, and that the threat of radical Islam and extreme cultural diversity would harm German society [Brubaker 1992]. This is why the IPs initially applied to immigrants in industrialized Western societies have continued as assimilation processes that ended up with the naturalization of their offspring in the 1990s.

There were different approaches and theories adopted in the earlier studies. Classical theories of assimilation, a well-known one is a straight-line/one-way process or assimilation theory [Park et al. 1925; Russell 1995], theories of acculturation and adaptation [Lazarus, Folkman 1984; Berry 1997], approaches related to multiculturalism and pluralism [Scholten 2011; Alexander 2001] and finally intersectionality theories are the most known in social sciences. These approaches and theories are keen on the assimilation of newcomers. Even some cultures are assumed in these studies as inferior to Euro-American cultures. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the IP between Yezidis and German society.

The integration between Yezidis and German society can be well-analyzed by conducting unstructured interviews. Hence, I conducted fieldwork in four different cities, where individuals in Yezidi institutions and organizations evaluate German integration policies from different perspectives. I adopted an inductive methodology in the study that was based on conceptual analysis and fieldwork in settings of four Yezidi settlements in different cities (Bielefeld, Celle, and Oldenburg) of Germany.

The article is structured as follows: First, the concept of the two-way integration process will be explained. Then a brief historical and demographic background of Yezidis is given. Then Germany's integration policies will be described. Lastly, research findings will be presented. In this way, the IP between Yezidis and German society will be clarified.


## THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The elementary definition of integration is made by Rinnus Penninx as follows: "the process of becoming an accepted part of society" [Penninx 2004: 3]. Penninx continues claiming that any integration process and policies related to integration should look at three dimensions: the legal dimension, the social-economic dimension, and the cultural or religious dimension. Alastair Ager and Alison Strang [2008] agree that the concept of integration is used widely with differing meanings. They highlight the key domains of integration as follows: achievement and access across the sector of employment, practices about citizenship and rights, the process of social connection between social groups, and structural barriers regarding such connection related to the local environment, culture, and language [Ager, Strang 2008]. In addition to social scientists who claim that there is no general definition of integration [Castles, Moore 2001], which is a "broad-ranking concept" [Vermeulen 1997: 8], it is important to note that many social scientists currently provide a normative understanding of integration via the consensus in the field of integration research that "integration is a two-way process" [Klarenbeek, 2021: 902]. The concept of integration, though in many contemporary studies, has a processual character shaped at least by two parties: the migrated population and the "receiving society". The realm of the IP was, in general, determined by the interaction between immigrants and the receiving society, where the receiving society, with its institutional apparatuses, took a decisive position in adapting immigrants or newcomers into the social structure of the receiving society until the 1990s. But, currently, individuals and immigrant organizations are essential parts of the integration processes to be part of civil society. Any IP has at least three levels: the individual level, the collective level, and the institutional level. These levels of integration are implemented with several types of "immigrant" policies. Hans Vermeulen emphasizes that there are distinctions between types of policies. He highlights two types of immigrant policies: general policies (the management and regulation of migration) and target policies (the regulation of changes in society as a result of migration). Depending on these policies, there are also structural integration and socio-cultural integrations. In structural integration, the socio-economic structural problems of migrants are solved and migrants are becoming part of public institutions. Socio-cultural one focuses on the relationships and connections that migrant groups or individuals can develop to involve the receiving society's culture [Vermeulen 1997].

In two-way process immigrants' cultural centers or organizations can work in harmony with the public institutions of the receiving society to facilitate and accelerate the IP. In time, they become part of the public institutions of the receiving society. However, a bad-formulated integration policy may target newcomers as a political security risk and culturally different. It may prevent immigrants from participating in all domains of the receiving society. It even may label immigrants as "outsiders", "aliens", "others", etc.

Some receiving societies are not happy with being called an immigration country formulating their local and national policies to deal with newcomers as "outsiders", "guests", and "guest workers". In this regard, the initial studies, theories, and approaches focused on the national level in the framework of nationalist thinking that is shaped as "methodological nationalism"[2] by academics to deal with immigrants` issues. Local levels of the receiving countries were not at the center of the initial theories of integration studies. Consequently, the role and influence of the receiving community at the local level in the integration processes were not clear in such works. Nearly all of the theorizing on immigration was dominated by national-level models until the mid-1980s.

