

Islamic Centers' Engagement with the Discourse of Cultural Pluralism in Germany

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Abstract

Germany, with a population exceeding 80 million, is the second most populous country in Europe, where nearly 20% of the inhabitants are non-native or foreign nationals. Moreover, the Muslim population in Germany is estimated to be over 6 million, with more than 2,700 mosques and Islamic centers. Given the diversity of nationalities, cultures, and religions present in Germany, many sociologists describe the Federal Republic of Germany as a multicultural society and consider the recognition of diverse cultures a fundamental principle for the country. In this context, officials in some states have taken steps such as signing agreements and approving affirmative action policies in favor of certain cultural, religious, and ethnic minorities. This study explores the nature of cultural pluralism and its various dimensions while examining how Islamic centers in Germany engage with this cultural phenomenon. The research, conducted using qualitative content analysis, indicates that Islamic centers in Germany, through their diverse functions—including social participation, social cohesion and integration, norm-setting and social security, identity-building and strengthening of ethnic culture, providing meaning to life, generating spirituality and psychological peace, and reinforcing the family system—embrace and support the approach of cultural pluralism. These centers prepare their audience for life in a multicultural society, and their overall performance aligns with strengthening and deepening cultural pluralism policies, shaping a society based on the acceptance of pluralism in a multicultural sense.

Keywords: Cultural pluralism, Germany, Islamic centers, religious diversity, peaceful coexistence.

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Introduction

One of the defining features of modern societies today is cultural pluralism (Multiculturalism). Cultural pluralism encompasses a set of ideas regarding the appropriate response to cultural and religious diversity in society. Based on this concept, individuals from various nationalities, religions, ethnicities, and races coexist within a single geographical region while enjoying equal citizenship rights. As Song ("An Introduction to Cultural Pluralism," no. 12, p. 8) explains, in cultural pluralism, the presence of multiple identities and cultural backgrounds is acknowledged and encouraged as a fundamental aspect of a cohesive society. In cultural pluralism, coexisting in a diverse and multicultural society with tolerance and acceptance of others' customs is considered ethically desirable. Accepting and properly understanding multiculturalism leads to the transformation of a singular perspective on culture into a more egalitarian view, allowing for peaceful coexistence. Cultural pluralism lays the foundation for an order based on diversity, enabling different ways of life to exist in a mosaic-like social structure. Germany, with a population exceeding 80 million, is the seventh-largest country in terms of area and the second most populous in Europe. The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, in its 2020 study titled "Muslim Life in Germany," reported that approximately 20% of Germany's population is non-native or foreign-born. Additionally, the number of Muslims in Germany, both Sunni and Shia, is estimated at around 6 million, making them the third-largest religious minority after Protestants and Catholics. Among religious groups, the Muslim population has been growing at a faster rate, with nearly 50% of Germany's Muslims under the age of 25. More notably, 35% of all children under five in Germany belong to Muslim families. This suggests that Islam is becoming more ingrained in Germany's cultural fabric. As former German President Christian Wulff stated, "Islam is now a part of Germany." With the increasing Muslim population, the number of mosques and Islamic centers in Germany has exceeded 2,700, of which 230 belong to the Shia community. Given these realities and the broader context of cultural pluralism, an important question arises: how can the performance of Islamic centers be assessed in relation to the theory of cultural pluralism? In other words, are Islamic centers, in general, aligned with the discourse of cultural pluralism? Do they constitute part of Germany's multicultural system? If some Islamic centers do not align with the policies of cultural pluralism, is it because their administrators believe that altering their structure and programs in favor of multiculturalism would weaken their influence, immersing them and their followers into European society and culture, thereby deliberately avoiding engagement with cultural pluralism? Or is it that these administrators are simply unaware of the potential impact of their centers on cultural pluralism? For

instance, it is often argued that the Turkish Muslim community—whether influenced by Turkey, their religious teachings, or their native cultural heritage—has consistently resisted incorporating multicultural policies, resulting in a ghettoized and isolated existence. Additionally, when analyzing terrorism and certain religious violence in Europe, it is sometimes suggested that such issues arise because the larger Muslim community has not adapted to cultural pluralism in Europe and that Islamic centers have not directed their activities toward multicultural ideals. This perspective implies that the operation of mosques and Islamic centers runs counter to cultural pluralism. However, others argue that the rise of groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda in Europe is not necessarily due to opposition to multiculturalism by Muslims or Islamic centers. Rather, it may be that while these centers do not explicitly endorse cultural pluralism, other factors contribute to the emergence of such extremist groups.

Regardless, while Muslims in Germany and their Islamic centers have the right to maintain an independent identity, the question remains: do they seek an isolated, independent identity, or do they aim to interact with other religions and cultures, embracing cultural pluralism while respecting the sacred beliefs of others and fostering peaceful coexistence?

