Representation of Shia Muslim life in Contemporary German Society (Hamburg Case Study)

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Abstract

"Representation of Shia Muslim Life in Germany" is a cultural anthropological study on the religiosity of Hamburgian Shias. Using the qualitative method of sensory autoethnography, the researcher describes and analyzes his lived experiences and attempts to clarify how religion is embodied in the face of tradition and modernity. The results of the study indicate the cultural resilience of Shias in a spectrum of pluralism in the new ecosystem.

Keywords: Representation; Religiosity; Shia Life; Autoethnography

Introduction

With the history, culture, and philosophical heritage of the Age of Enlightenment, Germany promotes "freedom of opinion and expression" as one of its fundamental principles under the rule of the secular constitutional state (Zafirovski 2011, 14). Recent surveys have shown that religion plays a very minor role in the lives of the majority of Germans (Umfrage-religion, 2022). Such an atmosphere has made the study of the religiosity of German Shias and their methods an attractive research topic.

The present study aims to answer these questions: How and to what extent has religion appeared in the lives of German Shias and what factors influence it?

The current study was conducted based on the researcher's cultural experiences with the aim of presenting "what people do, not what theologians say" (Bovey 2010, 15). The exploratory data show that religiosity has been reflected in different ways in daily activities and that Shiite life has become a part of the modern world, influenced by nine types of internal and external factors.

Literature Review

Studies on Shia in Germany have focused on the works of Zaydiyya and their native regions in recent periods (Pakatchi 2018). In the new era, the organization Deutsche Islam Konferenz (DIK) (German Islam Conference) has published books titled "DIK" in general about Muslims and with a statistical perspective since 2006 as part of the project of cultural integration. Mouhanad Khorchide (2008-2009) investigated "Religionsunterricht zwischen Integration und Parallelgesellschaft" (Religious education between integration and parallel society) or, in other words, the effects of religious education in schools with a cultural adaptation approach on Austrian Muslims. Hossein Motaghi (2013) offers a largely demographic study in his book *Research on Islam and Shi'ism in Europe with a focus on Shi'ism in Germany*. The book (2015) entitled "Blaue Moschee " (Blue Mosque) is 600 pages long and deals specifically with the development of the Islamic Center Hamburg over the last half century (up to 2012). Peter Schütt (2019) has also written down his observations on the European pilgrims of Arba'een in particular. Therefore, comprehensive qualitative research with a cultural anthropological approach focusing specifically on the Imamiyya in the modern world, especially with the method of autoethnography, is a study gap that the present study can partially fill.

Theory Framework

1. Culture and its definitions: Anthropology turns to culture with the addition of "culture". There are many definitions of culture that have gradually evolved over three periods of time (Bernard 1994, 74-85). In the broadest sense, "culture means the totality of attitudes, beliefs, customs, values and norms common to a group, and also includes actions, activities and products related to the intellectual, moral and artistic aspects of human life" (Salehi Amiri and Azimi 2011, 6).
2. The nature of religion and religiosity: among the many definitions of religion, "transcending the three realms of materiality, ego, and situation" is one of the most recent (Shojaeizand 2009, 11-18) and religiosity means "religious involvement" in a way that affects the attitude, tendency and actions (Himmelfarb 1975, 606).
3. Shi'i identity: Shia attitudes, rituals, morals, and education are among the most important components of Shi'ism:

Shia attitudes

1	Anthropomorphism and transcendence regarding God (*tashbīh* and *tanzīh*)	11	A historical look at the Prophet's companions and the denial of absolute approval of the companions
2	Denial of the sight and proof of meeting God)	12	Shi'a rationality
3	Monotheism and its branches	13	Shi'a spirituality
4	Representation of God's existence	14	The infallibility and transcendence of prophets and imams
5	Human will and freedom	15	*Tawassul* (Supplicating Allah through Intermediaries) and intercession (*shafāʿa*)
6	justice	16	Return (*rajʿa*)
7	The intrinsic goodness and badness of things	17	Divine change of mind (*Badāʾ*)
8	Sources of religion and the method of understanding it	18	The alive, innocent, and absent Imam (Mahdi)
9	Implementation of jurisprudential reasoning	19	The authority and the viability of ijtihad
10	Fallibilism and denial of infallibilism regarding ijtihad	20	Political succession of Imam Mahdi (*wilāyat al-faqīh*)

Shiite rituals

1	Sacred objects and places	5	Special cultural calendar
2	Holy times and hours	6	Childbirth ceremony
3	Emphasis on pilgrimages and frequent visits to pilgrimage destinations	7	Wedding ceremony
4	The symbolic and epic movement of Arba'een	8	death ceremony

Shiite Ethics and education

1	leniency (*tasāhul*) and tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*)	5	Capacity of cultural adaptation and integration
2	*Tawallī* and *tabarrī*	6	Gentleness and affection
3	Islamic unity	7	Resistance and stability
4	*Taqiyya* (dissimulation)	8	Promoting the status of women

4. Representation theory: In representation theory, meaning and language are related to culture (Hall 1997, 15). Social judgments are influenced by the ideology (van Dijk 2003, 31) behind the message (Thompson 2017, 117). There are different approaches to linguistic representation: a) reflective approach: language is like a mirror; b) intentional approach: language as the bearer of the sole meaning of the producer's intention; c) constructionist approach: language as a social construction with a system of signs with an interpretive approach (Hall 2003, 24-29). Hall advocated the constructivist approach and considered the semiotic approach, which led to "discourse," to be inadequate. Like Foucault, he believes that nothing, even objective facts, is meaningful outside of discourse (Hall, 2003: 42). Moreover, discourse is linked to power relations (Mahdizadeh 2008, 64). The relationship between representation and reality has been termed pretense (Baudrillard 1995, 68), which in the past took the form of imitation and reproduction and in postmodernity may take the form of simulation of reality (Kellner 2002, 51).

5. Theory of resilience: Resilience means accepting the new reality in the face of a crisis. There are different types of resilience, and its cultural nature is threefold: social psychology focusing on the psyche, sociology focusing on the community and anthropology focusing on the culture (Khodamoradi et al. 2021, 278). Anthropological cultural resilience can be presented in two ways in this paper: (1) How do Hamburg Shias seek help from Shia culture in personal and social crises? (2) How do they respect Shia culture?

6. Theories about the types of religiosity: for some, religiosity is the cause of the emergence of religion (Simmel 2014, 32); for others, it is the other way around. Apparently, the truth of the matter is that the two have an interaction. Some have named three types of deep, taste-oriented, and mass religiosity (Weber 2015, 326-328). James's belief in the worthlessness of ritual and the pure attachment of religion to the realm of the psyche led Taylor to accuse him of "neglecting the collective religious life" (Taylor 2008, 49). Sheppard divides Muslims into a right wing and a left wing, one of which is Islamizing and the other humanitarian. In general, typological theories focus on Sunni Islam, its political dimension and its Western influence (Zolfaghari 2013, 110).

7. The theory of cultural anthropology of religion: Anthropology has so far experienced turning points, from the paradigm of evolutionism, including the theories of animism, mana (Khajegir 2015, 3), the introduction of magic through religion (Fraser 2004, 810), diffusionism, the interpretative discourse of Geertz, and finally the sensory revolution. Geertz linked the factor of culture with the factors of geography and ethnicity, and thus cultural anthropology gradually emerged whose main goal was to be interpretation and not explanation (Firouzi 2010, 85). In this

discourse, culture is semiotic (Geertz 1973, 102-104) and knowledge of symbols, such as the sacredness of the circle among the Oglalas, is necessary to understand culture and religion (Geertz 1973, 126-128) and "the main concern of the anthropology of religion is to understand religious behavior rooted in beliefs, rituals and culture" (Bowie 2011, 117). David Hawes accused Geertz's interpretive and literary approach of derailing the classical stream of ethnography; for the main way was to focus attention on the experience itself, not on it as writing. Since then, sensory anthropology has flourished and instead of "participant observation," the new concept of "participant sensation" and "cultural experience" has been proposed as the beating heart of anthropology. According to this, sensory perception is also an act of transmitting cultural values (Izadi Jeiran 2013).

8. The theory of the influence of time and place: stagnation, reform with the dominance of modernity and intra-religious ijtihad are the three main approaches to the actualization of religion. According to the theory of influence, it is possible that with the development of opinions, what was once considered irreligion is the same as religion in a different place and time (Seyedian Arani 2021). The notion of "fiqh-i pūyā" (dynamic Islamic jurisprudence) is based on such an assumption. For example, wearing black was once reprehensible for men because of their resemblance to *the Banū ