

University of Luxembourg

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Second generation Iraqi migrants in Germany – what can I tell my parents and how?

A qualitative study exploring the intergenerational relationship quality

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*“I am from there. I am from here.
I am not there and I am not here.
I have two names, which meet and part,
And I have two languages.
I forget which of them I dream in.”*

Mahmoud Darwish
Palestinian poet (1941 – 2008)

“My parents embodied the Iraqi culture and, therefore, I had to negotiate my identity not only with myself but also with them and the German community. I have seen the possible risks for conflict between parent and child under these circumstances, the occasional frustration, and challenges, but also the beauty and richness of such an upbringing.”

Heythem Naji

The intuitive subjective world of the researcher is made to be the center of the conducted methods.

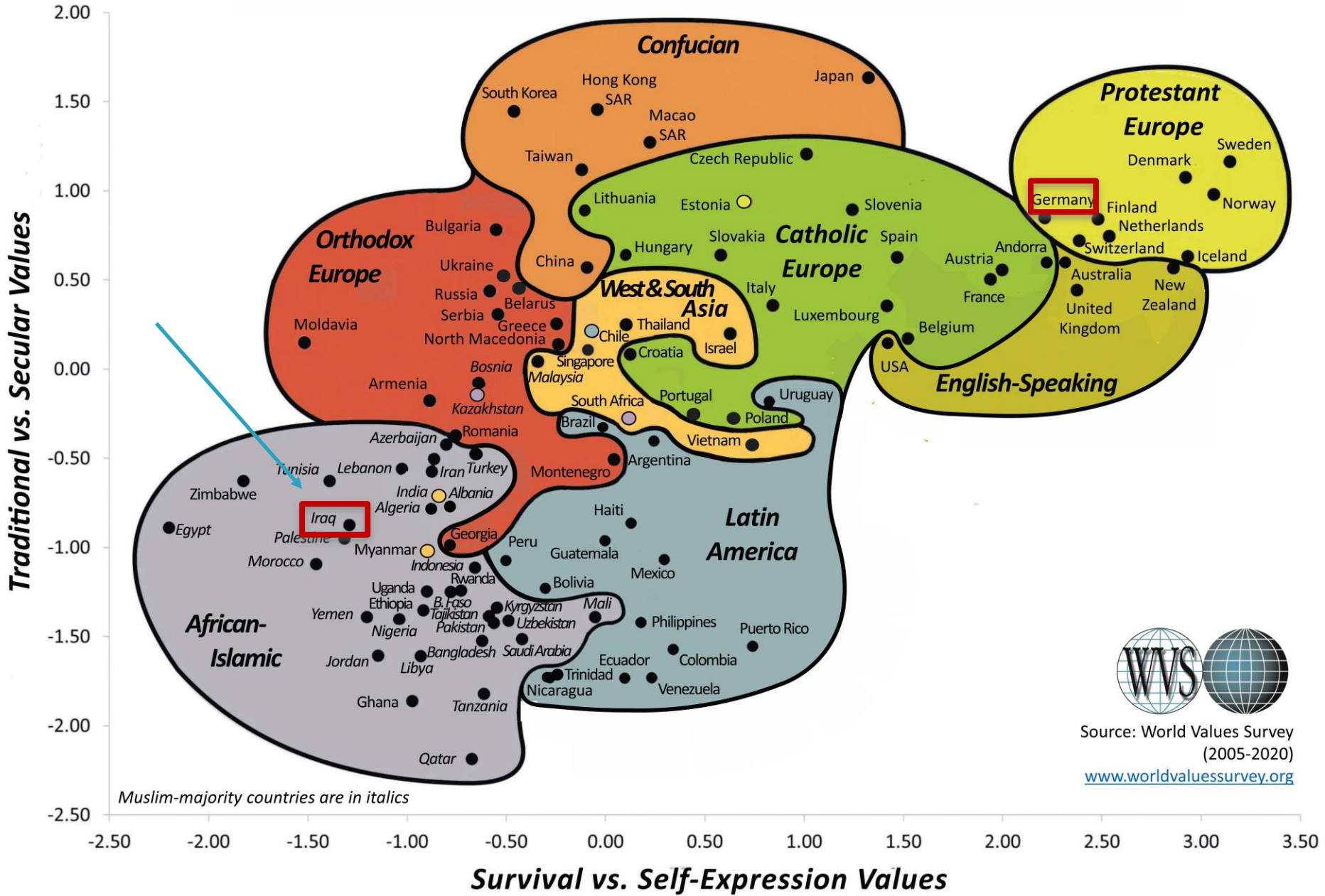
Without intuition, one would not do new research, one would only do reviews of already existing research (Valsiner, 2017).