Conceptual Definition

The key concept in this study is cultural pluralism (Multiculturalism). While cultural diversity has long been a reality in various societies, multiculturalism as a policy with its normative outcomes and sociopolitical impacts is a relatively recent phenomenon. The multicultural approach emerged in the 1960s in response to the genuine needs of ethnic and cultural minorities in Western countries, primarily immigrants and refugees, and is closely linked to identity policies (Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 13). Although cultural groups in contemporary societies share social spaces and experience communal living, this coexistence has also led to cultural complexities. In immigrant-receiving countries, cultural diversity has often resulted in ongoing debates between cultural minorities and governing authorities over issues such as the right to promote native languages, migration rights, citizenship acquisition, autonomy, political representation, access to multicultural education programs, and even the ability to influence national symbols, such as the selection of a national anthem or the designation of official holidays (Karimi & Zarei, "Multicultural Policing: A Manifestation of the Conflict Between Security-Oriented Approaches and Citizenship Rights," no. 32, p. 122). Cultural pluralism is a concept that recognizes and respects the beliefs, values, actions, and behaviors of various social groups despite cultural differences. Accordingly, individuals have the right to conduct themselves based on cultural norms they personally accept. In

another definition, cultural pluralism is a set of ideas regarding the appropriate response to cultural diversity in society, where individuals of different nationalities, religions, ethnicities, and races coexist within a single geographical region while enjoying equal citizenship rights. A key aspect of cultural pluralism is the absence of cultural determinism, meaning that no particular culture is considered superior to others. This framework allows for the recognition of ethnic and cultural minority rights—such as preserving native languages, practicing religious rituals, and maintaining collective traditions—without threatening the political unity of a national society (Gray, *The Political Philosophy of Isaiah Berlin*, p. 69). Based on these definitions, cultural pluralism can be described as follows: "Cultural pluralism is a discourse that views a society's cultural diversity as a value and a social asset, seeking peaceful coexistence among the various subcultures. It promotes mutual recognition and respect while encouraging individuals to remain committed to their cultural values" (Modood, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea*, p. 9).

From this perspective, several key characteristics of cultural pluralism can be identified:

1) Cultural pluralism is an intellectual movement whose most fundamental principle is *equality* (Karimi & Zarei, "Multicultural Policing: A Manifestation of the Conflict Between Security-Oriented Approaches and Citizenship Rights," no. 32, p. 125; Liubchik et al., *The World on the Threshold of the 21st Century*, pp. 179-180).

2) Another characteristic of cultural pluralism is its rejection of cultural monism within society. Proponents of cultural monism believe in the superiority of the dominant group's culture over others. In such a situation, the ruling social system, by ignoring the rights and demands of cultural minorities, contributes to the continued dominance of the majority group. Multiculturalism, by recognizing and respecting the various subcultures within a society, resists cultural monism (Karimi & Zarei, "Multicultural Policing: A Manifestation of the Conflict Between Security-Oriented Approaches and Citizenship Rights," no. 32, p. 125).

3) Another feature of multiculturalism is the formal recognition of diverse groups in public spheres, such as forming political parties and organizations, participating in elections, contributing to legislation and its interpretation, and engaging in cultural, social, and economic policymaking (Liubchik et al., *The World on the Threshold of the 21st Century*, pp. 179-180).

4) Another characteristic of cultural pluralism is its encouragement of individuals to practice their religious rituals and cultural traditions. In this regard, cultural pluralism not only supports and respects minorities but also invites them to uphold their unique customs.

5) Multiculturalism, by acknowledging cultural diversity as a reality, considers

it a value. Thus, what was once seen as a factor for division and discord is now regarded as national capital, fostering peaceful and friendly coexistence among various societal groups while contributing to social dynamism and cultural synergy (Modood, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea*, p. 9).

6) Another key feature of cultural pluralism is the necessity of interaction among different social groups. Living with others, alongside others, and not against others, is a fundamental principle of multicultural discourse (Gray, *The Political Philosophy of Isaiah Berlin*, p. 69).

Research Methodology

The present study is a qualitative research project employing the "experts interview" method. Expert interviews are an effective approach to gathering information from specialists in a particular field. In addition to empirical evidence and the researcher's long-term engagement with Islamic centers and mosques in Germany, this study draws upon the findings of exclusive discussions and 18 semi-structured interviews conducted with Islamic center administrators, imams, subject-matter experts, and religious-cultural activists. The interviewees were between 30 and 65 years old, with residency in Germany ranging from 5 to 45 years. Each had between 5 and 30 years of experience collaborating with Islamic centers. Among the interviewees, four were active women, and the rest were men (*Experts Interview Methodology*).