The predominant view about immigrants was produced in the framework of "methodological nationalism" in the world. National ministries of education, except Germany, notably after World War II, produced information regarding newcomers within the context of these approaches in early modern Europe. With methodological nationalism, a container model of receiving society with national thinking dominated postwar social sciences [Wimmer, Schiller 2002]. "Guest workers" or "others" are essentialized as a problem due to their cultural differences from the majority or container population within this framework and immigrant assimilation was a necessary cohesion to keep the mainstream culture "safe".

These approaches, however, have been criticized since they focus on such notions as a homogenous society, the concept of mainstream culture, ignoring structural inequalities that prevent immigrants' integration, and so on. These earlier approaches highlight particular requirements, such as assimilation, multiculturalism, and pluralism that political theorists developed, for immigrants to be accepted in host countries. But as mentioned above, the one-way discourse evolved into two-way discourse, notably since the 1990s. Numerous scholars criticized discourses, the ways of nationalist thinking, and integration policies taking the structures of the receiving societies into account [Modood 2004; Lucassen 2005; Ager, Strang 2008; Waters, Pineau Gerstein 2015; Penninx 2010; Schinkel 2018].

Today, instead of one-way conceptualizations of previous approaches, two-way processes and, to some extent, partly three-way processes continue to develop as theories in integration studies. The definition of integration in current integration

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[2]  Methodological nationalism is known as an approach that takes the borders of a national state into consideration while evaluating societies, notably evaluating migrants' social connections such as integration.

literature, though, may vary, in general, in empirical studies, and in policy discussions. New dimensions (the role of origin countries in settled countries, for example) come out in contemporary studies on integration. The investigation of the impact of origin countries on the integration of migrants is at stake. Integration, for example, is defined as a three-way, three-scale, and multidimensional process [Unterreiner, Weinar 2014].

However, in this study, I adopt Lea M. Klarenbeek's understating and approach of the two-way IP, a process in which both parties take part or insiders and outsiders integrate each other. I adopt the approach as an analytical tool for understanding the IP of Yezidis in Germany. One of the most important evaluative standards for integration research according to Klarenbeek is an end state where social boundaries do not affect social standing. She argues that integration is not legal or socioeconomic status, it is rather a matter of social standing. She considers integration "as a matter of relational equality promoting more equal relations between people" [Klarenbeek 2021: 903]. In her definition, an ideal type of integrated society is a society without any social boundaries between legitimate and non-legitimate members. There should not be a social distinction between 'real citizens' and people whose citizenship is questioned. According to Klarenbeek, there are three general categories of understanding the concept of two-way integration: "(1) Insiders are affected by the integration of outsiders; (2) Insiders can influence the integration of outsiders; and (3) insiders and outsiders integrate with each other" [Klarenbeek 2021: 908]. In the first category, the host countries do not remain unaffected and the change (an output and a potential input) in the receiving society is considered a consequence of immigration. In the second category, outsiders are more active agents while insiders are passive entities in integration. The institutions of receiving society provide a context for the IP remaining partly participated in it. In the third category, receiving society or insiders are an essential part of the relational process in integration. Insiders are integrated too. Klarenbeek's third understanding of integration is chosen in this study. Integration appears as a result of a configuration of social interactions and it provides information about the relationship between people in this third understanding that guide me to analyze what and how Yezidis running their cultural centers consider the current relational process of integration with German authorities.

## A BRIEF HISTORICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND OF YEZIDIS

Yezidis, a religious minority, settled widely in their lands of origin, which are today called northern Iraq and Syria, and southern Anatolia. Most Yezidis regard themselves as Kurds and "Kurdish is the community's common language of religious observances" [Omarkhali, Kreyenbroek 2016]. Their religion, Êzdîyatî, which is called Yezidism by scholars, originated in mountainous areas of the lands of Kurds, which is known as Kurdistan by Kurds. They are one of the heterodox communities

of Kurdistan alongside Kakais (Yarsan), and Alevis (Qizilbash) [Bruinessen 2023]. Yezidis spread across several areas of the lands of Kurds and of Transcaucasia. Currently, their lands in Kurdistan are dominated by two large sects of Islam, Sunni and Shia. The area, as known the area of the mixture of religions, has been destroyed by wars and by the ideology of the Islamic State (IS) over the last decades. The consensual social interaction between groups has turned into conflicts. Many religious groups were expelled around.

