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Study Abroad Research Project Final Paper

Abstract

As a group, we have chosen to examine the use of various mediums as a means of identity expression, and self-advocacy, as well as how these artistic and often personal choices impact outside perceptions of certain groups. For years media, theatre and film have been used to tell stories, convey events and present facts. However, with every character in a movie, scene in a play or piece of information presented in a news segment characteristics are placed on groups that are depicted. These characteristics often represent the individual or a small percentage of those being depicted, but they are used to represent the whole. These highly viewed and accessible mediums of expression contribute to prejudices and discrimination.

Focusing on how the choices of an individual can affect a larger group, Hannah will be researching various narratives surrounding Islam and how those narratives contribute to attitudes towards Muslims in Germany and around the world. Mira will be exploring how various minorities are portrayed in films and how German-produced films and those produced by the groups of interest may differ in their portrayals of the minority group. Roujia and Kendra will both be exploring German theater, examining the different aspects of social change that can be achieved through live performance. Roujia will be examining how ethnic minorities use stage performance as a means for social inclusion by the majority, while Kendra will be looking at how marginalized groups use theater arts to advocate for equal rights and opportunities in their own communities.

Within the lens of their chosen focus, each group member will take a look at how various mediums can be used as a form of self and group advocacy. Misrepresentation through film, theatre, art and written works is very common, but it does not complete the picture. Any misrepresented group has the opportunity to reclaim the narrative and tell their story as they see fit. We will focus on how that is done through film, theatre and written media and the effect that has on social feelings. In totality, our research will focus on how judgments based on appearance can affect daily interactions and how these judgments are either perpetrated or broken down through the human mediums of media, film, and theater.

Question

How do the themes present in written media contribute to national feelings towards Islam in Germany and how do German Muslims use written media to reclaim the narrative and combat misconception?

As a group our project became centered around the uses of different mediums as a means of expression. Through my question I am taking a look at multiple aspects of written media. I will look at perspectives created by non-muslims in German news media that discuss the few, but are used to represent the many. I will also look at various outlets where Muslims express their feelings about how Germany and the rest of the world views Islam as a whole. Using these different outlets I will explore national and international feelings towards Muslims, where they stem from and the affect they have on the identity of German Muslims as German citizens individually and collectively.

Background

Identity often manifests itself most visibly in the choices that people make in their own presentation. In synthesizing the different lenses we each chose to view identity with, we arrived at the broader concept of a "human medium," that guides both the formation and perceptions of identity. Since identity is a main theme of the study abroad program as a whole, we decided to make that a focus of all of our project to help ground and unite us. From there we decided to look at how the identities of groups or individuals are expressed through written media, film and theatre. Unlike music or visual arts such as painting or drawing, you don't need tools and years of practice. This makes these forms of expression, where you only really need your body or the ability to write more accessible to individuals of a variety of backgrounds where the tools for other arts may not have been available to them. The accessibility of these forms of expression make them among the easiest ways to share the unique experiences of individuals and come to significant understandings about the different identities they are rooted in.

Hannah:

Books, news articles, and comics are quickly becoming an electronic commodity. People no longer walk out to their driveway in the morning to pick up their newspaper to find out what is happening in the world. They unlock their phones, open up their news app or Facebook timeline and quickly scroll through article titles until something catches their eye. This change has almost brought the print business to a halt and changed the way people interact with written media, but it has not changed the magnitude of media's affect.

Written media whether it takes the form of a national news article, social network post, or blog column holds an immense amount of power. Whenever anyone expresses their own opinion, they have the ability to influence the feelings of others. Even facts can be relayed in

way that convey the writer's own feelings. The internet has brought written media into people's lives at a constant rate and with every article, comment, post or reblog people are representing individuals, groups, feelings, and the list goes on. Representation can be both damaging and uplifting, it just depends who is conveying the representation and the influence they are trying to have with what they created. Simone de Beauvoir says, "representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with the absolute truth."

With my project I hope to explore representation of Islam in written media. There are over 4 million Muslims in Germany and of those 4 million over half are under the age of 25. The young Muslim population and continuing immigration to Germany is bound to cause the percentage of Muslims in Germany to increase. Islam is a constant figure in international news and that is no exception in Germany. The depiction of Islam in media influences how people feel about the religion as a whole and Muslims as individuals. This often leads to the negative choices of Muslims not living in Germany affecting the way German Muslims and Muslims around the world are viewed.