History of Cultural Pluralism in Germany

In recent decades, the increasing migration of Muslims to immigrant-receiving countries has transformed from a purely demographic phenomenon into a socio-political issue. Part of this shift stems from the perception among native populations that the integration of Muslim migrants into Western societal norms is challenging. One of the key factors in shaping this perception was the 9/11 attacks. Shortly thereafter, a series of violent and terrorist incidents occurred across Europe, including in the Netherlands, France, London, and Spain, many of which involved radicalized Muslims. As a result, European debates about Muslim immigrants intensified, raising serious doubts about the ability of Muslim minorities to integrate into Western culture and live peacefully alongside other cultural groups (Kazempour, *Between Fear and Hope: A Study on the Lives of Muslim Immigrants in Canada*, p. 28). The transformation of Muslim presence into a socio-political issue was not solely due to this perception of difficulty in integrating with liberal democracies; other factors contributed as well. One widely accepted argument attributes the challenge to the reluctance or unwillingness of Muslims to integrate with host cultures rather than their inability to do so. The main components of this argument include:

- 1) Muslim immigrants generally do not integrate into host societies.
- 2) This situation results from a conscious decision on their part.
- 3) This conscious decision stems from the belief that their goal is not assimilation into Western societies but rather dominance over them.
- 4) All Muslims are the same, with no distinction between radicals, conservatives, or liberals.

At the core of this argument lies the concept of the "unusual nature of Muslims" and the notion that fundamental differences exist between Muslims and other immigrants in their interactions with host societies. This perspective shifts the burden of responsibility for addressing the issue from the host society to Muslim immigrants themselves. In Germany, discussions surrounding the concept of a multicultural society have been a focus of attention for several years. Multiculturalism remains one of the key points of contention in German politics, as it pertains to the country's future. One of the most pressing questions in this regard is: How should foreigners be treated?

Although the policy of multiculturalism was implemented in the early 1970s, it faced criticism from the outset. However, since the mid-2000s, these criticisms have intensified, with Muslims becoming the central focus of the debate. According to Tariq Modood, "Muslims have become the benchmark for assessing the merits and drawbacks of multiculturalism as a public policy" (Modood, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea*, p. 4). Furthermore, as Will Kymlicka explains, the level of opposition to multiculturalism in different countries is directly proportional to the number of Muslim immigrants residing there (Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 14).

To better understand this issue, it is important to examine the overall trend of migration in Germany.

General Trends of Migration to Germany

The migration process to Germany can be broadly categorized into seven phases, although these stages sometimes overlap:

- 1) Refugees fleeing from Germany and deportees returning between 1945 and 1949. These individuals primarily came from Eastern Germany or the Soviet-occupied zone, and nearly all of them were German citizens.
- 2) Migration between East and West Germany from 1949 to 1961.
- 3) Recruitment of foreign guest workers between 1961 and 1973 due to economic conditions in the 1950s and a labor shortage.
- 4) The arrival of family members of migrant workers between 1973 and 1988, despite the cessation of foreign labor recruitment due to economic decline.
- 5) The influx of asylum seekers, particularly from the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Turkey, along with new migrant workers between 1988 and 1992.

6) The introduction of restrictive immigration policies between 1992 and 2000, making migration to Germany more difficult, which led to a negative migration balance.

Migration Trends in Germany Since 2000

Since the year 2000, Germany has moved beyond restrictive migration policies and resumed active immigration. The first step in this process involved attracting elites, targeted recruitment of specialists, and other structured migration strategies.

Challenges Related to Migration in Germany

Today, more than 22% of Germany's residents have a migration background. However, for a long time, German policymakers denied that Germany was, in fact, a country of immigration. This longstanding principle—that Germany was not a destination for migrants—delayed immigration policy reforms and the adoption of pragmatic, forward-looking, and reality-based principles for years (Hölscher, *Die Diskussion über das Konzept der multikulturellen Gesellschaft*, p. 3).

Currently, millions of foreign migrants live in Germany, differing from the Christian Western majority in terms of race, education, and degree of social integration. It is also important to remember that guest workers did not arrive in Germany illegally. The German government itself invited them, and now it cannot simply send them back. If the authorities had wished to avoid the challenges posed by a multicultural society, they should have considered these factors when recruiting workers en masse.

Additionally, since 1970, the number of deaths in Germany has exceeded the number of births. Without immigration, Germany's population would decline. In some regions, companies are already struggling to find suitable employees, particularly in engineering, healthcare, and nursing sectors. Therefore, migrants should no longer be perceived as a burden on social systems but rather as a potential opportunity and a form of social capital. According to the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)*, reforms in Germany's migration policies have made the country one of the most liberal among the 35 OECD member states in terms of labor migration policies. However, welcoming skilled labor migration has also faced criticism, as migrants are often judged solely on their economic and demographic utility, reducing them to mere "commodities" (*OECD Report on Migration to Germany*).

German policymakers also recognize that high levels of immigration alone are insufficient to address demographic shifts and skilled labor shortages. Migrants must decide whether they intend to stay in Germany for the long term.

To positively influence this decision, political and business representatives have been discussing the creation of a "*culture of welcome and recognition*" for several years (*Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur*). This initiative aims to make Germany more attractive to skilled potential migrants and turn it into a true home for long-term residents and their children. Initially, this term referred to the presence of skilled foreign workers, but since 2015, it has increasingly been associated with refugees. Images of Germans welcoming asylum seekers at train stations with applause and posters bearing the slogan "*Refugees Welcome*" garnered global attention (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*). This approach aims to make Germany more attractive to qualified potential migrants and transform it into a true home for those who choose to settle there long-term, along with their children. Initially, this term referred to the presence of skilled foreign workers, but since 2015, it has increasingly been associated with refugees. Images of Germans welcoming asylum seekers at train stations with applause and posters bearing the slogan "*Refugees Welcome*" gained global attention (*Flüchtlingskrise*).