As an isolated[3] community in the Kurdish mountains of northern Iraq, "Yezidis appeared in the twelfth century" [Açıkyıldız 2010: 1]. "Their religion is not a single monolithic system of belief. There is no written sacred book, and the religion is based primarily on orthopraxy" [Omarkhali 2017: 13]. Being a Yezidi is a matter of birth. "Participation in festivals and formal obedience to traditional experts or religious authorities (the Prince, the Sheikh, and the Pîr) are essential in religious life" [Kreyenbroek 2014: 25]. Both cultural values and spiritual values play a crucial role in social life. Social norms, taboos, and religious observances in a body make sense in the Yezidi community.

Yezidis are distributed to Turkey, Transcaucasia, and to the Western diasporas alongside Iraq and Syria. The numbers of Yezidis appear as estimated data based on secondary data rather than officially recognized population census [Dulz 2016]. The community's population is suggested that half a million to one million by the community members.[4] Yet their numbers in Iraq are between 100,000 and 250,000; the largest Yezidi communities are currently found in northern Iraq's Dihok, Mosul, and Sinjar areas [Ackermann 2004]. The genocide of 2014 committed by the IS reduced the population in their homeland [International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021][5] It caused new migratory flows of Yezidis to Europe, notably to Germany where today the largest population of Yezidis exists in Western Europe. They feel free in Germany to experience the freedom of their religion, social interactions, and collective action that they never had in their homeland. Germany is a new space where they become visible via cultural centers, social organizations, social networks, and associations. Currently the total number of Yezidis around the world is estimated at approx. 800,000–1,000,000.[6] The number of Yezidis in Germany is, before 2014, illustrated as 100,000 in one of the publications of a Yezidi cultural center [Tagay, Ortaç 2016: 13]. It is noteworthy to say that each Yezidi association, cultural center, and organization gives different figures about the total number of Yezidi population in Germany. A potential estimated population count would not be

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[3] Alongside several internal factors, external factors such as the Islamist discourse of the heretic against Yezidis, the attempts at Islamization of Yezidis, and the activities of missionaries have isolated Yezidism.

[4] A big portion of Yezidi intellectuals, whom I had conversations with in Germany during research fieldwork, believe that there are around a million Yezidis living around the world.

[5] A total of 1,027,523 Iraqi families became displaced from their homes.

[6] The numbers are based on estimated data.

possible since Yezidi associations have contradictions in estimated data. A head of a Yezidi cultural center in the city of Celle, for example, claims that there are over five hundred Yezidi families in the city while a head of a Yezidi center in Bielefeld falsifies this data claiming there are two hundred families in Celle at most.[7] Currently, neither the Yezidis nor the German institutions have any precise data on the Yezidi population in Germany. It is unlikely that German institutions will conduct this census due to the neutrality of the State(s) towards religious groups. And there is not a clear indication that Yezidi institutions and organizations are engaged in such work on the number of their population in Germany.

### FIRST ENCOUNTERS AND GERMANY'S INTEGRATION POLICY

The need for a foreign workforce in the period post-World War II turned Germany into a country of immigration and largely determined today's integration policy. In the 1950s and 1960s, West Germany recruited a foreign workforce from Italy, Greece, and Turkey to deal with the industrial boom [European Commission 2016]. In the following years and the early 1970s, Germany encountered a large-scale migration due to family reunification. As of the 1970s, Yezidis became much more visible in Germany as a result of the arrival of migrant families. For example, "as early as the mid-1970s, a Yezidi colony was settled in the Lower Saxony district of Celle. In the following years, some other groups settled in Saarland and in the two Lower Rhine districts of Moers and Kleve" [Heine 1992].

