Chapter 5

When Times Are Out of Joint

Contestations of Official Temporal Religious Forms

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1 Introduction

Religions materialize in a variety of different objects, practices, and claims. People do not only hold different beliefs about, for instance, the existence and qualities of God or other supernatural beings and life after death, they also want to actively live their religion: gather and pray in houses of worship, produce and consume food, sometimes use psychedelic substances in rituals, print and disseminate religious writings, don clothing and headgear, ring church bells, broadcast and listen to the call of prayer, love and marry partners as they deem appropriate for their religion, and so forth. Next to this, religion – in Europe predominantly Christianity – is also a structuring principle that has shaped societies significantly (Joppke 2015, 2) and continues to influence political institutions, the public realm and material culture. In Germany, on which I will focus in this contribution, the built environment and cultural landscape are replete with objects that are part of or have clear references to Christianity like crucifixes in or on public buildings, street names and monuments of Christian figures (e.g., Mary, Saint Boniface or Martin Luther) and public celebrations of, for instance, Saint Martin of Tours or Saint Nicholas. Moreover, most public holidays are Christian holidays, such as Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, Ascension Day, and Christmas. It is safe to say, therefore, that despite an increasing pluralization of the religious field and a rapid secularization and unchurching of society since the 1960s, Christianity is part and parcel of the public sphere in Germany, and among all religions, it has a dominant and even privileged status in German society.

It is fairly uncontroversial to say that material things in general and religious forms like practices or tangible objects in particular can be morally and politically significant. With respect to religion, Marian Burchardt points out that religions actively shape cities “through inscribing their symbols and architectural languages into urban morphologies and appearances” (Burchardt 2017, 237; my translation). Accordingly, the built environment of societies with a historically dominant religion is usually dominated primarily by one particu-
lar religion. Such uneven material presence of different religions is politically significant, Burchardt argues, since it inscribes lines of cultural belonging that influence how different groups and people can or cannot relate to the space of the city or society in general (see Burchardt 2017, 235). This is particularly important if religious forms are not only public in the sense that they occupy a place in the realm where people meet and interact with each other in a society, but if they are endorsed by the state and construed as characteristics of national culture or as being in some other form especially significant for society and politics at large.

In the following I will refer to such forms as official religious forms, which denotes that they are rooted in or even part of a particular religion and at the same time endorsed or even established by official authorities, usually the state. This contribution focusses on contestations of official temporal religious forms and more specifically on the ethical and political issues that are involved in controversies about the status of Good Friday as silent public holiday and debates concerning the introduction of an Islamic public holiday in Germany. Temporal forms generally include structures like clock time, the calendar, and holidays, but also material forms like statues or memorials that commemorate events or persons from the past. Although not all temporal forms are direct parts of material culture, they materialize indirectly in things like clocks or calendars in print or on screen. Next to that, structured time coordinates human conduct; schedules make us go to school, take the train, or gather in stadiums at specific times, deadlines determine our priorities on a daily basis, during moments of silence people keep still, and a curfew forces people to stay at home at night. Temporal forms involve an ordering and shaping of what is possible to do in a given context (see Levine 2017) and for that reason they matter to critical theories of society and culture.

In contexts of religiously diverse and to a large extent secularized democracies official temporal forms can raise several challenges that are especially urgent for societies committed to political equality and ideals of social inclusion. It is here, that official temporal forms are in danger of getting out of joint with the times and temporal regimes that matter both existentially and politically for large parts of society. Public controversies and social conflicts about such challenges can be violent in the sense that they forcefully block efforts of members of religious minorities to be recognized as full and equal members of the collective ‘we’ that shapes the present and the future of society.

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1 The phrase ‘when times are out of joint’ alludes, of course, to Shakespeare’s Hamlet, see also Assmann 2020a.
To identify and explore political aspects of contested official temporal religious forms in democratic societies that are committed to political equality and social inclusion is the aim of this contribution.

