

Making Waves: User-Generated Comments about Burkini-Wearing in Three German Newspapers

The burkini – a full-body swimsuit worn for modesty while swimming in public – made waves in 2018 after German news media reported that a public high school in the Rhine-Ruhr metropolitan region had provided the garment to female students for class use. This paper uses critical discourse analysis to examine a corpus of online user-generated comments (n=3,606) made ‘below the line’ to articles about the controversy in two national newspapers: the liberal-leaning *Die Zeit* and the conservative-leaning *Die Welt*, as well as *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, the area’s largest regional newspaper. It asks: How do user-generated comments discursively frame the burkini in terms of German national identity and (un)belonging? Digital discourse about ethnonational identity constructs the parameters of successful integration in German society (Fuller 2019), and similar framing is at play in the analyzed corpus with discourse about the burkini marking group membership, namely ‘German’ / ‘foreign’ and ‘secular’ / ‘Muslim’ identities, as well as the ‘egalitarian’ / ‘patriarchal’ values that the commenters associate with them. These dichotomies represent dominant and counter discourses about the role of difference in German society and the burkini in coeducational contexts, in particular, given its positioning by the state in legal discourse as a means through which socialization and enculturation may be facilitated (Davis 2023).

Works Cited

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