Yezidis were part of the policies of local migrants and part of the works of religious scholars and some churches until the 1990s [Dag 2014]. National-level migrant policies of Germany were tried and tested at the local level in the local institutions of sixteen federal states (*Länder* in German). The success of local initiatives in dealing with ethnic diversity made Yezidis part of the national-level integration plans in time. According to Stephen Castles' [1995] "citizenship regimes" model,[8] "Germany is defined by ethnicity and it has an exclusionary immigration regime" [cited by Alexander 2007: 8]. Once the national category of Germany relied on descent-based (*Jus Sanguinis*), Germany did not see itself as a country of immigration until the end of 1990s. German authorities kept Germany out of traditional countries of migration even though it receives the highest number of immigrants among Western European countries [Vermeulen 1997]. In 1989, for example, the German government agreed on a memorandum called "Outline for Aliens Legislation" that resulted in the Aliens Act in 1991 to provide permanent residence status to resident aliens and to naturalize

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[7]    I witnessed it during field work in Germany in 2023.

[8]    Ausländergesetz [Act on Foreigners], Apr. 28, 1965, BGBL. I at 353, http://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav? startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBl&jumpTo=bgbl165s0353.pdf, archived at http://perma.cc/ETG7-ELM

their offspring [Senders 1996]. There was not a specific policy for integration in the Act. The migration provisions of Germany, therefore, were as follows until the new law of 2005 that reformed the immigration system of Germany: Foreigner's Law (1965), which was revised by the Foreign Law 1990,[9] the Establishment of the Commissioner for the Promotion of Integration of Foreign Employees and their Families, that affiliated to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in 1978, and Law for the promotion of foreigners' repatriation, political mobilization against "abuse of the right to asylum" (1983) [Borkert, Bosswick 2007].

In 2000, an Independent Commission on Migration was installed and the Commission offered a Canadian model of naturalization and integration policy to the German government. Until 2005, Germany did not have a state-controlled immigration and integration policy. From the 1990s to 2005, discussions and measures have concentrated on the strategy of Germany towards foreigners' integration into German society based on the basis of *ius soli* principle. Finally, a systematic integration policy has been established by the new Foreigner's Law, Residence Act, in 2005 (*AufenthG*),[10] and it brought a consistent integration strategy and policy for German governments. Section 43 of the Act regulates the integration policy of Germany dividing foreigners into different groups. To foster the inclusion of migrants two integration plans, the National Integration Plan of 2007 [Kirchberger 2007] and the National Action Plan on Integration of 2012 [Schneider 2012] were set up by German governments. The National Integration Plan of 2007 takes education, training, employment, and cultural integration into account while the National Action Plan on Integration of 2012 focuses on improving the recognition of foreign degrees, providing individual support to young migrants, and increasing the share of migrants in the services of federal and state governments. The adopted Meseberg Declaration on Integration [Meseberg 2016] in 2016 by the federal cabinet included some improvements to governments' integration policy targeting various immigrant groups and offering support to all federal ministries of employment, education, and social integration. When it comes to 2018, the National Action Plan of Germany was expanded with a hundred measures as a road map for the coming decade. This is the German government's most systematic and comprehensive integration policy that illustrates Germany as an immigration country with five phases of migration and integration ranging from pre-integration measures to bolstering social cohesion [Meseberg 2016]. Between 2019 and 2021, a commission called Expert Commission on the Framework Conditions For Integration Capability [Fachkommission 2021] was created by the federal government to deal with a wide range of topics in the field of migration and integration to shape the migration country Germany better.

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[9] The 1990 Foreigner Law was significantly different from its predecessors strengthening of residence rights of family members, providing protection for foreigners born in Germany, and easing naturalization requirements. It replaced the regulations of 1965.