Just like media can be used to promote negative representations and stereotypes, media can also be used as a means of combating injustice. Marginalized groups can use written media to express their true beliefs and present the effect discrimination has on their daily lives. It becomes a safe form of expression and with the popularity of the internet can be widely seen. Whether it be a social media post, blog entry, published article or comment people have the ability to take the narrative into their own hands. I will explore how German Muslims are using this opportunity to spread awareness and combat prejudice.

Kendra:

Stereotyping is a way in which people can group like-individuals in order to make quick decisions on how to interact with that type of person. When referring to a group it is much easier to make broad assumptions and generalizations, however this means that when a person is associated with a particular stereotype they a9re labeled with generalized characteristics of the group and their individual identity is lost. In this way, stereotyping can be correlated to a form of oppression in which a person who stereotypes is dehumanizing an individual by classifying them as a generalized group instead of a unique person. Through theater, individuals are able to tell their story and share their internal narrative with others. This internal narrative gives the artist's audience a snapshot of the artist's identity and is a way for them to express the trials and triumphs they have faced as a fellow human. This makes theater a wonderful way for individuals who are underrepresented to not only express themselves and share their story, but to explain to their audience why they are equal as humans. In this way, theater becomes a powerful method for minority groups to advocate for equal representation and opportunities in their communities.

Roujia:

People are taking actions to overcome such exclusion, both white German and non-white German. Artists or students from minorities groups in Germany lead an immigrant vanguard in seeking more social inclusion by the society. The idea behind this is a different type of social activism, also called creative activism. (Want one definition of social activism from the paper we read). Young German students direct musicals "Yes We Can" and "Wedding on the Street" to examine racial issues in Germany. Director of Maxim Gorki "made a nexus for plays tackling issues like immigration, race and assimilation" in their theater so that they move daily life of

ethnic minorities to a public stage. They used stage performance, a form of "human medium", as their pathway to share their perspectives. They are seeking an echo not only among the minority group, but also in the entire society. Those efforts in self-expression of ethnic minorities and promoting creative activism are worth to gain much more insights about them.

Mira:

Film is a form of self-expression that not only conveys the beliefs and attitudes of the creators, but has the potential to influence those of the audience. In this way, it is an incredibly important medium when it comes to the separation of "others" in society. Through the lens of the filmmaker, society can either be broken up into it's pieces or seen as a whole. It is my aim to look at the portrayal of immigrants in German cinema, in films produced by mainstream production companies and those produced by the demographic in question. The treatment of this often marginalized group in fictional narratives speaks volumes about the larger perceptions of their role in society, and to what prejudices come attached to this identity. The other side of film as a medium for immigrant stories are those told by the immigrants themselves. These works represent a view of the larger German society as the "other," as opposed to identifying the minority group as the "different" factor. The accessibility of film has incredible consequence in the spreading of the stereotypes or understandings it perpetuates. Thus, looking at the messages being broadcast by an entire industry is necessary in order to understand the national climate for immigrants in Germany.

Research Methods

My research was comprised of various methods including, but not limited to survey questions, statistics gathered from third party sources, lectures, on-line research, articles and

news sources. To get a baseline of impressions present in Germany I created a survey with five questions. The questions addressed the presence of Islam in German media and the role media plays in social opinions and change. All questions had responses that ranged from strongly agree with the given statement to strongly disagree. Participants were asked to select one answer. The surveys were distributed in one of Professor Klepers undergraduate classes at Humboldt University. I received twelve completed surveys. My small sample size did not allow me to run proper statistical tests to determine the significance of my results. Because of this I just decided to create graphs of the data so that I could look at general trends and make preliminary conclusions. The class was comprised almost entirely of women with only one male student. The age ranges and countries of origin were diverse, but because of the small sample size, lack of gender diversity and fact that all who answered the survey were college students I chose to take the results of the survey with a grain of salt. The survey was written in English which was the second language of most of the students. I realize that factor may have also altered the results. I also wrote the questions and distributed the survey when I thought I was focusing on all German news media in general. Once I changed my focus to various types of written media including less mainstream sources these survey responses became less relevant. The results were very helpful for getting a baseline of German feelings, but they were not robust enough for me to make any concrete conclusions.

