

The Hybridization of Muslim Spaces in Germany: A Historical Perspective on the Perception of Muslims

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Abstract : In 2017, about 4.5 million Muslims live in Germany. They can practice their faith openly, mostly in well-equipped community centers. At the same time, right-wing politicians and media allege that all Muslims tend to be radical and undemocratic. Both perspectives are rooted in an interacting development since the 1970s. German authorities closed the 'King Fahd Academy' international school in Bonn in summer 2017 because they accused the school administration of attracting Islamists. Only 30 years ago, German authorities and labor unions directed their requests for pastoral care of the Muslim communities in Germany to the Turkish and Saudi administrations. This study shows the leading and misleading tracks of Muslim life and its perception in Germany from a historical point of view. Most of the Muslims came as so-called 'Gastarbeiter' (migrant workers) from Turkey and Morocco to West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. Until the late 1970s, German society recognized them as workforce solely and ignored their religious needs broadly. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 caused widespread hysteria about Islamic radicalization. Likewise, it shifted the German perception of migrant workers in Germany. For the first time, the majority society saw them as religious people. Media and self-proclaimed 'experts' on Islam suspected Muslims in Germany of subversive and undemocratic belief. On the upside, they obtained the opportunity to be heard by German society and authorities. In the ensuing decades, Muslims and Islamophiles fought a discursive struggle against right-wing politicians, 'experts' and media with monolithic views. In the 1990s, Muslims achieved to establish a solid infrastructure of Islamic community center throughout Germany. Their religious life became present and contributed to diversifying the common monolithic images of Muslims as insane fundamentalists in Germany. However, the media and many 'experts' promoted the fundamentalist narrative, which gained more and more acceptance in German society at the same time. This study uses archival sources from German authorities, Islamic communities, together with local and national media to get a close approach to the contemporary historical debates. In addition, contributions by Muslims and Islamophiles in Germany, for example in magazines, event reports, and internal communication, revealing their quotidian struggle for more acceptance are being used as sources. The inclusion of widely publicized books, documentaries and newspaper articles about Islam as a menace to Europe conduces to a balanced analysis of the contemporary debates and views. Theoretically, the study applies the Third Space approach. Muslims in Germany fight the othering by the German majority society. It was their chief purpose not to be marginalized in both spatial meanings, discursively and physically. Therefore, they established realities of life as hybrids in Germany. This study reconstructs the development of the perception of Muslims in Germany. It claims that self-proclaimed experts and politicians with monolithic views maintained the hegemonic discursive positions and coined the German images of Muslims. Nevertheless, Muslims in Germany accomplished that Muslim presence in Germany's everyday life became an integral part of society and the public sphere. This is how Muslims hybridized religious spaces in Germany.

Keywords : experts, fundamentalism, Germany, hybridization, Islamophobia, migrant workers

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