[10] https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_aufenthg/ (access: 13.10.2024).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Yezidis in Germany have three main demands from German society and the State institutions: the recognition of the Yezidi genocide of 2014 by the German government;[11] being recognized officially as a religious group and having constitutional protection; and having more cooperation from German authorities and institutions in the IP. The recognition of the Yezidi genocide of 2014 by the Bundestag is considered a big step to reach the next demands by almost all Yezidis. The unity of Yezidis is likely to be the only way that will enable the Yezidi community to reach its goals in a short time and undergo a successful IP. They have tested it in Germany in 2023.[12]

Analyzing the Residence Act of 2005[13] is mainly oriented to new Yezidi comers regarding integration. The newcomers are encouraged by German authorities at the local level to attend language and orientation courses efficiently while their language, and material culture are not promoted by the law at the national level. The first generation, therefore, considers the IP as not a mutual integration (a two-way IP) and as an "assimilationist process" that "forces" children to learn firstly German language, culture, and values and then learn their mother tongue and their own culture optionally in public schools. For example, during an interview, a Yezidi individual states as follows: "Our children are exposed to the German State education system all day. Kindergarten is compulsory at a very young age. If we don't bring these children to our institutions and educate them, we will lose them all. They will become Germanized".[14] In addition to that, the first Yezidi generation and some individuals from the second generation consider the current regulations of integration as exclusive ones while a big portion of the second generation, almost all third generation, and newcomers consider the ongoing IP a positive step for Yezidis on the base of a mutual relationship.

Except for the cultural center in Oldenburg, the Yezidi cultural centers, that are part of this study, seem to have not enough professionals and do not have a well-organized system of conducting integration. They are not competent to take big steps such as making dialogue with institutions belonging to other religious groups. They do not have an effective interaction with German society for better integration even

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[11]  It was an urgent demand that appeared on the top list in the last years which was approved by the German Bundestag in January 2023.

[12]  They realized that they could achieve success when they put aside political factions and political divisions acting in unity. In the process leading up to the Bundestag's recognition of the Yezidi genocide, "the Yezidis acted in unity for the first time in history" according to a big portion of Yezidi individuals interviewed for the data of this study. Currently, the Yezidis have two main goals to reach for now and the most important one is the integration process. Managing this process in a proper way is very important for development and for gaining official religious recognition in Germany.

[13]  https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_aufenthg/ (access: 13.10.2024).

[14]  A Yezidi individual in a Yezidi cultural center in the city of Oldenburg highlights his thoughts about integration during our face-to-face conversation in February 2023.

though they have been known by Germans for over 60 years. All Yezidi cultural centers and organizations are in competition to be much more visible in Germany which is causing German authorities confusion in the IP. A head of a Yezidi cultural center exemplifies this competition as follows: "Once we are doing a very good service and propaganda on our own behalf, other Yezidi associations and cultural centers can get jealous and make a similar effort. But they openly declare that they don't like us since we do not get involved in political demonstrations. But they appreciate our work at the same time".[15] The same informant continues later as follows: "At least three different Yezidi individuals from different groups apply to local public authorities to get a place to celebrate the Yezidis' religious festivals in Germany. And the Germans are surprised and say we don't know which one of you to allocate the space to".

Among them, the members of the Zentralrat,[16] group seem to have developed close ties with German institutions at the local and national levels. It is one of the most active Yezidi groups in the IP providing language courses, and teaching religion and Yezidi culture in their own cultural centers. Another group that I classify as the politically *neutral* Yezidi group in the study is the most active Yezidi group in the IP. This group analyzes the concept of integration well and conducts studies and activities accordingly. It is the group with which the German authorities and institutions are most in contact and work together alongside the third group. This group separated from the Zentralrat in 2019. In addition to German institutions, they also cooperate with churches, mosques, and Jewish associations in the IP. They can declare that the support they receive locally from German institutions will be withdrawn if they are close to any political group. The fourth Yezidi group is a new formation of the Yezidi group that became much more visible in Germany after the Yezidi genocide of 2014. Members of this group have sufficiently been interacting with German society for the last ten years. People from this group accuse Yezidis of settling in Germany of forgetting their cultural values and religion. They declare that they have the only true knowledge of Yezidism and the correct way of keeping Yezidis' traditions and try to protect it with a conservative attitude. Members of neutral groups accuse this group of bringing "radicalism" into Yezidi German society. Integration is a new and complex concept for members of this group. The role and impact of individuals from this group in the IP is still very new. They benefit from social and economic benefits and German language courses offered by Germany, but they do not have a clear position in the integration yet.