2 The Moral and Political Significance of Temporal Forms

Time materializes in a number of forms in society. Clocks and calendars regulate the flow of time and create temporal structures that affect all members of a society and render possible the temporal coordination of activities like work, travel and play at specific days and hours. Public holidays provide shared days of leisure and rest, and in many instances, they commemorate particular people or events from the past. This also applies for public memorials, which are in many cases material representations of people or events from the past in the present. The official temporal forms that I am interested in here are authorized and regulated by the state, for instance by means of holiday laws, public commemorations, or the erection of monuments. They provide shared temporal resources and structures for all people in society, demand compliance (as in the case of Sunday rest or public moments of silence) and they often entangle a specific and selected (view of the) past with the envisaged and aspired future of society (see below).

Religions also produce specific temporal forms and ‘higher times’ that interrupt the ordinary flow of profane time and invest certain moments with a special meaning and value. Such ‘religious time’ can establish continuities between current believers and ancient times, events and ancestors or saints (see Chidester 2016; Taylor 2007, 54–61). Religions can also make specific demands about common days of rest, periods of particular religious practices like fasting or special times of worship, and when and how these times should be observed. Cases in point are the prohibition of work on Sabbath in Judaism, the special character of Sunday as day of worship in Christianity, and Friday prayer in Islam (see Gavison and Perez 2008, 189–196).

2 See Walzer (1983, 194) with respect to the Jewish Sabbath. Michael Walzer distinguishes between ‘two forms of rest’: There are public holidays on the one side, that are provided for all members of society in the same form and at the same time, and accordingly require enforcement mechanisms like Sunday closing laws. Such public holidays can, according to Walzer, be “part of the common life that makes the community” and “shape and give meaning to the individual lives of the members” (Walzer 1993, 194). From this he distinguishes vacation, that is “individually chosen and individually designed” (Walzer 1983, 191). The issues that I am interested in, here, are related to public holidays, and not in the same sense to vacation.
In circumstances of religious diversity, the presence of particular official temporal forms on the one hand and religious demands concerning time on the other can easily raise ethical or political issues – especially if the set of official holidays of a society reflects only one religion, whilst the actual religious field of that society is becoming more and more diverse, with many people who do not identify as religious at all. Let me address two such issues, the temporal coordination problem, and the evaluative and expressive function of official temporal forms.

Religious practices such as specific forms of prayer or fasting have to be performed at specific times, so that believers may need to request for abstention from work if they have to carry out their religious duties during working days and hours. Concrete examples that are discussed in philosophical literature include a US-case of a Seventh-Day Adventist whose employer shifted to a six-day workweek and thus expected her to work on Saturdays, the obligatory day of worship of her religious community (see Nussbaum 2008, 135–140), and the case of a Muslim teacher in London who was not allowed by his school to be absent for a part of his teaching time to attend a mosque for prayers on Friday afternoon (his absence would have had to be covered by other teachers, see Jones 1994). Whilst the primary problem in such cases is a time-related direct conflict between religious and work-related obligations of individual believers, such cases also illustrate the more general issue of the “temporal coordination problem” (Julie Rose), which concerns shared temporal resources that are necessary to exercise associative freedoms and certain aspects of freedom of religion respectively. Potential associates, for instance members of a religious group, face the challenge that they “must synchronize their schedules to realize periods of shared free time” (Rose 2016, 262). If members of a Christian church have the religious duty to jointly celebrate church service on Sundays, they can practice this part of their religion relatively easily in societies where Sunday is a public day of rest – they benefit from status quo biases (Laborde 2008, 22) and enjoy, one could say, a ‘Christian privilege’ that allows them to

3 Such cases can become especially thorny if believers have to quit their jobs due to a conflict between religious and work-related obligations, since if they cannot find jobs that better allow them to perform their religious duties, the question arises whether they are eligible for unemployment compensation. Martha Nussbaum describes one such case in her analysis of the US-case of Seventh Day Adventist Adell Sherbert (Nussbaum 2008, 136–140).

4 For the concept of Christian privilege see Schlosser 2003. This concept is based on research on white privilege, which denotes “subtle, yet powerful ways that white people silently enjoy advantages in the United States” (Schlosser 2003, 45). White privilege is not limited to the United States, of course, but often operates in other societies where white people are dominant and in power, as well. For research on white privilege see Kendall 2006.
practice their religion within existing social institutions (such as public days of rest) without facing significant obstacles. Members of other religions, however, who perform common worship on, say, Fridays, have to do quite some effort to reconcile their religion with their job (file a request for abstention, explain to their colleagues, perhaps give up some vacation time etc.). In many cases this can be solved through accommodations that allow believers to abstain from work during their religious ceremonies and compensate for the absence by working outside of regular working time.\(^5\) However, this does not solve other issues that are related to religious public holidays in liberal democratic and religiously diverse societies.

Next to the temporal coordination problem, the expressive and evaluative function of official temporal forms also raises ethical issues. Scholars of cultural memory like Aleida Assmann point out that groups – for instance religious communities, but also large countries and societies – construe and manifest their practical self-understandings and their collective identities with reference to the past (see Assmann 2020a and Assmann 2020b). According to Assmann, such groups develop imagined self-images that are based on “chosen key events, significant places, and cultural artifacts and practices that offer the group, together with a particular image of history, both a sense of their uniqueness and a historical orientation” (Assmann 2020a, 210). This process connects the present with the past and the future through practices and objects that ‘bend’ the linear flow of time into cultural strategies for actualizing and reappropriating the past”. (Assmann 2020a, 209). The past, however, that is actualized in the present and for the future, does not consist of some objectively given event or moment in time but is chosen and thus selected and construed as particularly significant for the present by people, usually cultural majorities and/or people in positions of power. Chong-Ming Lim refers to such processes as commemorations in the sense of practices or objects that “acknowledge the importance of a certain person or event (and often the values that undergird them) for the community” (Lim 2020, 187). Consequently, it is important to realize that commemorations not only remember historical events or people as something that is in the past, but also involve evaluation and express values, ideals and beliefs that are important for the present and the future. Lim describes this appositely by characterizing commemorations as ‘composite’ practices or objects – “they are remembrances of certain peo-

\(^5\) This is proposed by Julie Rose, who argues that in order to prevent Sunday free time laws from constraining religious liberties, such laws “ought to include accommodations for those citizens who have a Sabbath day on a different day of the week” (Rose 2016, 274).
ple or events, accompanied by the expression of some evaluative view (or views)” (Lim 2020, 187). To give an example, the fact that the German reunification is annually commemorated by a national holiday on 3 October not only remembers the historic date of 3 October 1990 when the unification of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic was formally completed. Rather, the national holiday and the ceremonial acts and citizens’ festivals organized on that day remember an event that happened in the past, but they also activate it for the present and the future by expressing that the unity of Germany is considered of great value for the German society at large. This aspect of (re)activating specific moments, people, or events of the past in the present and for the future (since they are considered especially significant or valuable) creates connections between collective memory and commemorations on the one side, and collective identities on the other. Assmann calls this “the aspect of reactivating the past and making it possible to appropriate it into an active ‘functional memory’” (Assmann 2020a, 211). It matters, therefore, for the self-understanding of a group or society, which events and people are commemorated – and how – and thus publicly marked as significant not only for some private individuals, but for a group or society at large. This renders official temporal forms and structures normatively significant, and Aleida Assmann rightly points out that in the context of democratic societies, the close connection between cultural memory and identity requires a careful construction of cultural memory – that includes official temporal forms in the sense described above – so as to “create possibilities for identification and structures of participation that enable individuals as well as collectives to make the past their own” (Assmann 2020a, 211).

But what does this mean for official religious temporal forms in the context of religiously pluralistic and to a large extend secularized societies that are committed to political equality and social inclusion? Commemorating, for instance, the Reformation and celebrating Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost as public holidays can easily be understood as elevating and publicly marking Christianity as particularly authoritative for current society through a normative use of Christian temporal forms. If that is the case, certain temporal forms inscribe into the public realm cultural and religious biases that portray a specific religion – here: Christianity – as ‘normal’ and fully belonging to a group, for instance, German society. This is because certain official temporal forms express what is considered especially significant or valuable by and for society, and, resulting from this, due to their normative function for the formation of collective identities.

These ethical and political issues related to official religious temporal forms in religiously pluralistic societies committed to political equality figure promi-
nently in a number of controversies and cases related to memorials and public holidays. The following section presents two such cases; controversies about the status of Good Friday as silent holiday on the one hand, and about the introduction of an Islamic public holiday on the other.

3 Political Contestations of Official Temporal Religious Forms in Germany

In Germany, public holidays are, with the exception of German Unity Day (which is established as national day by federal law), regulated on the level of the states (Länder), and there are significant differences concerning the number and character of public holidays between the states. In all states, however, several – mostly Christian – holidays enjoy the special status of a public silent holiday. It is forbidden by law to organize public entertainment events on such days, including the public screening of ca. 700 movies that are listed as improper for that day (e.g., Ghostbusters and The Life of Brian), dancing and musical performances that disturb the silence and undermine the solemnity of the holiday. On Good Friday, sports events are forbidden as well. The comprehensiveness of the protection differs between German states, with the most moderate regulations in Berlin (at Good Friday from 4.00h a.m. until 9.00h p.m.) and Bremen (6.00h a.m. until 9.00h p.m.), whilst Bavaria protects a period of silence from Maundy Thursday 2.00h a.m. until Holy Saturday 12.00h p.m. This special status of silent holidays is debated almost every year, and next to commercial interests there is also protest from people and organizations who object to the special protection of silence on those days on principled grounds. In 2017, for instance, youth organizations of the Social Democratic Party, the Free Democratic Party and the Green Party in Hannover held dance demonstrations against the Tanzverbot on Maundy Thursday and justified their protests with reference to the separation between church and state and the secular character of the German state. A spokesperson of Hannover’s Green Youth Party declared “the freedom-restricting rules for ‘silent holidays’” to be an “idea from yesteryear” (Brady 2017) and suggested to hold a silent holiday on Holocaust Memorial Day, the day when the surviving prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau were liberated in 1945 (which is not even a public holiday in any of the German states), instead of on a religious holiday (Brady 2017).

A more formal and institutional route of protest was taken by the Union for Freedom of Spirit Munich (Bund für Geistesfreiheit München; hereafter BfG), an organization that understands itself as representing principles of
enlightenment and humanism, advocating the interests of nondenomina-
tional people and a strict separation of religion and the state.\textsuperscript{6} In 2007, the
BfG organized a public ticketed event to take place on Good Friday in a the-
atre in Munich. The motto of this event was ‘Religion-free Zone Munich 2007,’
and a party that was part of it was announced as ‘Heidenspaß-Party\textsuperscript{7} with a
screening of two movies and a ‘Dance for Free Spirits’ – clearly phrases that
are meant to convey a critical message with respect to the law on silent public
holidays that was presented by the activists as outdated and no longer appro-
priate in a religiously diverse society. This party was prohibited by the public
authority, who argued that it would have violated provisions of the Bavarian
Act on the Protection of Sundays and Public Holidays, which determines
that exceptions from the prohibition to perform activities such as dancing
are ruled out for Good Friday (but not for other silent holidays). The BfG
appealed through several levels of jurisdiction and finally to the Federal Con-
stitutional Court where its representatives claimed that the prohibition of the
event violated their right of freedom of assembly, because it was a political
event with the purpose “to point to the Bavarian Act on the Protection of
Sundays and Public Holidays, which is from our perspective undemocratic
and outmoded, and to get it revised” (BfG 2007; my translation). Moreover,
the BfG also argued that the freedom of faith and conscience of members of
the BfG was violated: as an ideological community, the BfG is a recognized
body under public law (\textit{Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts}) and thus has the
same legal status as, for instance, Christian churches. The BfG understood the
planned event as manifestation of their beliefs and parts of the event like the
screening of the movies, speeches, and written materials that were to be dis-
tributed were meant to be proclamations of the beliefs of the members of the
BfG.

The Federal Constitutional Court confirmed both claims in an Order of the
First Senate in 2016 and declared that whilst the provisions of the Bavarian Act
on the Protection of Sundays and Public Holidays protecting public silence
on Good Fridays are generally compatible with the Constitution, “the absolute
exclusion of exemptions […] that applies to this day and according to which
exemptions – even exemptions for important reasons – from the prohibition

\textsuperscript{6} The following description of the facts of the case and the arguments brought forward by the
parties involved is based on the documentation of the Federal Constitutional Court in its
decision (see BVerfG 2016a).

\textsuperscript{7} ‘Heidenspaß’ literally translates as ‘heathen-fun,’ but according to colloquial usage of the
term ‘Heiden-’, which as prefix denotes an emphasis, the term ‘Heidenspaß’ is also a play on
words here. (BVerfG 2016b).
of activities are barred from the outset [...] proves to be disproportionate" (BVerfG, 2016b). The Union for Freedom of Spirit Munich should have been granted such an exemption for their event. Not granting it, violated both their freedom of assembly and their freedom of faith and conscience. Whilst this may at first sight be understood as a legal victory for the BfG, it is important to realize that they did not achieve what they wanted to achieve with their protests. The Bavarian Act on the Protection of Sundays and Public Holidays was revised in 2013 (and thus before the decision of the Federal Constitutional Court), but only to the effect that the protection of silence during silent holidays other than Good Friday and Holy Saturday is reduced by two hours and begins now at 2.00h a.m. rather than 0.00h a.m.; the strength and scope of the protection of silence on Good Friday remains fully intact. For the interest of this chapter, it is especially important to study the reasons that Bavarian legislators provide for the modest revision. On the one hand, they emphasize that silent holidays and other public days of rest are “indispensable to the preservation of our Christian and cultural traditions and values in Bavaria and for social cohesion” (BayLTDrucks 16/15695, 3; my translation). This motivates the continuation of the relatively comprehensive protection of silent holidays in Bavaria. On the other hand, the Bavarian government points out that legislation also has to recognize changes in society, such as the fact that lifestyles of members of the Bavarian society have changed and are no longer homogeneous. Accordingly, provisions regulating public holidays have to reconcile conflicting positions. This aspect seems to suggest that official temporal forms such as public holidays should acknowledge changes in society – for instance with respect to religion – at least to a certain extent. Does it also imply that the presence of an increasing number of Muslims in Germany should be acknowledged by introducing an Islamic public holiday?

This question is a recurring matter of public debate, and it was discussed especially vividly in 2017, when the then Federal Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maizière publicly stated at a campaigning event that one could think about introducing a regionally defined Islamic holiday – later he clarified that he did not suggest to actually introduce one (see FAZ 2017). This could be possible, he suggested, in regions where many Muslims live; comparable to All Saint’s Day, which is a public holiday only in regions with a largely Catholic population. In fact, some German states such as Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen already implemented regulations that allow Muslim students and employees to take a day off on certain Islamic holidays (Wagener 2017), but nowhere in Germany an Islamic holiday has the status of a public holiday.

De Maizière’s statement was received very positively by the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland) whose chair-
Aiman Mazyek pointed out that such a holiday could grant “Muslims a sense of being taken into account at school and in the workplace” (Wagener 2017). Some representatives of Christian churches also supported an introduction of an Islamic public holiday. The spokesperson of the Central Committee of German Catholics Thomas Sternberg, for instance, argued that Christian public holidays like Easter and Christmas express that German society is connected with the Christian tradition. This cultural connection, however, would not be threatened by the introduction of an Islamic holiday, but rather by the fact that an increasing number of people have lost any positive sense for Christian holidays and do not even know the religious meaning of, for instance, Pentecost or Ascension Day (ZEIT online 2017). Accordingly, Sternberg concluded, the introduction of an Islamic holiday in regions with a high percentage of Muslims would not “betray the Christian tradition of the country”, but rightly and publicly “take note of the Islamic holiday culture” (ZEIT online 2017; my translation).

Conservative politicians of Thomas de Maizière’s own party Christian Democratic Union CDU, however, swiftly rejected the idea of introducing an Islamic holiday even on the regional level. The Secretary General of the Christian Social Union CSU – the Bavarian counterpart of the CDU – outrightly rejected Thomas Sternberg’s statement and expressed his consternation and discontent that “even the top of the Committee of German Catholics supports an Islamic holiday” (FAZ 2017, my translation). Together with the Free Voters of Bavaria (Freie Wähler; FW), the CSU even initiated a formal political intervention when both parties submitted to Bavarian State Parliament urgency motions to pre-emptively disallow introducing an Islamic public holiday (see BayLTDrucks 17/18705 and BayLTDrucks 17/18718). Both urgency motions mobilized the ‘Christian-Jewish-occidental imprint of Bavaria’ to rule out the possibility of establishing an Islamic holiday as public holiday even before anybody had actually proposed such a thing in Bavaria. Clearly, the CSU and the FW in Bavarian State Parliament assumed that an Islamic public holiday was incompatible with the existing holiday culture in Bavaria and would undermine what they described as ‘Judeo-Christian values and traditions’ (BayLTDrucks 17/18718, my translation), ‘Christian imprint of Germany and Bavaria’ and ‘Christian-occidental heritage’ (BayLTDrucks 17/18705, my translation).

Which insights does the exploration of these controversies yield for the topic of this chapter, and especially the ethical and political aspects of contested official temporal religious forms in democratic societies committed to political equality and social inclusion?
The controversies about the special status of Good Friday as silent holiday and the (im)possible introduction of an Islamic public holiday in Germany demonstrate that official temporal forms can have significant ethical and political dimensions, especially in contexts of religious diversity and rapid social change. It is important, therefore, to include temporal forms into analyses of materializations of religion and corresponding politics of religious diversity. Thereby it is important to consider that temporal forms share with material objects and bodily practices a characteristic that anthropologist Michael Lambek describes as ‘ordinary ethics’: they imply normative ideas and evaluations that are “relatively tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself” (Lambek 2010, 2). Let me have a closer look at this.

From the perspective of ordinary ethics in the sense described by Michael Lambek, official temporal forms like public days of rest, official holidays and public monuments could be described as remembering and materializing cultural traditions or historic events in a way that expresses some (usually, but not necessarily, positive) evaluation. This evaluation, however, is often implicit and not spelled out in explicitly normative terms, and importantly the values expressed by temporal forms do usually not demand internal acceptance and compliance. Aleida Assmann describes this aspect of a relative non-bindingness with respect to cultural memory in the context of democratic societies, where, as she suggests, the “structures of participation and belonging” provided by cultural memory “are only an offering and not an obligation imposed from the outside” (Assmann 2020a, 211). Moreover, many public temporal forms do indeed often do the work they are supposed to do (e.g., providing shared days of rest, expressing values) “without calling undue attention” to themselves, as Lambek describes it for ‘ordinary ethics’ (Lambek 2010, 2) – probably most people take it as a matter of course that Sunday is a public day of rest, for instance, use shared temporal resources for activities that need to be done synchronously (participating in community events, playing a team sport, singing in a choir et cetera). However, the controversies sketched out above demonstrate that this does not apply to all people in society and also not to all official temporal forms in exactly the same way. People campaigning against the status of Good Friday as silent holiday as well as proponents of the introduction of an Islamic holiday as public holiday in Germany argued that there is a problematic mismatch in society with respect to temporal forms. They suggest that official temporal forms on the one hand and times that actually matter for many people in society on the other are out
of joint. For many official temporal forms reflect Christianity, whilst the actual religious field in Germany has undergone profound changes since the 1950s, including significant pluralization and most importantly rapid unchurching (see Großbölting 2013; Pollack and Rosta 2017). The two cases also illustrate that both of the ethical and political issues that I mentioned above are important in this context.

With respect to the temporal coordination problem, the Union for Freedom of Spirit Munich and other critics argue that the strict protection of public silence and solemnity on Good Friday and thus the creation of a specific temporal resource for Christians imposes undue limitations on the liberties of other people. The (qualified) confirmation of this claim by the Federal Constitutional Court and the existence of regulations concerning Islamic holidays in Berlin, Bremen and Hamburg illustrates the importance of accommodations that allow religious minorities to practice their religion (see Rose 2016). More important, however, but also more complex from an ethical and political perspective is the second morally relevant aspect, the expressive and evaluative dimension of official temporal forms. For the controversies described above, this issue is important in at least two different respects.

In the controversy about silent holidays, critics argue that the special status of a silent holiday should not be given to a holiday of a particular religion, Christianity, since that would express that the German state would actively endorse Christianity (and Christianity alone). This would be at odds with its secular character and also with the actual religious composition of society. In discussions about the introduction of an Islamic public holiday, on the other hand, proponents of that idea argued that introducing an Islamic holiday as official temporal form would signal to all people in society, that Islam is not some ‘alien religion’ (Gould 2013) that is ‘tolerated’ in Germany, but as a religion whose followers enjoy the same status as any other member of society. Conservative politicians and the Bavarian parliamentary groups of CSU and FW, however, reject in their statements both of these arguments and construe Christian holidays in cultural terms. Does such culturalization of religion (see Beaman 2020, Joppke 2018) solve the puzzle of religious diversity in pluralistic democracies and secular states? This is doubtful for a number of reasons. First of all, what counts as cultural in the context of policies of religion and religious diversity is usually defined from the perspective of majorities (Laborde and Lægaard 2020, 182), while members of minorities (who are affected by decisions made possible through such culturalization) do not necessarily agree with such definitions. The controversy about the status of Good Friday clearly illustrates this, since the critics argued that the special protection of silence on Good Friday violates principles of non-discrimination and impartiality of the
state towards different religions and non-religious worldviews. The state can only escape the accusation of violating such principles if it construes Christian forms, and not those of other religions, as culture. If, however, such culturalized religion is charged with a normative status and positioned against material manifestations of minority religions in the public realm, the state slips from the danger of religious discrimination into problems of social exclusion. For in that case, the minority religions and also non-religious people are discursively excluded from “the narrative of ‘we’ in the public sphere, and as contributors to nation in the present tense, the past, and potentially the future” (Beaman 2020, 19), as Lori Beaman aptly describes the dangers of culturalization of religion in the context of state policies. “What is worth preserving and protecting does not belong to [religious minorities and the nonreligious] and does not originate with them” (Beaman 2020, 19). This exclusion from the “narrative of ‘we’ in the public sphere” (Beaman 2020, 19), can occur through public conflict, but also and sometimes more effectively tacitly and indirectly. The violence it does to people’s efforts to be recognized as full and equal members of the collective ‘we’ that shapes the present and the future of society can on the one hand alienate people from the state (see Modood and Thompson 2021). On the other hand, it can also portray those who are not publicly included in the narrative of ‘we’ as not fully belonging in the eyes of members of the cultural majority (see Laborde 2017, 135–137). Both aspects indicate that Assmann’s claim that cultural memory (and thus also certain official temporal forms) provides “structures of participation and belonging” only in the mode of an “offering and not an obligation from the outside” (Assmann 2020a, 211) needs to be qualified. If participation and belonging to a society is conditional on the recognition as equal participant and full member of society by others, achieving full participation and belonging can be impeded if the dominant narrative of ‘we’ does not offer a place for certain people. The question of whether or not somebody wants to accept the ‘offering’ that Assmann describes for cultural memory, is only one factor next to others that are equally important and related to processes of recognition and belonging. Such processes depend on a multitude of factors, relations and people and cannot be fully determined by the person who wants to participate on a par with others in social and political interactions and the future development of society.

I cannot go into the debate about ‘symbolic establishment’ and whether certain forms of it can be compatible with principles of non-discrimination and political equality, here. Important contributions include Laborde and Lægaard (2020), Lægaard (2017), and Modood and Thompson (2021).
An additional and with respect to political equality even more problematic aspect related to the culturalization of religion concerns the increasing mobilization of terms like ‘Judeo-Christian culture’ to actively portray Islam as a foreign religion. This is the case in a number of European countries including Germany where illiberal and xenophobic versions of right-wing populism and nationalism ‘hijack religion’ (Marzouki et al. 2016) to construe an ‘identitarian Christianism’ (Brubaker 2017, see also Hemel 2014) that is then positioned against minority religions, especially Islam. Conservative members of parties like CDU and CSU increasingly share in this mobilization of ‘Judeo-Christian culture’ against Islam. Cases such as the initiatives to pre-emptively ban an Islamic public holiday in Bavaria illustrate the political-discursive fortification of a ‘Christian-Jewish-occidental imprint on Bavaria’ or an allegedly Christian ‘cultural tradition of Bavaria’ as it exists, or rather as it is imagined at a certain moment in time. In circumstances of rapid social change, however, such a political-discursive fortification of culture locks off the constellation of times being out of joint and can transform official temporal religious forms into ‘things of conflict’. For democratic societies committed to political equality and social inclusion, this is problematic because it impedes developing the repertoire of official forms that provide anchors for belonging and participation. The two ethical issues related to temporal forms mentioned above – the temporal coordination problem and the evaluative and expressive function – however, require such changes. Therefore, a combination of politicizing culturalized religion (here: Christianity) and regulating and suppressing temporal and material forms of minority religions in the public realm can be “toxic to democracy” (Beaman 2020, 132).

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