

# Exploring the Islamic influence on German culture and language

## INTRODUCTION

Many countries and dependent entities acknowledge the German language or one of its dialects. The list of countries includes Brazil, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Namibia, Poland, Romania, Russia and Slovakia.

Due to German colonial history, other countries with sizable populations of (primarily bilingual) German speakers include Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Canada, Paraguay and the United States. However, the German language does not have any legal status in these countries.

## MIGRATION BACKGROUNDS IN GERMANY

Almost every fifth person in Germany has a migration background. More and more people with Global Majority roots are living in Germany.

‘Global Majority’ is a collective term referring to people who are racialised as Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and/or have been racialised as ‘ethnic minorities’.

The population in Germany with a migration background reached a high in 2016 for the fifth year. A total of 18.5 million people belonged to this group; that was at least one in five people (22.5%), as the Federal Statistical Office in Wiesbaden recently announced. At 8.5%, the year-on-year increase was the strongest since the survey began in 2005. The demographic of people with Global Majority roots has never been richer!



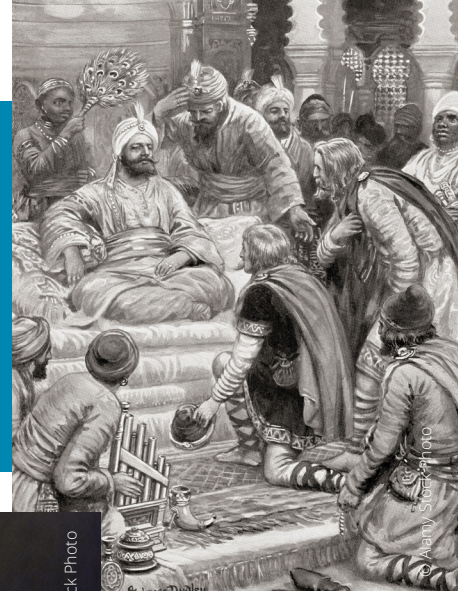
Turkish guest workers spend their free time on a Sunday afternoon in Victoria Park in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Gastarbeiter is German for ‘guest worker’. It refers to foreign or migrant workers, particularly those who had moved to West Germany (BRD) mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, seeking work as part of a formal guest worker programme.



Although Christianity has the largest demographic in Germany, and its documented introduction findings date back to modern Germany by 300 AD, the history of Islam goes back to the 8th century. From Charlemagne to Goethe's literature and to the Turkish guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*) who arrived in the 1950s and 60s, Islam has been a regular part of German culture for centuries.

Records state that Muslims first moved to Germany as part of the 18th century's diplomatic, military and economic relations between Germany and the Ottoman Empire. This was when 20 Muslim soldiers served under Frederick William I of Prussia at the beginning of the 18th century. Besides the Prophet Muhammad, additional evidence also dates back to Caliph Harun al-Rashid in 763 to 766.

Harun al-Rashid receiving an embassy from Charlemagne wishing to obtain facilities for trade and pilgrimage in the Holy Land, c.763 - 766 AD. Painting by Ambrose Dudley, (1867-1951).



Emperor Charlemagne (748-814) by Louis-Félix Amiel, oil on canvas, 1837.



History of Sicily: Arrival of Arabs in Mazara del Vallo. June 17, 827. Followed by the occupation of the town. On this day, Byzantine rule ended in Sicily after almost 400 years and Muslim rule began. Illustration on Liebig collectible card (French series: 'La Sicile historique'). 1913.

## ISLAM IN EUROPE, GERMANY'S FIRST ISLAMIC COMMUNITIES, THE NEW FACE OF ISLAM AND LANGUAGE TODAY

During the 8th and 10th centuries, Arab Muslims had a huge influence in Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily and Rome, which made headway from south to west via Piedmont and Burgundy into the Rhone Valley, and occupied alpine passes and parts of Switzerland from 952 to 960.

These Arab Muslims had a huge influence on medicine in and around Germany, and still do to this day. These inhabitants had roots from Ethiopia, North Africa and southern Morocco (then Mauritania).

In medieval Spain, Muslim inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula and the western Maghreb were called *Moros*, and soon Christians no longer distinguished between Berbers, Arabs and Saracens: *Moro/Maure* was increasingly used synonymously with 'Muslim'.



Pope John VIII, forced to pay tribute to the Emirate of Sicily, 9th century.



In the 16th to 18th centuries, 'Mohr' became a general term in Germany, denoting Black and Brown people of the Global Majority. It was used in relation to Africans as well as to the inhabitants of South America, the Caribbean islands, North America, and even in relation to the Roma and Sinti peoples.

Finally, the Ottoman Turks captured the Byzantine capital Constantinople (today, Istanbul) in 1453. Then, the Ottomans expanded their realm and made incursions in 1529 and 1683 throughout the Balkans, Vienna and Islamised Albania and Bosnia.



Victorious Turks entering Constantinople making it the Ottoman Empire capital in 1453. Hand-colored woodcut.

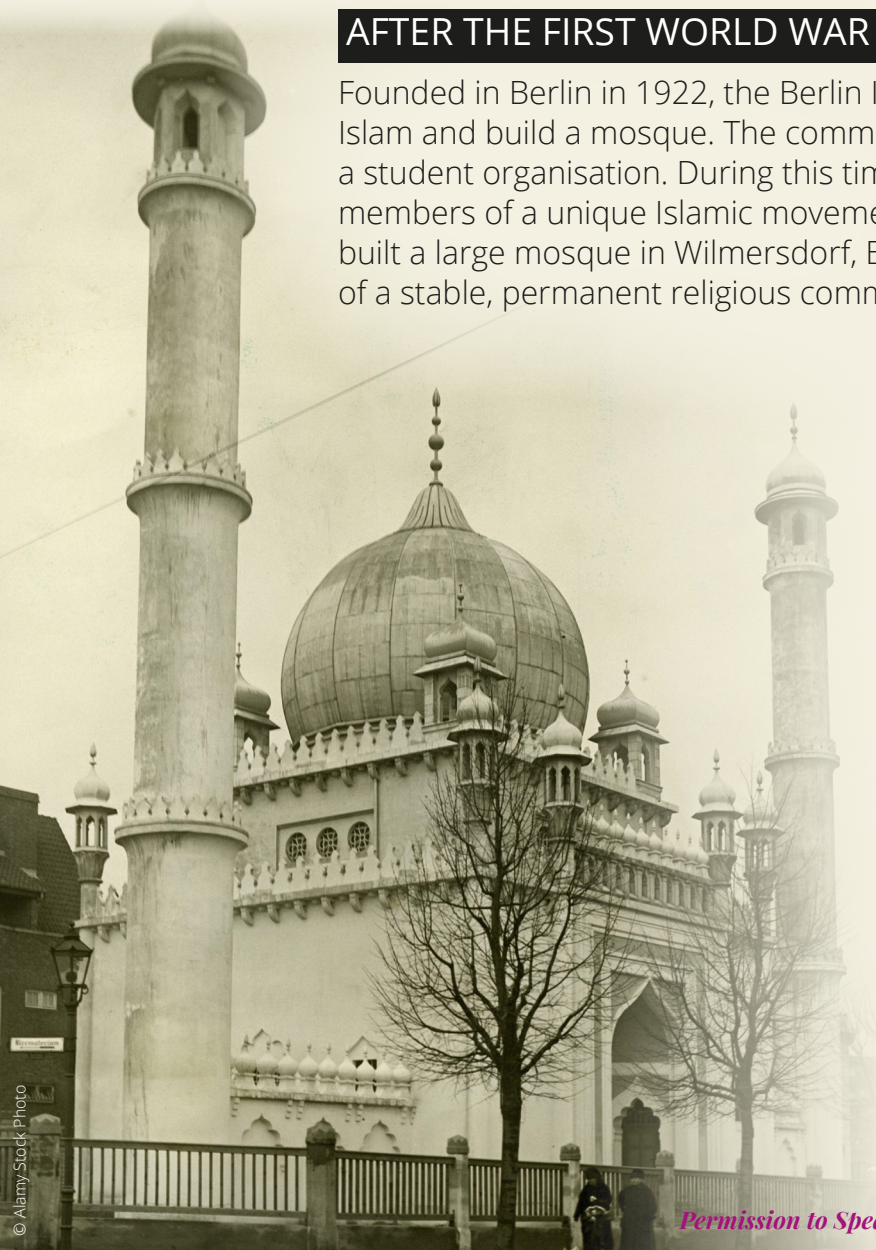
## AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Founded in Berlin in 1922, the Berlin Islamic Community aimed to promote Islam and build a mosque. The community also oversaw the establishment of a student organisation. During this time (1923 to 1925), the Ahmadi Muslims, members of a unique Islamic movement, also formed their organisation. They built a large mosque in Wilmersdorf, Berlin, which has since served as the centre of a stable, permanent religious community.

The *Moslemische Revue*, their online magazine, is available online to download.

During 1933, the number of Muslims in Germany (primarily students, individuals living in exile and former prisoners of war) rose to 1000. Those from French and English colonies, prisoners of war and deserters from the Soviet Red Army, including many Muslims of various nationalities, signed up to fight as members of the Eastern Legions of the Third Reich, in the hope that their home countries could break away from Soviet rule.

The photograph shows the first mosque in Berlin on Brienner Straße, seen from Berliner Straße, opened in 1928.





After the war, thousands of former Muslim fighters sought refuge in Munich, which was the American zone of occupation. Thanks to their language skills and contacts in the Soviet Union, these Muslims were a valuable asset to the world gearing up for the Cold War.

From 1961, guest workers were invited, and flocked, to West Germany (Turks from 1961, Moroccans from 1963 and Tunisians from 1965). Under the current climate, immigrants have also recently joined these communities, including refugees from Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq, Iran and Palestine.

Today, more than three million Muslims live in Germany. Roughly one million of them are German citizens.

Since 1961, Islamic organisations have worked diligently on concepts for how devout Muslims can live peacefully in non-Islamic countries without neglecting or, even worse, betraying their beliefs, through lobbying for prayer rooms, mosques and minarets in larger cities and small towns.



June 1943. The Nazi propaganda picture shows soldiers of the German Wehrmacht liberating the native people in Yugoslavia from the so called 'Bolshevik gang'. The soldiers were part of the Eastern Legions of the Third Reich, units in the Nazi Army during World War II that were made up of personnel from the Soviet Union, and largely part of the Wehrmacht foreign volunteers and conscripts.



Turkish market on Maybachufer in Kreuzberg district of Berlin, Germany.



## Kiezdeutsch

Teenage slang has always existed; the special thing about *Kiezdeutsch* is that this new language has developed through contact with different languages. There are similar youth languages in other European countries: for example, in Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, the youth language in question is called *Straattaal* (literally, 'street language'); in Sweden, there is *Rinkeby-Svenska*, named after Rinkeby, a Stockholm suburb with a high percentage of migrants; in Denmark, such a youth language is known as *Københavnsk Multietnolekt*.

What all of these youth languages have in common is that they are not limited to young people with a migration background and are also not typical of speakers of a specific language of origin (for example, Turkish), but have developed in the common everyday life of young people of different origins. One therefore also speaks of 'multi-ethnolects', a term that emphasises the ethnic diversity of the speakers. *Kiezdeutsch* is therefore not a sign of a lack of integration of 'foreign' young people, as some older Germans may say, but has spread in mixed groups of young Germans and has developed from a non-German origin. *Kiezdeutsch* is, therefore, a sign of a particularly successful linguistic integration: a contribution from multi-ethnic residential areas in which young people, with and without migration backgrounds, are equally involved. In comparison with other youth languages, however, we find a special grammatical dynamic in *Kiezdeutsch*, which is supported by the multilingual skills of its speakers.

Many speakers of *Kiezdeutsch* are fluent in one or more other languages in addition to German. For example, someone who speaks local German with their friends might speak Kurdish to their grandmother, Arabic to their grandfather and mother, and German to their father. Another young person who speaks *Kiezdeutsch* may be of German origin and only speak German at home but has learned some Turkish from friends or their parents. These multilingual competencies create an environment that is particularly conducive to linguistic innovation. In this way, *Kiezdeutsch* has been able to develop into a dialect of German that has produced a particularly large number of linguistic innovations in a relatively short period of time.

### REMEMBERING AFRO-GERMAN INTELLECTUAL, MAY AYIM | AAIHS AND MUSLIMS IN GERMANY

Black and Global Majority people often form resistance to intersectional injustices by organising themselves into informal groups and networks within religious communities or in small association structures. This is largely due to difficulties accessing finance for community support, reducing poverty and inequality, promoting well-being, prosperity, protecting the environment, addressing climate change, encouraging good governance, peace and security and supporting political education work. There are intersectional experiences that, in reality, particularly affect: young, Black academic women; Muslim Afro-Germans in industrial districts and in rural and small towns; African refugees; Black churches or mosques; and small entrepreneurs (for example, afro shops, barbershops and beauty salons). All these perspectives and experiences are critical and reflect the diverse realities of the life of Black Muslim people in Germany.

May Ayim was an Afro-German poet and activist. Born in Hamburg in 1960, she grew up in Münster with her adoptive family. Her real name was Sylvia Brigitte Gertrud Opitz. After completing her *Abitur*, she moved to Regensburg and studied education.



In the 1990s, May Ayim, in collaboration with Katharina Oguntoye, then published the book *Farbe Bekennen*, from which ensued Black initiatives and workshops which resonated with many Global Majority activists. She also laid the first foundations for the Initiative for Black and Global Majority People in Germany (ISD – Initiative Schwarzer Menschen in Deutschland, eingetragener Verein meaning ‘The Initiative of Black People in Germany’, registered association) and ADEFRA e. V. (short for *afrodeutsche Frauen*, meaning ‘Afro-German women’).

There is also an extensive list of notable German Muslims who have had a huge influence on German culture, cinema, music, fashion, film, sport, philosophy, poetry, literature, politics and archaeology over the decades.

## RAMADAN 2022

This year, Ramadan begins on the evening of Saturday 2 April 2022, and will end approximately a month later upon the sighting of the new moon crescent. The end of Ramadan is marked by a significant holiday, Eid al-Fitr, which celebrates the close of a month-long period of fasting. Eid al-Fitr usually lasts up to three days, depending on the country and region.

The word Ramadan refers to the ninth month of the Islamic year and means the month of fasting. Fasting is the fourth pillar of Islam. Muslims fast during Ramadan every year in Germany and around the world. The period of fasting changes every year. During this time, eating, drinking and smoking are prohibited between sunrise and sunset. After 29 or 30 days, Ramadan comes to an end with the Eid al-Fitr celebrations.



August 21, 2009. Duisburg, Germany. Muslim families eat as they break their fast on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan at the Merkez mosque. Muslims around the world congregate for special evening prayers called “tarawih” during the fasting month of Ramadan.



June 6, 2016. Scharnhausen, Germany. Male Muslim refugees and German volunteers (men and women) sit together eating dinner during Ramadan in a refugee camp in Scharnhausen, Germany.

In many countries with a predominantly Muslim population, the days of Eid al-Fitr are free from school and work. In Germany, the relevant regulations differ according to the federal state and sometimes the workplace. In Hamburg and Rheinland-Pfalz for example, Muslim children have the opportunity on the first day of Eid to be given a leave of absence from school if they so wish. Similar regulations apply in some workplaces.

July 17, 2015. Dortmund, Germany. A girl gets her hands decorated with traditional henna patterns at a festival of Eid-al-Fitr to mark the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan.





## THE LUNAR CALENDAR

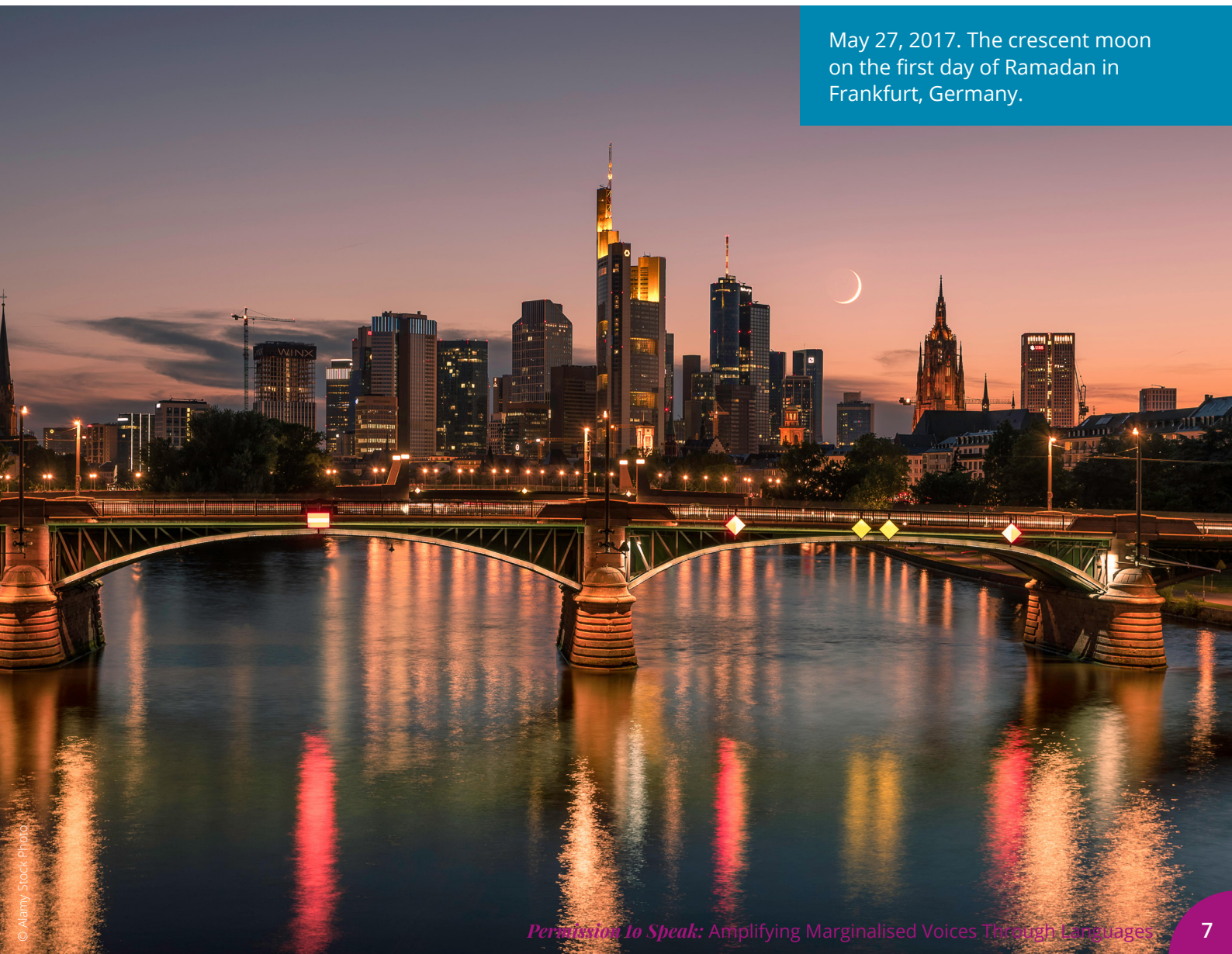
Islam follows the lunar calendar rather than the solar and Gregorian calendar. Therefore, the Islamic festival year has 354 instead of 365 days. This means Ramadan is shifted forward by ten or 11 days per year and, thus, gradually runs through all the seasons.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the year and begins with the new moon. For this reason, the beginning of Lent is also known as the 'birth of the new moon'. In order to refer to the arrival of the new moon or to the first visible moon after the new moon, the 'moon sighting' is also spoken of as a criterion for the start of Ramadan.

There are special mealtimes for Ramadan. A light meal is allowed before sunrise. After sunset, people usually eat with family or friends. This meal is called Iftar in Islam. However, there are exceptions during Ramadan. Fasting does not apply to people in exceptional circumstances or of a certain age: pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, children, the sick and travellers. In addition, anyone who is ill or is away for a more extended period should make up for the fasting days later.

Devout Muslims pray at least five times a day. The prayer times for the obligatory prayers are *Fajr* (dawn), *Dhuhur* (noon), *Assr* (afternoon), *Maghrib* (sunset) and *Ishaa* (evening). The exact times vary, as dawn is slightly different from place to place. There are various calendars that indicate prayer times in individual cities such as Berlin, Dortmund or Stuttgart. However, many communities also publish their own calendar.

May 27, 2017. The crescent moon on the first day of Ramadan in Frankfurt, Germany.





## WHY FASTING?

Ramadan is considered a particularly sacred time: the month when God speaks to people. Believers should have the opportunity to deal intensively with their faith during this time.

Fasting is said to be for the sake of Allah and means that the Muslim or Muslima must abstain from eating from dawn to dusk. Believers are not allowed to eat, drink or smoke. In addition to this 'outer' form of fasting, fasting also has an 'inner' dimension. This means that devout Muslims should avoid sin even more than usual, which means not speaking, hearing or doing anything wrong. For Muslims, fasting during Ramadan also means recognising that Muslims as believers are solely dependent on God. For many Muslims, Ramadan is a very conscious break for body and mind, in which they can find peace and concentrate intensively on their faith. As a devout Muslim or Muslima, fasting also means concentrating on the essentials and avoiding the excessive. Many Muslims think about their relationship with God, pray intensively and read the Koran. However, Ramadan is not just about deepening one's relationship with God and faith. The month of fasting also has a social aspect. The lack of food felt in their own body should motivate Muslims to help others and understand poor and starving people.

Fasting begins every day before the so-called *Fajr* prayer (Arabic: صلاة الفجر *salāt al-fajr*, 'dawn prayer'), one of the five mandatory *salah* (Islamic prayers) at around 5 a.m. It ends around 9 p.m. with the evening prayer and the subsequent *Iftar*. The whole family gathers to break the fast together after sunset at this celebratory dinner. Traditionally, dates are served with water or milk as the first meal to break the fast.



Muslims read the Qur'an at the Şehitlik mosque in Berlin, Germany.



October 3, 2002. Essen, Germany. Muslims pray in the Fatih Mosque.



## LANGUAGE TASKS

### KS3: Reading comprehension: questions with answers at the bottom of the page.

1. Wie viele Säulen gibt es im Islam?
2. Was ist der Koran?
3. Zähle zwei Personengruppen auf, die während des Ramadans nicht fasten müssen.
4. Während des Eid ul-Fitr-Festes werden Kinder beschenkt. Richtig oder falsch?
5. Was ist Eid ul-Fitr?

OR

### KS4 Reading comprehension: gap-fill task.

Der \_\_\_\_\_ Kalender des Bundesamtes für \_\_\_\_\_ und \_\_\_\_\_ beinhaltet wichtige Feiertage der fünf sogenannten Weltreligionen sowie weitere Gedenktage.

Er soll ein Hinweis auf die \_\_\_\_\_ von Feier- und Gedenktagen sein (ohne Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit).

Der Kalender steht Ihnen als Download im PDF-Format zur Verfügung.

Vielfältigkeit, Migration, Interkulturelle, Flüchtlinge.

Deutsch	English
Migration	
interkulturelle	
Flüchtlinge	
Vielfältigkeit	

Answers:

1. Es gibt im Islam fünf Säulen.
2. Der Koran ist das heilige Buch des Islams.
3. Schwangere Frauen, Kinder unter zehn Jahren, muslimische Soldaten, kranke Menschen, alte Menschen.
4. Richtig.
5. Eid ul-Fitr ist das „Fest des Fastenbrechens.“



## DISCUSSION POINTS

- What surprised you most about what you have read?
- What do you think constitutes identity?
- Do you think that cultures have an influence on a city and its inhabitants?
- Where do stereotypes come from? Are they dangerous or harmless? Do useful stereotypes exist? Give some examples.
- How can stereotypes become dangerous? How can we change or eliminate stereotypes?
- What positive and what harmful effects does the media have on us?
- How is cultural identity expressed?
- How does the media influence us?
- Can art help us understand the world better?





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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Rodeane Henry-Grant** is an educator, linguist, abolitionist, ludologist and a co-founder of C.A.R.E. (Coalition of Anti-Racist Educators) and a member of N.M.E. (No more exclusions). With just over five years' experience teaching German and French GCSE and A/AS Level, Rodeane completed her studies in Bristol and was a member of Beyond the 26, an online campaign to bring awareness to the lack of Black and Global Majority teachers teaching in Bristol at the time. She now teaches IGCSE German, and IB German and French.