The three cultural centers in this study have different methods of participation in integration with their different political backgrounds. Each Yezidi individual being interviewed in these centers evaluates the IP differently. But, the common theme from these conversations is that a big portion of Yezidis still has a skeptical approach to the

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[15]  Interview with the same Yezidi person in Oldenburg in February 2023.
[16]  The center was formed in 2017.

IP: fear of assimilation. Every individual stresses the concept of assimilation except for the members of the Yezidi Cultural Center of Oldenburg. According to them,

> in the current system, integration is moving towards assimilation as they consider the integration as a dangerous process. For example, Muslims and Christians can learn about their religion for an hour a week in public schools whereas we are deprived of it. In terms of integration, we are not afraid of learning German laws and customs, but we are afraid that one day they will tell us to give up our own customs and way of life. Because the duties and obligations that they demand from us in terms of integration are entirely within their framework and in accordance with their laws. There is a one-sided imposition. This leads to assimilation.

By contrast, many Yezidi individuals evaluate integration as an opportunity for Yezidis and accuse the rest of the Yezidis of not giving enough effort to be successful in integration. One of the heads of a Yezidi cultural center that I consider a neutral group evaluates the ongoing IP as follows:

> Most Yezidis misunderstand the concept of integration and assimilation. The German State has a law that aims to make every aspect of life easier… Germans are protecting people's rights. In Germany, no need to embrace your religion, culture, or identity. The State does not put obstacles to your education. They provide you with all kinds of opportunities so that you can be a beneficial member of this society.

Considering the above statements of the people in this cultural center, which is part of a two-way IP, it is clear that they are not against integration. Instead, they support the IP accusing Yezidi families of unconsciousness. Moreover, they emphasize that assimilation is a natural process stressing their fear of potential assimilation. This fear was obvious in the statements of other heads and employees of different cultural centers too. For instance, an informant in Bielefeld highlighted that "Germans want Yezidis to be mentally integrated. They want the Yezidis to get out of their mold and to get into their mold. In such a situation, there will be no Yezidism, it will over". Conversely, an employee added that

> according to our faith, we have some sacred values. Like swearing on Sheikh Adi,[17] swearing on Berat.[18] We believe in it and we swear on it. These values that are sacred for me become incomprehensible for my children. These values are lost in the integration process. If we preserve our own values and learn and apply the values of German society at the same time, then integration makes sense.

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[17]  The mystic figure of the 12th century in Yezidism. Some Yezidis consider Sheikh Adi a reformist of Yezidism as a Sufi figure.

[18]  The earth from the holy center (Lalish in Iraq) mixed with healing water.

However, a Yezidi lawyer considers the IP purely the assimilation of Yezidis. He stressed that

> I know more than a hundred Yezidis who married Germans and they all became Germans. They completely forgot their language and culture. They call themselves Germans although they are clearly not. It is very easy for the process we call integration to evolve into assimilation. I, for sure, speak German and actively interact with the State institutions. Germany is like our own country. But we also need to preserve our own culture.

When it comes to what did Yezidis gain from IP so far, the current sufficient interaction between Yezidis and Germans takes place through federal regional institutions, churches, and local German members of governance. After years of interaction, the Yezidis, first of all, became a well-known religious group, notably after 2014. They gained a religious holiday for children to celebrate their religious festivals in Germany. Children of Muslims and Christians did not attend school on religious holidays. From now on, Yezidi children have the right to stay at home on their religious holidays. As a result of sufficient interaction, German authorities asked Yezidis for a calendar of religious holidays to regulate it and to deal with potential complex issues that Yezidis have in Germany. It can clearly be said that from Penninx's understanding of integration, Yezidis' integration in Germany is about to gain a legal dimension after cultural and social-economic dimensions. That is, the IP gained an institutional level from the individual level and the collective level. Thus, from Klarenbeek's understanding of integration, it is obvious that "insiders and outsiders integrate with each other".