However, the initial euphoria soon subsided significantly. Doubts grew about whether Germany could truly accommodate and integrate such a large number of people. In 2015 and 2016, the high level of refugee migration created significant challenges for German society, to the extent that 2015 became ingrained in Germany's collective memory as the year of the "*refugee crisis*." Never before in the history of the Federal Republic had such a large number of asylum seekers arrived in a single year.

Different Forms of Relationships Between Germans and Migrants

When analyzing the relationship between the majority and minority groups in a society, four classic types of interactions can be identified: *assimilation*, *integration*, *separation*, and *marginalization* (*Assimilation, Integration, Separation, Marginalisation*). **Assimilation** refers to the complete absorption of a minority into the dominant culture (*Assimilation bedeutet das völlige Aufgehen in der Kultur der Mehrheit*). This phenomenon has been observed in Germany in the past, such as the assimilation of Huguenot religious refugees in Prussia (*Assimilation der hugenottischen Glaubensflüchtlinge in Preußen*), Polish miners in the Ruhr region (*Assimilation der polnischen Bergleute im Ruhrgebiet*), and Piedmontese immigrants in southern and western Germany (*Assimilation der piemontesischen Einwanderer in Süd und Westdeutschland*). German Jews also followed this path during the 30-year rule of the Wilhelmine Empire (*Das wilhelminische Reich, zwischen 1888 und 1918*).

Integration is the model that aligns most closely with the ideal envisioned by German society. It signifies mutual acceptance and tolerance while adhering to a

common principle, ensuring that the cultural identity of the minority remains intact (*Integration bedeutet volle gegenseitige Akzeptanz und Toleranz, verbunden mit Unterordnung unter ein gemeinsames Prinzip, bei Intaktbleiben der kulturellen Eigenständigkeit der Minderheit*).

Separation refers to the marginalization of minorities within isolated districts, often referred to as *ghettos* (*Separation ist die Ausgrenzung der Minderheit in geschlossenen Bezirken, in sogenannten Ghettos*).

Finally, "marginalization" is similar to the situation of Native Americans in North America or the indigenous Australians in their protected areas, or the status of the Roma in Europe, which leads to the cultural decline of these groups. It should be noted, however, that the most extreme approach to dealing with minorities is their physical destruction. Unfortunately, due to events that took place during the period of National Socialism, Germany became notorious in this regard (Hölscher, 2003).

Standardization within the Framework of a Progressive Culture

One of the issues discussed on the margins of cultural diversity in Germany is the concept of "progressive culture." Progressive culture means that German culture is mandatory for all members of German society, as well as for immigrants. Therefore, German culture takes precedence over the lifestyle of foreigners and acts as a unifying force in the community. German culture reflects the values of society, its laws, and the worldview of its people. Proponents of progressive culture, in the role of critics of multicultural society, argue that multiculturalism ultimately leads to the collapse of society and the formation of "parallel societies" (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 2003). Additionally, uncontrolled immigration is seen as a threat to internal peace. They believe that in order to maintain peace in society, preserve native culture, and reduce German hostility towards foreigners, efforts should be made to guide the cultural assimilation of immigrants towards the progressive German culture. In Germany, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), of which Ms. Angela Merkel was a member, advocates for the idea of progressive culture. Supporters of this view argue that the cultural diversity that exists today comes with many disadvantages. Attention to the different foreign cultures and the integration of cultures erodes the native and national culture of Germany. In the view of these politicians, Muslims who are loyal to the Quran neither accept equal rights for women nor the separation of religion from the state. Even liberal Muslim intellectuals argue that apostasy and a definitive departure from Islam should be punishable by death. Islam increasingly shows that it is a real barrier to integration and social cohesion. For centuries, Europe has struggled for liberal and democratic values such as freedom of religion, the separation of church

and state, and gender equality. Dr. Barbara Senfening believes that culture is something that is constantly changing. Cultural progress is marked by further development of culture, such as the integration of new aspects of foreign cultures. In Germany, there should be a "progressive culture," not the integration of cultures, because this does not lead to the formation of a new society but rather results in the clash and confrontation of cultures (Meier, 2000).