The Young Islam Conference, which is based in Berlin and we had the privilege of meeting with became a very important source for me. They have completed national surveys in Germany regarding various aspects of Islam and feelings towards Islam in Germany and when we met with them they presented many of those results. I was able to use what they collected to

further build upon what I had collected and get a more complete understanding of feelings towards Islam in all of Germany. They also showed us some comics done by a Muslim artist that goes by the name Tuffix. I did some further research on her and her comics and decided to make them a central part of my research and project. The Young Islam Conference provided me with important information that I would of had a very hard time finding on my own. Their access to national surveys was very helpful.

My research on Tuffix took on various forms. I looked on multiple websites to view her comics and chose the ones I felt were the most relevant to my project. I also did biographical research on her, so that I would have a better idea on her background and her influence for her comics comes from. I looked through the comment section on many of her comics, so that I could see how people perceive her comics and how she interacts with people who view her work.

My project focuses on narratives surrounding Islam present in various parts of written media. Tuffix's comics were a great example of a German Muslim reclaiming the narrative through written and drawn expression. To get an idea of what other narratives were present and their contribution to attitudes towards Islam I had to look at mainstream news outlets. I used two news sources, Spiegel Online and DW.com. I chose these two because most stories were presented as or available as written articles as opposed to video clips. Having the stories in written form made it a lot easier for me to translate from German to English. On each site I used the searched the terms "Islam" and "Muslim." From there I read articles that pertained to each search term paying close attention to common themes. I payed close attention to the titles of articles looking for common buzzwords. The title of an article is used to draw readers in and often can be the only part of an article that people read. Because of that fact I wanted to pay

close attention to the message that article titles were conveying. Since I do not speak German it was difficult to find sources that were reliable, popular in Germany and easily translated into English. This factor limited me to these two sites. I would have prefered to look at more sources and get a more complete view of what exists in news media.

I also did research on PEGIDA, which is an anti-Islamic group in Germany. Pegida is short for *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*, which in English means Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident. Pegida was formed in Dresden, Germany in 2014. Since then the organization has held rallies and gained enough support in Germany to make national headlines (Pegida). I chose to look at Pegida because the organization has attracted a large amount of attention in just under a year and is a good example of anti-islamic feelings in Germany.

Lastly, I did some research on some of the religious aspects of Islam. Before this project I did not know a lot about Islam and I wanted to make sure that I could check what was present in media with Islamic teachings. I did not want my personal biases or ignorance to inhibit my ability to do effective research.

The survey I conducted and information provided by the Young Islam Conference were essential to getting my research started. From there I had an idea of where to go with my research and was able to get a clearer idea of where I wanted to go with my project. My limited knowledge of Islam, German culture and Islam in Germany was making it tough for me to focus my research, but the figures and statistics I collected gave me firm ground to stand on.

My language barrier played a significant role in my ability to do effective research, but I

feel that I was able to make the best with the resources I had. Using those two sites I was able to get a good idea of how Islam is presented in the news. Tuffix's comics were the most important part of my research and really helped to bring everything together. Her comics depicted prejudices that German Muslims and immigrants face from a Muslim perspective. In the end all my research methods worked together. Some aspects helped to get me started while others gave me both concrete and abstract ideas that were important for seeing representation and advocacy in written media.
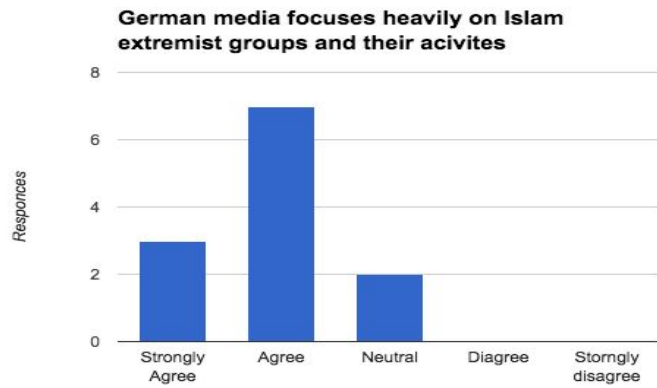
Findings

My initial survey was comprised of five statements. The students taking the survey were asked to rate those statements by selecting either strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree or strongly agree. The five statements were:

1.) German media focuses heavily on Islamic extremist groups and their activities.