The relationship of this cultural center with German institutions becomes stronger. They manage two processes in integration very well. Such as establishing first contact with Germans in the 1990s interacting with German society and providing service to the Yezidi community. They managed these two processes well and the German authorities have developed trust in them since 1995. Without this trust, they would not have been able to build the cultural center in Oldenburg according to members of this center. A member of this center states that today Yezidis in Oldenburg has the power to send three parliamentarians to parliament from Oldenburg. Trust-based relationships between the cultural center of Oldenburg and German authorities in integration have an impact on the German central government. The German central Government, for instance, has indicated that they would be happy to have Yezidi theology departments or institutions at the universities in Germany. But this decision cannot be taken by the German central government. The institutions of the Federal States can make such decisions. It will not be surprising to have a Yezidi theology institution with Yezidi theologians at Oldenburg University soon.

CONCLUSION

Yezidis' experience of integration in Germany occurs in the context of "identity politics". It occurs in the forms of legal, political, and constitutional recognition of the identities of individuals and religious minorities. During the IP, they have sought public and institutional recognition, and protection of their language, culture, and religion. However, they struggle for culturally sensitive modes of integration. Today, the third generation of Yezidis consider Germany as their home. Many young Yezidis I contacted during data collection in the field consider German as their native language. As Yezidis work in a wide variety of professions, they shape Germany both economically and culturally. Yezidis raised in Germany naturally became part of German society by speaking German and adopting German cultural values. This subject, for sure, will take the IP to another level in the near future.

After 2015, the Yezidi population in Germany increased significantly. In some schools, the number of Yezidi students is believed that have reached fifty or sixty percent. German authorities are now aware that these Yezidis may have some demands in the future. Before 2015, they would not respond to Yezidis' demands quickly. But now the population has increased a lot. In this case, it is noteworthy to mention that the hypothesis of the research with research questions, notably with the question of how Germany adopted an integration policy and when it evolved into a two-way integration policy is testified. Cause, Yezidis' interaction with German society is now at a high level which resulted in the recognition of the Yezidi genocide of 2014 in the Bundestag in 2023.

Some Yezidis hold German passports. Some Yezidi villages completely moved to Germany after 2014. In the near future, the local authorities will accelerate the IP with sufficient interaction with all kinds of Yezidi groups in Germany. Those who provide teaching classes voluntarily in cultural centers have to follow the rules and curriculum of the German State in their cultural centers. Some Yezidis who moved to Germany recently with a good education are not considered teachers at first by German authorities. Many Yezidi individuals in cultural centers are, therefore, still skeptical about the IP. But the German authorities keep Yezidis' way open.

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INTEGRACJA MIĘDZY JEZYDAMI A SPOŁECZEŃSTWEM NIEMIECKIM: ROZUMIENIE PRZEZ JEZYDÓW OBECNEGO DWUTOROWEGO PROCESU INTEGRACJI W NIEMCZECH

Od połowy XX w. Niemcy pełnią rolę centrum migracji różnorodnych mniejszości etnicznych i religijnych, w tym jazydów – grupy etniczno-religijnej wygnanej z ojczyzny przodków. Począwszy od lat 60. XX w. jazydzi osiedlali się w Republice Federalnej Niemiec, utworzonej w 1945 r., poruszając się w złożonym krajobrazie społecznym. W ciągu ostatnich sześćdziesięciu lat, a szczególnie od lat 90. XX w., jazydzi coraz bardziej integrowali się ze społeczeństwem niemieckim. Niniejsze badanie analizuje stopień

integracji jazydów, stawiając hipotezę, że jazydzi wykazują bardziej proaktywne podejście do integracji w porównaniu z innymi grupami imigrantów w Niemczech. Aby odpowiedzieć na tę hipotezę, badania analizują kilka kluczowych pytań: jak jazydzi postrzegają niemiecką politykę integracyjną?; Czy postrzegają ją jako formę asymilacji, czy jako szansę na awans społeczno-kulturowy?. Niniejsza analiza sytuuje integrację jazydów w ramach dwukierunkowego procesu integracji, wspieranego metodami indukcyjnymi, w tym wywiadami przeprowadzonymi w Niemczech i kompleksową analizą tekstu. Badanie dowodzi, że jazydzi podchodzą do integracji z dużą wrażliwością, ukształtowaną przez ich oczekiwania co do politycznego, prawnego i konstytucyjnego uznania w społeczeństwie niemieckim.

**Słowa kluczowe:** jazydzi, Niemcy, integracja, proces dwukierunkowy

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