- 42 m inhabitants
- Surface area 438,317 km² - 1.2 times larger than Germany
- Ethnic composition
 - 80% Arabs
 - 15% Kurds
 - 5% others such as Assyrians, Turkmen, Yazidis, and Mandaeans
- Arabic and Kurdish are the official languages – with Kurdish mostly being spoken in northern Iraq.
- War-torn country (Iraqi-Kurdish War in the 1960s & mid 70s, Invasion of Iran in 1980)
- Iraq – war (2003 – 2011)

- Standard Arabic and local dialects.
 - The differences are significant!
 - Standard Arabic is taught in schools – the dialects are learnt at home.
 - Standard Arabic is used for Schoolwork, prayers and news/ TV programs.
- Most second-generation Arabs don't learn to read or write Arabic, unless they also attend an Arabic school.
- Second generation Arabs – often only learn spoken Arabic and the version of Arabic spoken by their parents.

- 95% follow Muslim religion - Islam provides the primary guidance on how the population structures their lives.
 - Islamic values such as community, honor and respect important.
 - Rules are expected to be followed – resistance is punished by society.
 - Respect / obedience towards older people expected.
 - Women considered to need protection.
 - Clear division of roles: Women are responsible for the household & raising children. Men protect the family and serve the family economically.
 - Importance of hospitality – and looking after the poor.

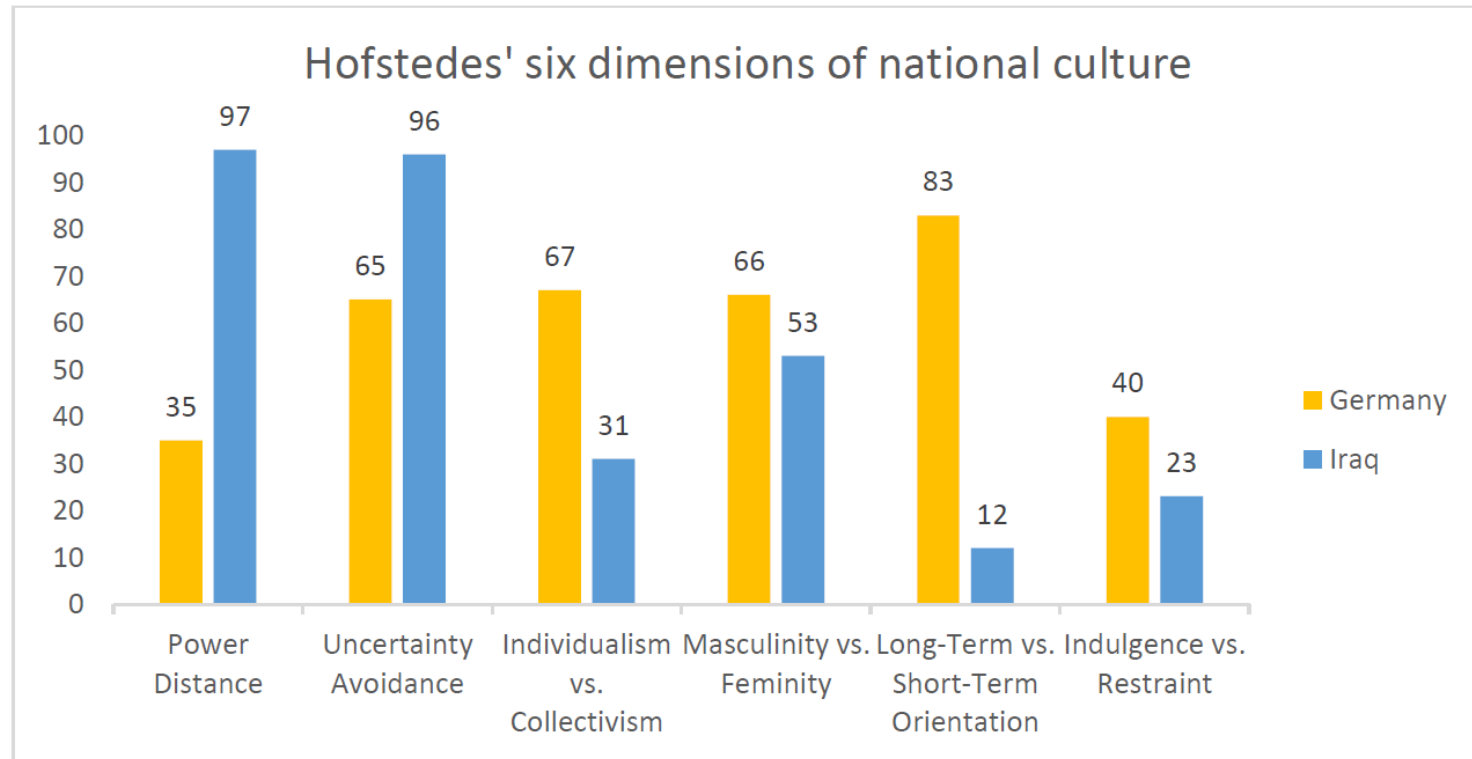
The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map (2020)