2.) The overturn of the ban on teachers wearing headscarves was covered well by the media.

3.) Media contributes to discrimination against Muslims.

4.) Most people feel that Islam is a threat.

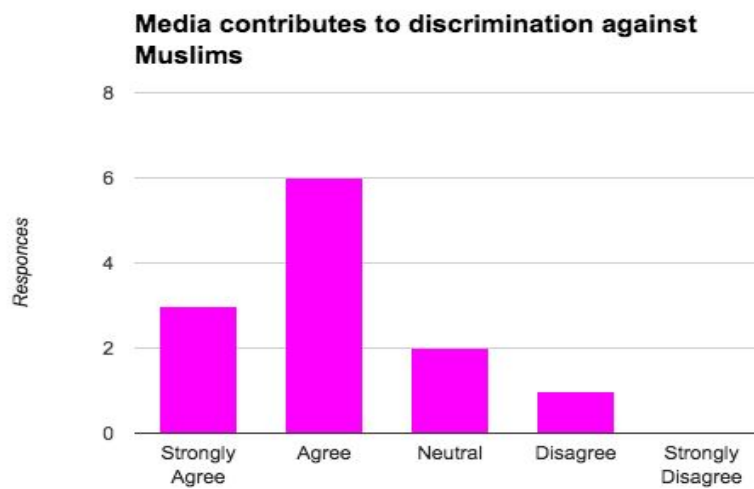5.) Media plays an important role in social change.

For my research I chose to focus on responses to statements 1, 3, 4, and 5. When I wrote the survey I was planning on researching coverage on the overturn of the headscarf ban, but since my project took a different turn that is of less relevance.
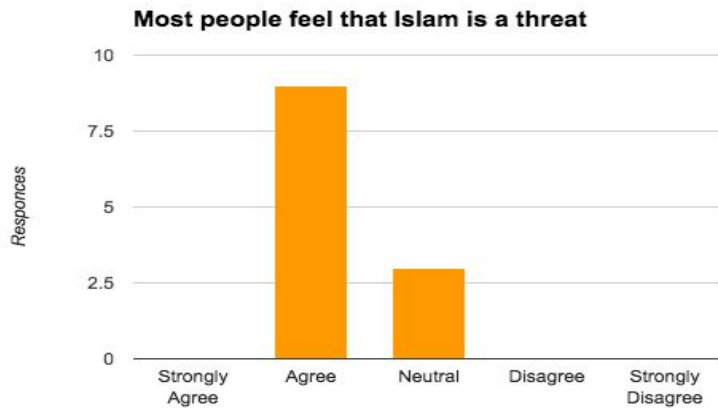
Results for question 1:

German media focuses heavily on Islam extremist groups and their acivites

Strongly agree = 3 Agree = 7 Neutral = 2   Disagree = 0   Strongly Disagree = 0

Results for question 3:

Media contributes to discrimination against Muslims

Strongly agree = 3 Agree = 6 Neutral = 2   Disagree = 1 Strongly Disagree = 0

Results for question 4:

Most people feel that Islam is a threat

Strongly Agree = 0   Agree = 9 Neutral = 3   Disagree = 0   Strongly Disagree = 0

Results for question 5:

Media plays an important role in social change

Strongly Agree = 9 Agree = 2   Neutral = 1   Disagree = 0   Strongly Disagree = 0

From the Young Islam Conference I collected various statistics pertaining to Muslims in Germany and attitudes towards Muslims in Germany. As found through a national survey, 58% of Germans consider Islam to be a threat and 61% of Germans feel that Islam and Western Society are not compatible. As an American I know that media can often be very focused on Muslim extremist groups and upon further research I found that the same trend in German media.

However, only 1% or 40,000 of German Muslims are considered to be Muslim extremists. Of those 40,000 only 8,000 or 0.2% of all German Muslims are considered dangerous (Laumann).