German Multiculturalism

In contrast to proponents of progressive culture and, more fully, cultural standardization, many German scholars believe that the realization of a multicultural society in Germany is currently a reality. Furthermore, standardization is not legally mandatory, and freedom in various domains is a principle of democratic values. Additionally, the challenges of a multicultural society are natural and not unsolvable, but can be resolved with appropriate policies. In Germany, the term "multicultural society" entered political and sociological discussions in the late 1980s. Many believe that it was Heiner Geißler, a German jurist and politician from the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), who first declared that Germany is a multicultural society. He believed: "We must be prepared to live in the future with millions of people who have different mother tongues, different origins, different views of life, different customs and traditions. But we will not lose our national identity... A multicultural society means the willingness to live with people from other countries and cultures, to respect their uniqueness, without wanting to assimilate and Germanize them" (Geißler, 1990). Professor Dieter Oberndörfer, Director of the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute for Cultural Research in Freiburg, is also an advocate of cultural diversity in Germany. He argues that a "monocultural society" has never existed, because different occupational, cultural, or religious groups have always lived parallel to each other in their own worlds. They also argue that Article 116 of the new constitution could read as follows: "A German citizen is someone who was born in Germany. Furthermore, anyone who has resided in the Federal Republic of Germany for five years can become a citizen." Every immigrant is strongly advised to learn the German language. Without a common language, coexistence is ineffective. However, this does not mean that immigrants should not use their mother tongue. As the example of Switzerland shows, multilingualism does not necessarily lead to numerous problems (Leggewie, 1993).

Different Levels of Cultural Diversity

Many sociologists and scholars in Germany describe the Federal Republic of Germany as a multicultural society. Based on personal observations and lived

experiences, as well as insights gathered from experts and social activists, the author believes that cultural diversity in Germany has two different levels:

Descriptive Level

At the descriptive level, cultural diversity in Germany is an undeniable reality. People from different cultures live in Germany with their own customs and traditions. They have active temples and cultural centers and enjoy the right to freedom of belief and freedom of expression. They are free to publish and distribute books in their native languages and can speak about their beliefs and cultures in dialogue sessions, introducing their values. If someone travels through downtown Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt, and other cities, they can easily observe various ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities moving about the city, dressed in diverse clothing, and speaking different dialects and languages. They shop not only in German stores but also in Turkish, Indian, Iranian, Afghan, and other ethnic shops. On weekends, they go to restaurants that serve food from their home countries with their families. Furthermore, Jews, Buddhists, Bahá'ís, Hindus, and Muslims, alongside Christians, visit their respective temples and practice their religious rites and traditions. According to data from the Northern Germany Statistics Office at the end of 2020, nearly 700,000 people with a migration background were living in Hamburg. This represents 36.7% of the total population of Hamburg (Statistik Nord, 2020).

Normative Level

At the normative level, cultural diversity goes much beyond the descriptive level. Cultural diversity at the normative level refers to the government's specific and systematic program for implementing policies related to a multicultural society. One of these policies is the official recognition of the groups and minorities present in society and the legal validation of their languages and native traditions. This means that the German language will no longer be mandatory for everyone. Instead, there should be provisions allowing individuals to study in various languages in schools and universities and to write their academic theses in different languages. To achieve this, the school and university systems in Germany must be designed to accommodate multiple languages. Additionally, receiving and presenting official documents should also be possible in various languages. All organizations, associations, and service websites should be designed to offer services in multiple languages. However, in many public places in Germany, citizens are told that they must either speak German or visit government offices with a German translator. Moreover, there is no German public TV or satellite channel broadcasting in English, Turkish, or Arabic. "Recognition" is a key concept in multiculturalism. Muslims, as the

largest minority in Germany, also believe that their Islamic identity should be recognized, not merely tolerated. Moreover, cultural diversity at the normative level means that the government should offer special support to ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities (e.g., homosexuals, feminists, Muslims, etc.). Specifically, for Muslims, this means that a Muslim group in Germany should be able to receive more assistance from the government for their mosque and Islamic center, at least equivalent to the support provided to Christian churches. Additionally, just as church bells are heard on Sundays, there should be a provision for the call to prayer (adhan) to be heard for Muslims, and Muslim workers should be allowed to take a short break, such as 15 minutes, to pray. It should also be possible for both veiled and non-veiled individuals to be employed in both public and private institutions. On the other hand, cultural diversity at the normative level must lead to the inclusion of minorities in various levels of societal management. However, we see very little presence of minorities, especially Muslims, at higher levels of management in society. In Germany, it is rare to find Muslim, Indian, or other minority judges, university heads, or leaders of major public banks and hospitals. Furthermore, the presence of Muslim, Buddhist, or other minority politicians in the German Parliament is quite rare. This contrasts with countries like the UK, Canada, or even Belgium, where the ratio of elected Muslim representatives is much closer to their proportion of the general population. This analysis clearly shows that Germany's support for the religion and culture of minorities is minimal, allowing their presence and enabling them to hold cultural events. This type of support means that the German government grants various religions and cultures the right to exist and allows them to maintain their identity. However, there are no comprehensive programs to grow, develop, and strengthen these diverse cultures.