Source: World Values Survey (2005-2020)
www.worldvaluessurvey.org

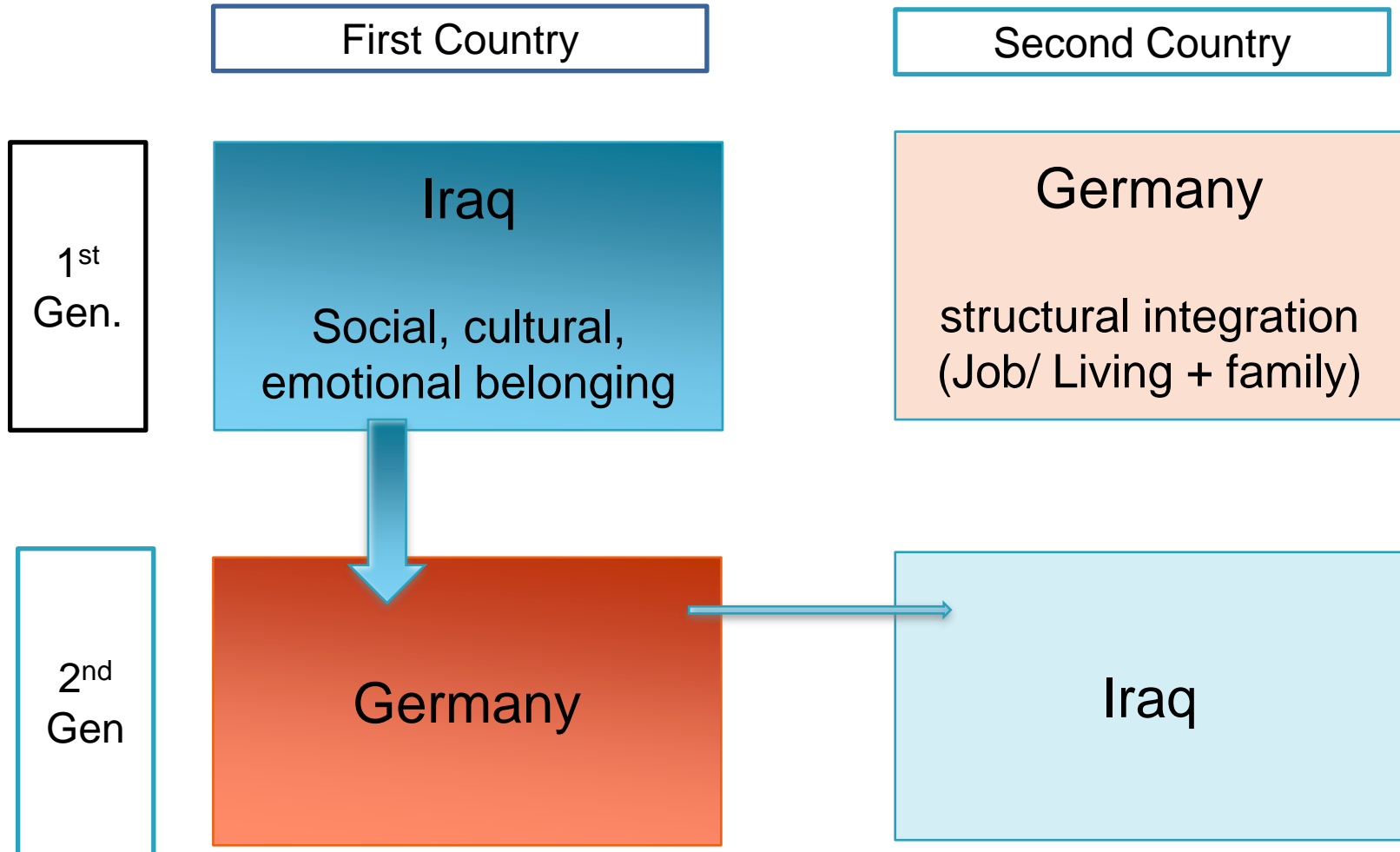