When researching news articles I focused on three different keywords. Depending on the key world and the website very different articles came up. When I searched Pegida most articles focused on anti-refugee feelings across Europe and mentioned Pegida as an example of this. Other articles focused on Pegida itself and its rise and attempts to gain political office. One article focused on the attack Charlie Hebdo that occurred in Paris in January. The article had quotes and perspectives from various German Muslims including Aiman Mazyek the head of The Central Council of Muslims in Germany. The article also focused on how many German Muslims felt that the attack would encourage and allow for an increase in anti-Islamic feelings. The article included a line the read,

> "Germany is home to around 4 million Muslims. There are Sunnis, Shiites, Alevis and Ahmadiyyas. There are immigrants from Turkey, from the Balkans and from Lebanon. There are those whose families have been here for several generations and those who have just recently fled their homelands, not infrequently to escape Islamist terror. University students and high-school dropouts, doctors and manual laborers: It is a heterogeneous group with their faith often being the only thing they have in common." In general the article conveyed that the attack was a tragedy, most notions that exist about Islam are false and that very few German Muslims deserve the prejudices that are directed at them." (#notinmyname)

When I searched "Islam" I experienced different results. Most articles were focused on "Islamists" or the Islamic State and most of them were in reference to countries around the world
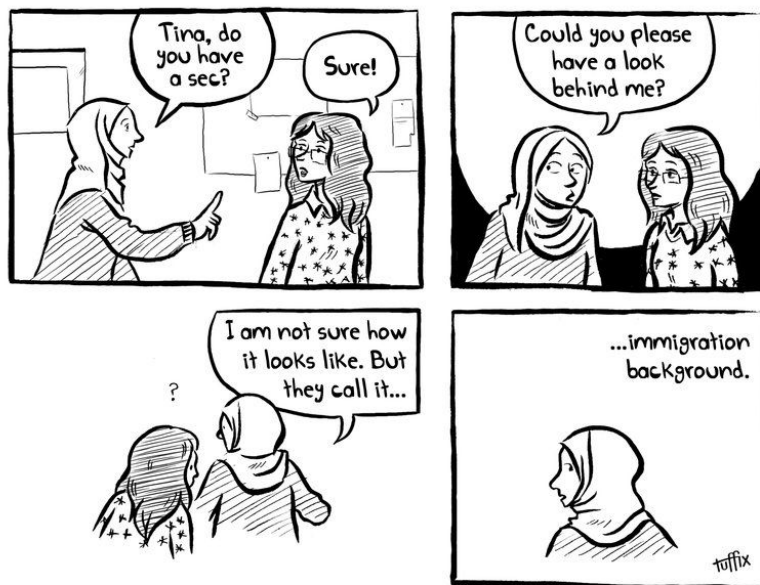
and not Germany. There were also articles focusing on the battle between refugees and anti-immigration groups in Germany depicting Muslims as one of the groups that is often being negatively affected by Germany's immigration laws. When I searched "Muslim" many of the articles were the same. I noticed though that one article focused on persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Burma a country where this minority is not granted citizenship. Very few articles focused on Muslims in Germany. One of the few articles that did cover Islam in Germany was focused on the return of Islamists to Germany. The article was about Emrah an Islamist and terrorist who left Germany to work with al-Qaeda to attack Germany. He has returned to Germany and even though he is in prison many people are concerned with where his loyalties will lie. The article states,

> "For some of them, the goal is to ensure that men like Emrah don't find new brothers in German prisons, brothers they could recruit for terrorism. For others, the goal is to ensure that the struggle against all things Western continues, and that Emrah doesn't give up. And for Germany, the goal is to ensure that the country continues to avert terrorist attacks, that Germany never has to see bombs exploding in suburban trains, as occurred in Madrid, or on buses like the ones that were targeted in London, that journalists are not executed the way they were in Paris, and that people are not shot dead the way they were in Brussels." (Returning Islamists)

In general news articles that referenced Pegida, Islam or Muslims focused on the ongoing issue with immigration in Germany. Many focused on Islamic extremist groups in Middle-Eastern countries or terrorist acts lead by Islamic extremist groups in Europe. Very few articles focused
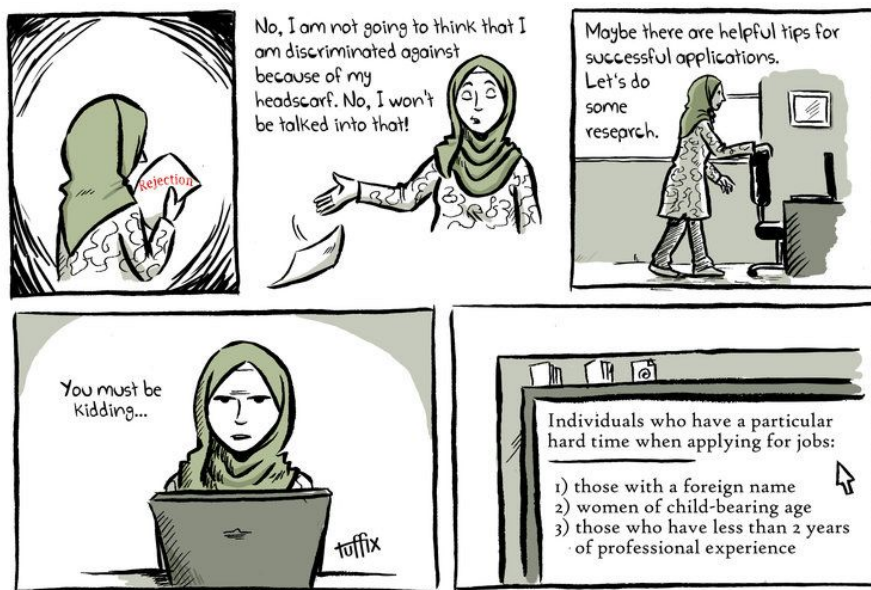
on violent acts towards Muslims in Europe, issues faced by Muslims in the German school system or issues faced by Muslims that are labeled by their immigration background.

An important part of my project was taking a look at how Muslims have reclaimed written narratives. I was shown a comic artist that goes by of Tuffix by the Young Islam Conference. Soufenia Hamed or "Tuffix" is a German Muslim that was born in Tunisia. She grew up and studies in Germany and as a result most of her comics focus on what it is like to live in Germany and Europe on the larger scale as a practicing Muslim. However she does not stop there, her comics also address what it is like to be an immigrant in Germany and various aspects of her daily life. Some of her comics are very politically charged and serious, while others are humours and tell the story of a woman in her 20s. She posts her comics on various sites, but mostly DeviantArt and her sites have received over 90,000 views (Comics with Attitude). She also has her own website www.tuffix.com. For the purpose of my project I have chosen to highlight a few comics that depict her feelings about being a Muslim and immigrant in Germany.

We addressed the concept of "immigration background" many times and in many different contexts during our program. I chose this comic because I think it is a good example of advocacy through media. In this comic Tuffix directly addresses something that would have directly affected her life and she does it in a way that is so simple to understand. In Germany being Muslim and having an immigrant background often go hand in hand. Those that are visibly Muslim are often assumed to have a recent immigration background and vice versa.

This comic also depicts what it means to have an immigration background and be Muslim in Germany. Those factors influence many parts of daily life. Through her comics Tuffix takes concepts such as immigration backgrounds and discrimination based on appearance and reclaims them. These comics are so clear and concise. With just a few words and pictures she is able to make discrimination and its affects very visible.

When I started my project, I did not intend to look at social media. I know that social media is one of the most popular forms of self advocacy and expression, but with my resources exploring narratives on social media would have been a very difficult undertaking. However, there is a page on Facebook called Humans of New York. The creator of the page takes pictures of people in New York City and posts them with a story or quote. Recently he has been in Pakistan and posting pictures and stories from people there. Since Pakistan has a high proportion of Muslim citizens and is often depicted in a negative light I have been paying close attention. An incredible quote from a young woman was posted a few days ago,

> "It seems that violence is the only lens through which ordinary people in Pakistan are viewed in the media. Even if it's a story about a Pakistani rock band, it will be set in the context of a violent society. There's nothing false about the perspective. Pakistan has a problem with violence. Violence is used to silence journalists, and judges, and moderate religious scholars. And it seems to be getting worse. Every time I see somebody on television speaking out in anger against extremism or corruption—I'll say a prayer for them. And every time one of those people is murdered, those of us who aspire to be like them grow a little more afraid. So it's not that the reports of violence are false. But they are only a small part of the truth. There's so much other life being lived here. But there's only so much space in international newspapers. And there's so much news in the world. So only the most jarring stories make the cut."

https://www.facebook.com/humansofnewyork?fref=ts

This quote is not related to Germany or even Islam, but when I saw it I thought it was a perfect example of the effect of media. Any story can be presented in a manner that pushes a certain

viewpoint or further advances current feelings. What people feel to be most eminently important is what is highly publicised and highly viewed. When people are not exposed to the whole picture, they believe the part they were exposed to is an adequate representation of the whole.

I also did a small amount of research on Islamic beliefs. I did this for a few reasons. I wanted to have a basic knowledge of the religion. Since many of the articles referred to Islamic extremists as terrorists I also wanted to see how Islam views terrorism. This is what I found,

"Terrorism, unjustified violence and the killing of non-combatant civilians (or even intimidating, threatening or injuring them) are all absolutely forbidden in Islam. Islam is a way of life that is meant to bring peace to a society whether its people are Muslim or not. The extreme actions of those who claim to be Muslim may be a result of their ignorance, frustration, uncontrolled anger or political (not religious) ambitions. Anyone who condones or commits an act of terrorism in the name of Islam is simply not following Islam and is, in fact, violating its very tenets."

After reading various articles and hearing about Islamic terrorists for the better part of my life I felt that this was a very important distinction to make." (30 Facts About Islam)

Conclusions

Muslims face difficulties in Germany for many reasons. Many have an immigration background leading to many levels of discrimination. They also have to deal with the fact that most of the world views Muslims as dangerous due to the fact that many terrorist groups associate themselves with Islam. Only 0.2% of Muslims in Germany are considered dangerous; this is a very small percentage. Yet these 0.2% lead to 58% of Germans to believe that Islam is a

threat. Muslims constantly have to make it clear that they are not extremists and that they just want to live their life and practice their faith in peace.

In Germany Muslims have no where to turn. Their immigration background cause Germans to associate them with places like Turkey or the Middle-East when in fact most of them have lived in Germany their entire lives. They cannot turn to their faith for solace because then they may be viewed as an extremist. Both their race and religion contribute to high levels of othering. How can German muslims identify as Germans when their immigration status and religion are constantly used to identify them and remind them that they do not have a full place in German society? There are many reasons why they don't fit into everyday German society.

Based on what I found in my research I feel that news articles contribute to the othering of German Muslims. Most articles that discuss Islam do so in a context outside of Germany furthering the notion that Islam and Muslims are heavily connected to states other than Germany. When Muslims in Germany are covered the focus is placed on extremists within the country and the fear associated with their presence. Of the 4,000,000 Muslims in Germany the 8,000 that are considered dangerous are the ones that referenced in the media. It is only natural for Germans to see Islam as a threat when they are only exposed to the 0.2% that is.

I do not feel that German news media purposefully aims to contribute to the negative representation of Muslims. By no means was every article painting Islam in a negative light; there were articles that focused on the issues faced by Germans with immigration backgrounds, which pertains to many German Muslims. However, I think the Humans of New York quote stated it perfectly; it is the news that is most pertinent in the moment that receives high amounts of coverage. Unfortunately, a fair amount of German and international news is focused on

terrorist groups that associate themselves with Islam. It is easy to see how the association could be formed even if it is not deserved. Media does contribute to the continued prejudice towards Muslims, but it does not have to be that way.

I also think it is important to make the distinction that these terrorist groups may associate themselves with Islam, but they are not carrying out Islamic teachings when they commit acts of terror. This is not the first time in history that violent acts of been committed in the name of religion. Christians persecuted people in the name of God for centuries. The world and history have found ways to forgive those evils. Islam as a religion does not promote violence there are just some Muslims that are violent for their own personal gain or the gain of their organization.

Not all hope is lost. There are activists and artists like Tuffix that use their passion and creativity to bring a different feel to the dialogue. She has become an advocate for Muslims and immigrants in Germany. Through her work she expresses what so many people cannot and gives people the opportunity to see social issues that receive very little coverage. There are groups like the Young Islam Conference that inspire young people to educate others, so that discrimination towards Muslims can be put to a stop. They reclaim Islam as a religion; a religion with a set of teachings and beliefs that promote a positive way of life and when they do so they empower Muslims to be proud of their faith instead of fear being seen as an extremist. They aim to remind people that Islam does not teach violence and the overwhelming majority of Muslims do not condone violence.

So what does this mean for Germany and the rest of the world? I think it is very important for people to realize that a large majority of Muslims living in Germany or the United

States are not extremists. We need to stop allowing the few to represent the many. The issues

Muslims face in Germany are wrapped up in their status as immigrants. In order for Muslims to

overcome discrimination in Germany and fell a strong connection with German society there

needs to be advancements in how Germany treats its immigrants. However, that is only part of

the battle. The distinction between Islamists and Islam as a whole needs to be clearer.

As with any marginalized group many levels of misconception contribute to the

discrimination of Muslims. Taking apart those misconceptions will take years, but it is possible.

People need to be educated on Islam, so that they can see that the religion does not promote

violence. News outlets need to be more careful to not only cover terrorist, but also problems that

Muslims face everyday as a result of discrimination, so that the public gets a more complete

view of the current situation. Artists like Tuffix, organizations like the Young Islam Conference

and Humans of New York need to continue to bring light to issues and perspectives and advocate

for those that are oppressed and cannot advocate for themselves. Written media can be a

significant part of the problem, but it can also be a very important part of the solution.

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Cultural Sensitivity

When I began to think about my topic for this project, I knew I wanted to push myself out of my comfort zone. I was hoping that something would inspire me during the spring seminar, but that did not really seem to happen. I started the program thinking that I would look at the connection between fashion and religion, without really knowing all that it would entail. It was during the second week of class that I came to my final project idea. I was reading one of the required texts for class that was focusing on how Muslims are treated in the German school system. That reading made me come to term with so many of my own prejudices and I felt compelled to explore the sources of prejudice further. And with that my project took me to a world I knew almost nothing about.

Growing up in the United States it can be so easy to form judgements about Muslims and Islam. So easy that we forget they are judgments that far more often than not are not deserved or true. Until this trip I did not realize the prejudices I had towards Muslims and when I did I was so disappointed in myself. This realization is also the reason this project is so interesting to me. I consider myself to be a socially aware person and yet I fell into this trap so easily. I think most people do not even realize that they have prejudices towards Muslims, which is both fascinating and terrifying. As I moved forward I had to come to terms with my own misconceptions and find a way to move on from them. I have made snap judgements about Muslims in the past, usually based off physical appearance; from this point on I am determined to educate myself on

issues faced by Muslims in the United States and explore the entire picture before I make snap judgments.

Once I was further into my research it became difficult for me to set my personal feelings aside. As I have found through research it can be very easy to let one's own personal feelings or the feelings of a group influence something that is supposed to be factual and neutral like a news article or research paper, and in the end it is pretty easy to tell the feelings of the author. While researching, putting together my presentation and writing this paper I have found this to be an issue for me. It upsets me that many people around the world are ignorant about Islam and that ignorance allows prejudices to form. In general media only contributes to the perpetuation of negative feelings towards Islam, but that does not mean that everyone has to buy into what they are being sold. In reality I have no room to judge, since I have fallen into this trap many times before. I just wish we lived in a society that it made it easier for us to see every side of an issue instead of the side that just further perpetuates current feelings.

I feel that this topic is so important in Germany, the United States and across the globe. Recent events in history have caused a global fear towards Muslims. That fear leads to prejudices that isolate and target people. Although I strongly feel that most feelings about Muslims are undeserved and inaccurate I can understand why they exist. Groups like Isis, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Taliban are common fixtures in German, American and international news whereas positive accounts of Islam or the discrimination that Muslims face all over the world is almost never heard of. People can only make judgements off of what they know and if they have been painted a picture of violent Muslims than they will learn to fear Islam, which is why this topic is so relevant. Most Muslims in the world are kind and caring

people, but current events make it hard to see that. If the world can see that in cases where a group is discriminated against it is often because the few are used to represent the many then maybe social indiscrepancies will begin to decrease.

As a group we focused on advocacy and representation using different aspects of performance media. Through this focus I realized how important it is for people to have an avenue in which to express themselves. That expression can take on many different forms each with as significant an impact as the first. Forms like film or theatre have the potential to reach a large audience, but others like reflective or comics are important for the artist to express themselves. I also learned that trying to make four different projects come together as a unit with some aspect of fluidity is very difficult. In the end though being apart of a group was so helpful and it was so comforting to have people to reflect with.

I learned so much about my own feelings and the feelings of others during this project. I now feel more prepared and empowered to advocate for what I feel to be important and make a difference in the life of others.