Integration, The Middle Path Between Assimilation and Cultural Diversity

It seems that cultural diversity has never been a government policy in Germany, and overall, it has not received significant support in the political class. What is being pursued by politicians and statesmen in the face of the cultural diversity in Germany is the policy of "integration." The German Minister of the Interior, Mr. Horst Seehofer, holds that: "Instead of cultural diversity, we are seeking the integration of immigrants. Integration does not mean living next to each other, but living together, based on a shared system of values, the constitution, and German culture, which stems from Christian-Jewish roots" (Seehofer, 2020). What is emphasized by this section of politicians is that "immigrants must fully accept the prevailing German legal system, values, and

culture. Germans not only share a common language but also have specific cultural customs and laws. We must not allow this shared foundation to be destroyed by foreigners" (Seehofer, 2020). Integration means mutual acceptance and tolerance, along with adherence to a common principle (the constitution), while preserving the cultural independence of minorities. Advocates of this approach believe that communal life should be defined by respect, mutual trust, a sense of belonging, and shared responsibility. Immigrant integration should provide equal opportunities and real participation in all areas, particularly in social, economic, and cultural life. The goal of integration is to strengthen cohesion throughout German society. For integration to occur, immigrants must learn the German language and gain basic knowledge of German history, culture, politics, and especially its laws to continue their presence in Germany and obtain a German passport. Accordingly, the constitution determines how people live together in Germany. Unlike complete assimilation and conformity, integration does not require abandoning one's cultural identity. Successful integration means that everyone feels they belong to one society. This implies creating a shared understanding of how to live together in the community, which requires the majority of society to be willing to accept immigrants and the immigrants' willingness to respect the laws of the host country and make efforts to integrate (Geißler, 1990).

Alignment of the Activities of Mosques and Islamic Centers in Germany with the Discourse of Cultural Diversity

The key question of this research is: what relationship can mosques and Islamic centers in Germany have with the discourse of cultural diversity? In response to this question, based on the definition of cultural diversity and the main characteristics outlined for it, it can be claimed that the Islamic centers in Germany, due to their unique social functions, can collectively contribute to the growth and development of a multicultural society and align with and support the discourse of cultural diversity. It is worth mentioning that mosques and Islamic centers in Germany have a variety of functions, including supportive roles, social participation, unity and social cohesion, social normativity and security, identity-building, cultural reinforcement, economic functions, providing meaning to life, producing spirituality and psychological calm in society, strengthening the family system, and educational functions (Al-Batul, 2023).

The Impact of the Multicultural Environment on the Functioning of Mosques and Islamic Centers in Hamburg

When a religious institution enters a new and non-native space, it redefines its functions according to the needs of the new audience and in line with the

conditions of the host society, resulting in a different performance. For example, in Islamic countries, the interaction of mosque imams with the People of the Book, their meetings with followers of non-Abrahamic religions, and inviting non-Muslims to attend the mosque and hosting them are not widely accepted, and may even be seen as incompatible with the dignity of the clergy. In fact, some may view it as leading to the imam's departure from justice. In contrast, nearly all imams of Islamic centers in Germany consider such gatherings necessary and essential. The reason why the Imam Ali (a.s.) mosque in Hamburg designates only the carpeted area under the dome as the specific prayer space of the mosque is to allow it to have an impact in its multicultural environment. Martyr Beheshti decided to make such provisions so that non-Muslims could enter the Islamic center and observe and experience Muslim religious practices up close. Furthermore, at the Islamic Center in Hamburg, there is no barrier or wall between the rows of men and women during congregational prayers. Additionally, to show respect for Sunni Muslims and to promote unity and cohesion among Muslims, during Friday prayers, the imam prays on the mat instead of using a prayer rug, and the Friday prayer in Hamburg does not include the qunut (supplication). Mosques and Islamic centers adjust their religious and theological approaches in accordance with the new multicultural environment. For instance, they decide which aspects of Islamic teachings to emphasize and which to downplay, what topics to focus on in sermons, and what issues to give less attention to. They may also adjust the themes of their seminars and conferences to focus more on human rights topics, in line with the prevailing atmosphere of the host society, as well as the direction and content of their publications. In the short- and long-term educational programs, such as those of the Hamburg seminary, specific goals and strategies are emphasized. For example, in the Hamburg seminary, the course "History of Religions" or "Women's Rights in Islam" is given more attention compared to traditional seminary programs in Iran and Iraq because Hamburg has people of various religions, and feminist discourse is prominent and influential in the region. Another example is that in Islamic countries, addressing the issues of refugees and providing support services to migrants is not related to mosques and religious institutions. Similarly, publishing books and magazines, creating social networks, or engaging in matters of burial and funeral services are not part of mosque activities. For instance, in Iran, it would be unimaginable for a mosque like Jamkaran to take on responsibilities related to the burial of Muslims or to establish an office for marriage and divorce services. However, organizing such activities is considered part of the essential responsibilities of mosques and Islamic centers in Europe, in line with the needs of the society in which they exist. Imams and managers of mosques and Islamic

centers in the West, influenced by the new multicultural environment and in accordance with the needs of their audiences, must take on more responsibilities than their counterparts in Islamic countries. The important point is that all these activities are carried out under the banner of the religious institution, even if these functions are not inherent or traditional roles of religious institutions. It is crucial to note that the diverse roles of Islamic centers in Germany arise from the needs and necessities present in that cultural environment, and the religious institution is responding to these needs. In other words, in addition to addressing the religious needs of people, it also meets their social needs and has social functions. It should be noted that when it is stated that the activities and functions of Islamic centers align with the theory of cultural pluralism and in some way reinforce it, this does not imply that secularism or the diminishment of religious values is present in these centers. As the concept of cultural pluralism suggests, one of its key features is encouraging individuals to preserve their unique identities and cultural practices. Thus, cultural pluralism not only supports and respects the minorities in society but also calls on them to perform their specific customs and uphold their group values.

Conclusion

In response to the important question of whether the activities of mosques and Islamic centers in Germany strengthen multiculturalism, the researcher has concluded that a distinction must be made between the perspectives and actions (i.e., mindset and performance) of the managers and officials of Islamic centers. In other words, multiculturalism as a mindset and theory differs completely from multiculturalism as action and practice. Interviews conducted with the managers of Islamic centers and cultural actors in the field of religious culture have led the researcher to conclude that many of these individuals have not developed a correct mental connection with the concept of multiculturalism and are unfamiliar with it. They are unaware of the true meaning of multiculturalism and its benefits for Muslim minorities, and sometimes, without proper understanding, they take a stance against it. However, if we consider multiculturalism as a situation in which ethnic and religious minorities are recognized and granted the opportunity to express their identities and cultural values, we should not hesitate to accept multiculturalism. Moving towards multiculturalism is not only not a threat to the religion and culture of Muslims; rather, it presents an opportunity for better introduction of Islamic values and culture. This culture and thought, in competition with other cultures and thoughts, will have the opportunity to be introduced and spread more widely. Moreover, this situation seems to align with Islamic principles and teachings, as the Quran in verses like 256 of Surah Al-Baqarah emphasizes freedom of belief and will. Additionally, if we consider

the recognition of differences and distinctions as a fundamental principle of multiculturalism, we will find that Islam, based on verse 13 of Surah Al-Hujurat, regards diversity and difference as characteristics of human life and considers them necessary for mutual recognition of humans and the clarification of shared beliefs, values, and customs. From this perspective, it must be acknowledged that Islam does not advocate for the implementation of coercive policies for cultural homogenization; on the contrary, it emphasizes the presence of diverse and different cultures. Islamic teachings also emphasize important values such as rationality, freedom of belief, tolerance, forbearance, and so on, and aim for people to engage in dialogue despite their differences, living peacefully in a multicultural society. However, in terms of performance and institutional activities, despite the lack of a proper intellectual understanding of multiculturalism, it can still be observed that the activities of mosques and Islamic centers are aligned with the theory of multiculturalism. The functions of these centers are in line with the discourse of multiculturalism and cover its core elements. Therefore, it seems that the activities of these centers, as institutions, may encourage and strengthen the theory of multiculturalism. But what the reasons for this are requires further research; however, it can be said that the main reason for this alignment may be the compulsion of national laws, the conditions of the host society and public culture, or even the needs and requests of the audience. In other words, Islamic centers have moved towards programs and activities in line with multicultural policies due to the prevailing atmosphere in society and existing needs. If this social need did not exist, these religious institutions would not engage in such activities and functions aligned with multiculturalism, as we do not observe such functions in religious institutions in Islamic countries. In other words, imams and managers of Islamic centers may not believe in the policy of multiculturalism, but in practice, due to the needs of the audience and society, they may be compelled to implement such programs. In conclusion, by evaluating the research findings and comparing them with the presented principles, it can be concluded that while Islamic centers in Germany may not fully embody all the characteristics of ideal multicultural institutions, their unique functions in the West suggest that, overall, they align with the discourse of multiculturalism and can contribute to the growth and development of multiculturalism.

Suggestions for Islamic Centers in the West

1) Many active cultural and religious centers in the West, based on the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity among their visitors, as well as the variety of programs and services they offer, easily identify themselves as multicultural centers. However, it is important to understand that the key components

and distinguishing features of a multicultural center include: vision, policies, programs, multicultural atmosphere and environment, as well as practical actions taken by the multicultural institution. In a multicultural center, the programs and actions of the organization reflect the experiences, multicultural perspectives, and cultural and ethnic approaches prevailing within the institution. The style of service delivery in such centers should align with the cultural and motivational styles of the community. These centers show great respect for the first language of their audience. The diversity of services and the variety of programs and educational classes tailored to different cultural groups connected to the institution are other characteristics of a multicultural center.

2) Imams and managers of Islamic centers in the West play an important role in shaping the identity and the emergence of Islamic culture in the next generation of cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities. The implementation of a multicultural strategy in Islamic centers to take advantage of the opportunities offered by cultural diversity requires the application of multicultural management in these centers. In this regard, awareness and skills related to multicultural management are critical needs for the managers of religious centers and cultural institutions in multicultural societies.

For the successful management of a multicultural institution, a proper vision and the development of comprehensive, long-term plans are essential. In an Islamic center, for planning to align with the host community's environment, managers must possess the necessary insight and a correct understanding of their multicultural environment. There is undoubtedly a difference between a builder who only places bricks without understanding their role in the overall plan and an architect who knows exactly what they are doing and constantly keeps the overall design in mind, understanding the impact of each brick placed. Unfortunately, some imams of Islamic centers are not well-informed about German society and culture, and due to a lack of study, insufficient knowledge of living conditions in Germany, inadequate language skills in German, and limited opportunities, they do not have enough awareness of the real needs of the host society. Since most imams have not grown up in Germany and their education did not account for the living conditions in the West, they are often unable to understand the problems that people face in society, let alone provide adequate and suitable solutions. In other words, since imams are not deeply familiar with German culture, even if they want to contribute to German culture and society, they do not have the resources or tools to do so. In some Islamic centers, instead of differentiating between the imam's role in the mosque and the management position of the center, one person holds both responsibilities, usually sent from outside Germany for a limited period, and lacks a proper understanding of German culture and, in particular, the cultural diversity in the

region. Moreover, the work priorities and policymaking of these centers are determined outside Germany, which is another factor contributing to the gap between the functions of Islamic centers and the requirements of multiculturalism.

Managers of multicultural institutions have high expectations from their colleagues in how to interact with different racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Developing the necessary skills in staff members and defining their roles in managing the institution is also important. Managers who respect cultural differences know that audiences from non-dominant cultures are also talented and come with different thinking, behaviors, and speaking styles from what is found in the dominant culture. To improve the quality of a multicultural center, it is essential to hire employees and collaborators from various nationalities and ethnicities. They must work together and be involved in the institution's decision-making processes.

3) In the success of multicultural centers, the role of the community, the audience, visitors, and generally the stakeholders is of significant importance. In this regard, individuals should attempt to test the credibility of their personal beliefs and assumptions by using various resources. They should spend time with individuals who correctly represent a particular cultural group. Everyone should always be cautious of prejudices and biased statements from others. Additionally, good management of intercultural relations is strongly linked to the ability to limit oneself. This includes high tolerance and forbearance, patience and self-restraint, the ability to endure silence, excellent listening skills, and resisting the urge to engage in arguments.

4) Islamic centers in the West are among the most important institutions that can provide an opportunity for interaction between the Muslim minority and the host society. Therefore, it is essential that imams and officials of Islamic centers, in addition to learning the language of the host country well, also take specialized courses, such as courses on the history and culture of the host country, general psychology, counseling on education and family, and courses on religions and sects.

5) According to some research, a large portion of Europeans acquire their knowledge of Muslims through "dialogue with Muslims" or "discussions about Muslims." Therefore, the information exchanged in these interactions plays a significant role in shaping attitudes. In this regard, it is recommended that Islamic centers make more efforts to organize dialogue sessions and face-to-face introductions of Islamic teachings, as there are few people who read about Islam on the internet. It is also necessary to organize specialized dialogue skill development courses for some individuals to participate in interfaith and intercultural dialogue sessions.

6) Given the unique opportunity Islamic centers have to introduce their

indigenous culture and ethnic customs to European people, it is appropriate to plan better and more studied strategies and continue updating Islamic teachings. Therefore, rather than focusing solely on historical examples, the emphasis should be placed on the universal values of Islam, including rationality, justice, spirituality, freedom, security, and hope for a better future for humanity.

7) Imams and managers of Islamic centers should consider participating in the workplace, schools, gatherings, volunteer organizations, and charities in the host society and establish communication with them. Through such interactions, Muslims can remove doubts and misunderstandings that non-Muslim citizens may have about them. These social reforms can help ease the process in the job market and gradually create a more positive image of Muslims, bringing more opportunities for them.

8) One important point that managers of Islamic centers should pay attention to is the need to inform the general public and the elites of society about the positive actions and services these centers provide for the Western society. Many centers offer a wide range of services and have excellent social functions, but because proper communication has not been made, the general public is unaware and does not understand the benefits these centers offer. It seems that Muslims must work harder every day to improve their image in the eyes of non-Muslims and Germans. Muslims should strive to be role models for society, take on greater responsibilities, and participate more in social services so that people can develop a positive view of them.

9) In Western societies, given that political parties and partisanship are very serious matters, it is appropriate for Muslims residing in Western countries to join political parties that align with their views and to consider creating independent Islamic parties for the future. As we know, a large portion of the population in Germany consists of Muslims, and they should pursue their demands through political parties. Although some members of the Bundestag in Berlin are Muslim, their presence is not necessarily due to their Muslim identity. Without a doubt, Muslims should strive to play a more active role in Western society and in shaping major social policies, and this is only possible if they enter the political arena. In this regard, Islamic centers should encourage Muslims with German passports and citizenship to participate in elections and to assert their rights.

10) Another suggestion from the researcher is to strengthen the presence of Muslims and Islamic centers in mass media and to use modern tools for promoting the Islamic religion and culture. Using animations, infographics, and other media, as well as posting quality content online, can be beneficial and practical for many families. In this regard, it is appropriate for Islamic centers to have think tanks and to plan for the dynamism and innovation in how they present ethical and religious teachings.

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