Hofstede dimension on national Culture

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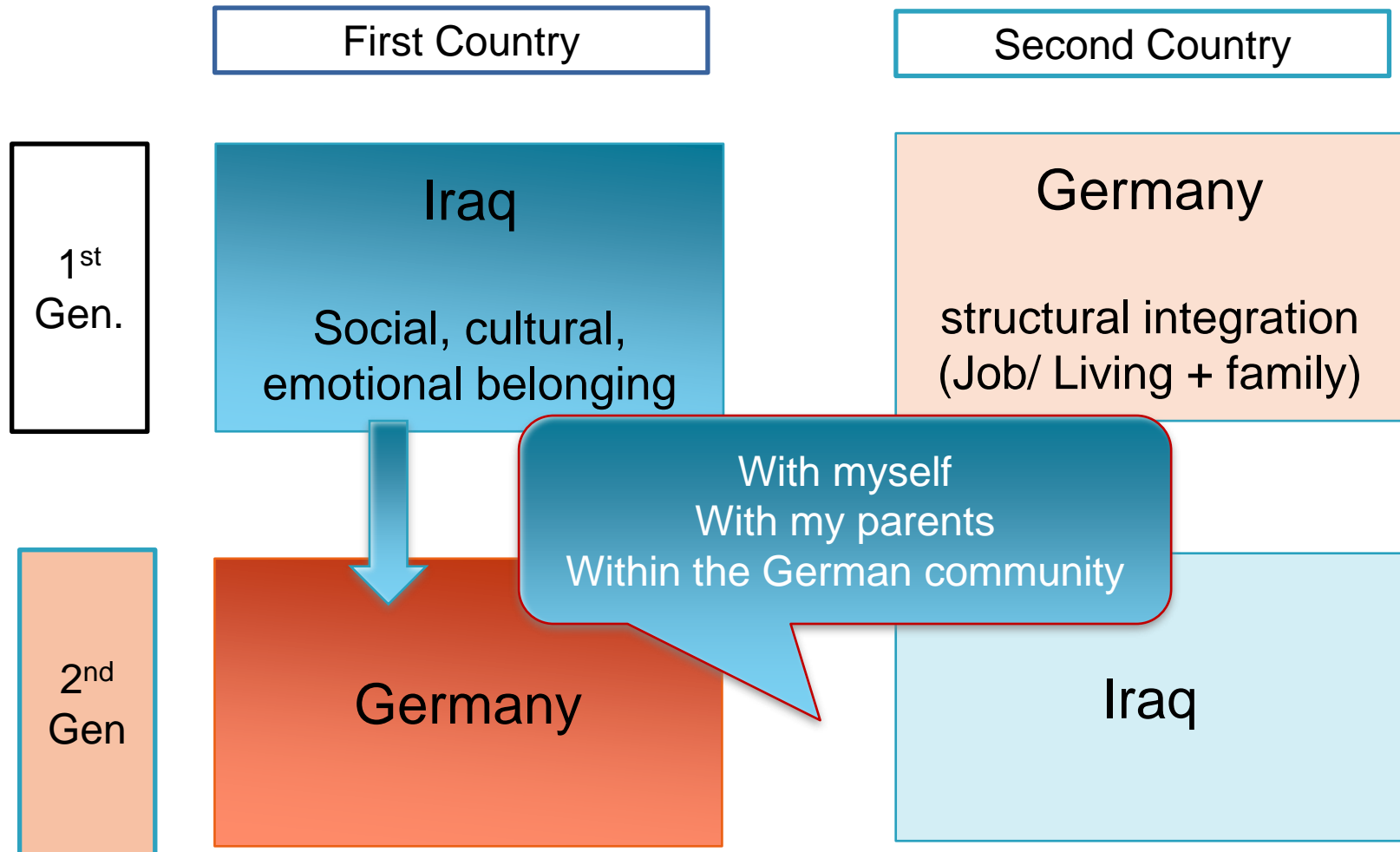


Acculturation - a multidimensional process consisting of the confluence of different cultural practices, values and identifications

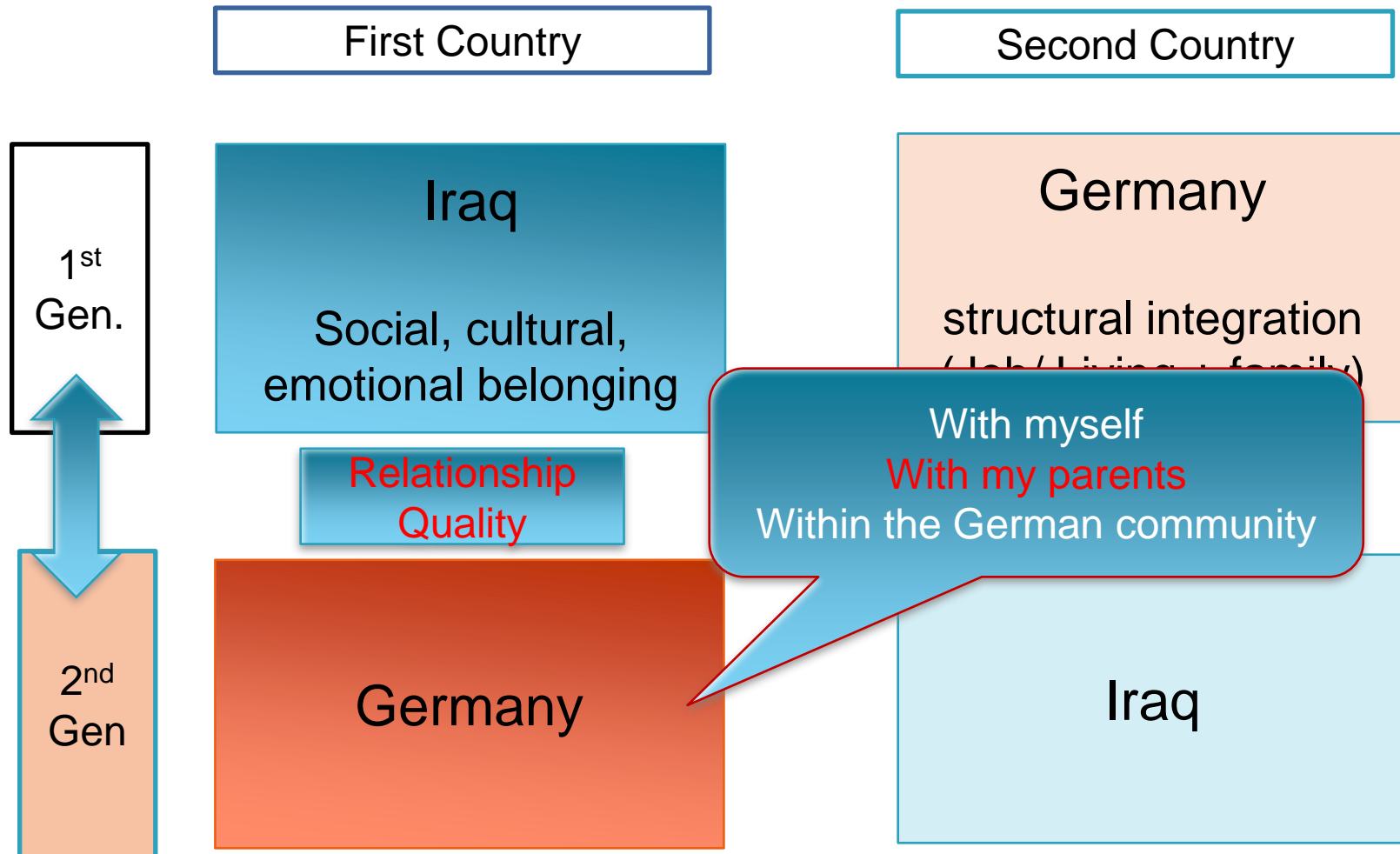
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Second generation: Identity negotiation:



Identity negotiation:



Cultural distance – Conflict expected

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- Negotiation process of more culturally distant countries **more effortful** (Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006).
- Iraq – predominant parenting style – **authoritarian**. Increases chances of transmitting values in collectivistic cultures, where it is perceived as parental warmth (Rudy & Grusec, 2001).
- Individualistic culture: Frequent, open communication for value transmission required. Effective communication is reached
 - by first communicating key values,
 - then by family members engaging in **frequent discussions** about these values (Schönpflug & Silbereisen, 1992)

- Qualitative approach – semi-structured interviews.
- Purposeful sampling – inclusion criterion: 2nd generation Iraqis – both parents born in Iraq – Participant grown up in Germany (schooling)
- Age – 18 – 30
- Male & Female participants
- N = 6 – recruited through the second author's network
 - (N = 6 + 1 - personal investment of the second author)

Sample:

	Gender	P o B	Age	Living with parents	Frequency of contact with parents
P1	M	Iraq	23	No	Daily
P2	F	D	24	Yes	Daily
P3	M	Iraq	30	No	2 x week or less
P4	M	Iraq	28	No	2 x week or less
P5	F	D	27	No	2 x week or more
P6	F	D	21	No	3 x week or more

- Sense of belonging
- Relationship quality
 - Communication
 - ability – language proficiency
 - Perceived value similarity between 2nd and 1st generation
 - Negotiation
 - (Emotional closeness)

Sense of belonging:

Deutsche Kultur -----|-----Irakische Kultur
|

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|

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Deutsche Kultur -----|-----Irakische Kultur
|

- All but one – clearly identify more as German.
- P5's answer need to be qualified: In terms of role – she identifies as German. She has a strong emotional attachment to Iraq because of the welcome – sense of warmth and friendliness experienced there.
- This friendliness/ sense of community – caring for others is mentioned by all participants. The importance of food/ sharing of food with the community – sharing the little you have.
- All expressed discrimination experiences - or references as “foreigner” – not being accepted as “German”
- All very conflicted – Iraqi at home – German outside.

- Common theme: **Colloquial Arabic** (dialect), but lack of vocabulary in Arabic to hold an in-depth conversation.

“ I can only really do what you can when you talk about everyday life, what I'm eating right now or what I did today, and that's possible. ...Well, we can talk about everything normally, but when it gets to a really deep level, then it gets difficult. So, there are topics that I can't really discuss with my parents, unfortunately“ (P4).

- **Shame/ guilt** about inability to express oneself properly in Arabic
 - „I try to paraphrase, and that's always so embarrassing because you think to yourself, ok, now you want to act smart, then you can't pronounce it properly." (P2)
- Preference to communicate with persons who are bilingual as **mixing** of languages is possible
- Difficulty of understanding **Arabic dialects** – communication with other Arabs difficult – again shame (“peinlich”) for being judged as not being clever.
- Inability to understand standard Arabic – inability to read or write.
 - None expressed pride in speaking two languages – all focused on the limited Arabic
 - None criticized parents for lack of fluency in German.

Consequences – relationship with parents – Language as a barrier.

"I would perhaps also address some things, even if they are conflicts, **if I were linguistically fit.** Because then I could express myself and explain things (...) that is a communicative requirement.

And I can't do that, because I know exactly that I will look like a **loser,** because they [the parents] can express themselves perfectly. They know exactly how to put their arguments and then I start to stutter. And they think: what does he want to discuss with me? That's why I just leave it and that's why the communication is very abstract, on a banal level, and yes, **this profound thing doesn't take place.**" (P3)

- Shame about inability to speak well – and worries about transmission:

„Yes, that makes me sad, because it is actually my language and when I imagine passing it on to my children one day, I realise that these gaps shouldn't be there, because I want to teach it to someone. And then I feel so much pressure that I should actually speak better.” (P4)

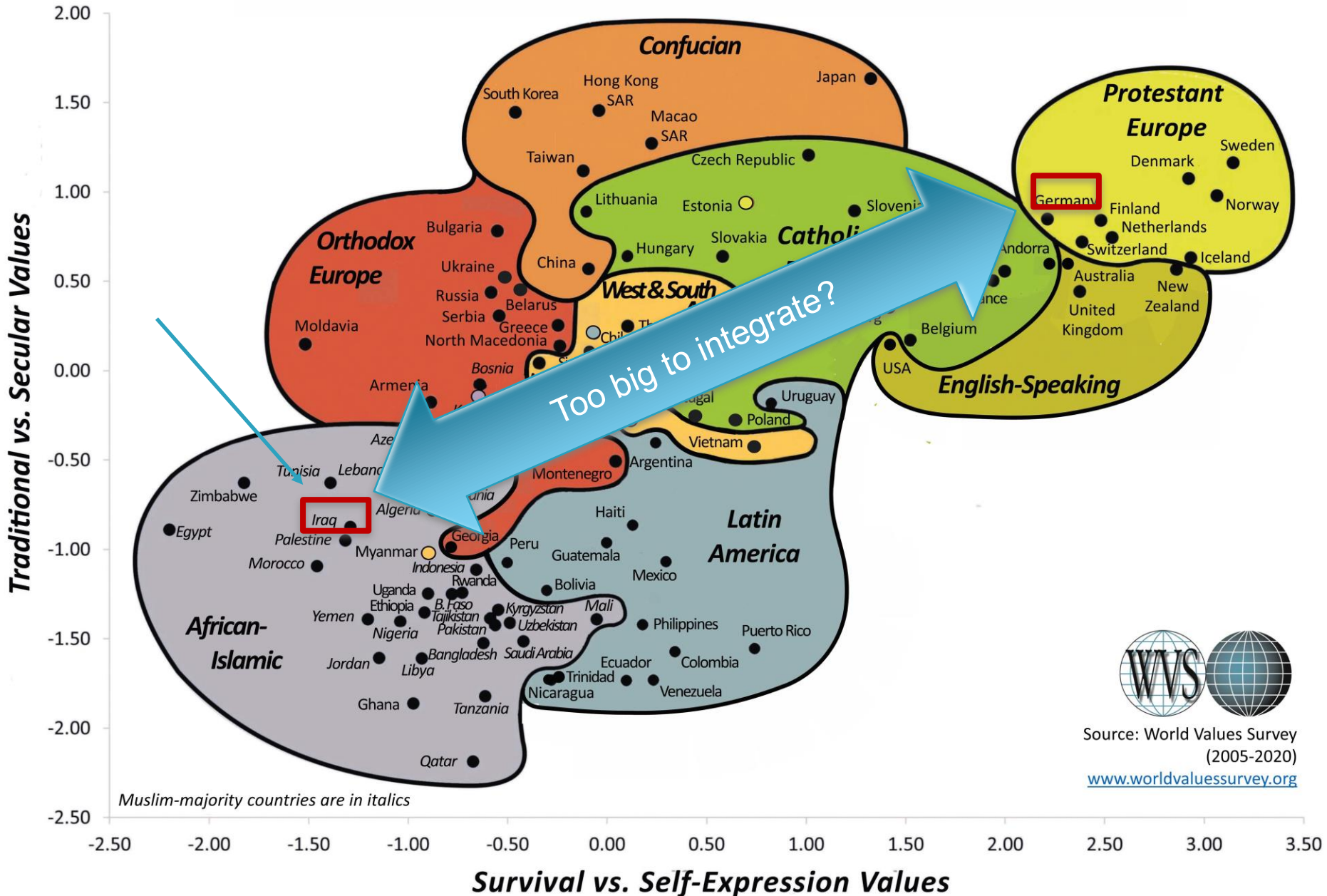
- Strict Muslim upbringing
 - Parents live according to Islam – and bring up children accordingly.
 - Emphasis on religion – education – founding a family – looking after poor.
 - Reputation (!)
 - Traditional gender roles – marriage within the religion.

“...Education and religion. Clearly above everything. So religion is number one either way. The expectations are very clear: finish my studies and have a secure job. To marry at some point. They definitely want me to marry a Muslim (...) prayer, that's the top priority. (P1)

“...Reputation, clearly (...) So I just see the most important thing is you have to be religious and keep a good reputation.” (P2)

- Non-alignment
 - Identify with German values
 - „live and let live rather than don't live and let others not live“ (P2).
 - **But** – also feel a sense of obligation and pride in Iraqi culture
- Parallel worlds: guilty conscience
 - "I also think it's bad that I do this (...) I always have a guilty conscience about it too." (P1)
- Strategy: Keeping things **secret** => Parallel worlds
- Hide the “German side” from parents
 - „...I avoid conflict by hiding it [my life outside]” (P1)

The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map (2020)



Source: World Values Survey (2005-2020)
www.worldvaluessurvey.org

Steps towards integration:

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- Possibly for this generation, but not the next:
- Asked about what he would do differently in bringing up his own children, P1 replied:

“...I just try so that they can talk to me **openly** without having to feel this **fear**.

Of course, I want to give them religion as well. But not in such a way that everything is no, no, no, no, **but always explain why things are like this** and like that, why you have to pray, why you have to donate to the poor, why. So this "why" is always the biggest question, because I wasn't really taught that myself.”

Concluding thoughts - 2nd Generation

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- Compartmentalization – solution for all participants.

- Effort –
 - Doing parents justice – felt anguish – love for parents (especially mothers)
 - Experience of not belonging to both countries
 - Permanent guilty conscience – leading two lives.

- Language –
 - guilt about lack of proficiency in Arabic
 - Very real language barrier in talking to parents.

- Sense of belonging –
 - Experience of sense of community (being loved) – Iraqi relatives
 - Identification with Germany, but experiencing not belonging

- Dimensions of Bicultural Competence (LaFromboise et al., 1993):

Dimensions of BC	Parents	Children
1. Knowledge of cultural beliefs and values	☒	☑
2. Positive attitudes to both groups	☒	Partial
3. Bicultural efficacy	☒	Partial
4. Communication ability	☒	Partial
5. Role repertoire (range of culturally or situationally appropriate behaviors or roles)	☒	☑
6. Sense of being grounded (stable social networks)	☒	Partial

Concluding thoughts/ questions

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- Acculturation challenge – First generation
 - Expectations in terms of “integration”?
 - Societal reactions?
 - Reciprocity?
 - Chronos?



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Independence from the UK was gained in 1932

Tensions between Northern Part (Kurdistan) and the South

Iraqi-Kurdish War in the 1960s

Iraqi-Kurdish War in 1974

Iraq invaded Iran in 1980. Dire consequences of the war – by 1988 up to 1.3 m dead and a collapse of the economy. Poor health system, education, income and life expectancy.

Invasion of Kuwait in 1990 – Iraq essentially bankrupt

By 1990, 70% of the population below the poverty line.

By the end of 2021 almost 300,000 Iraqi immigrants.

Diaspora started in 2003 when Saddam Hussein gained power.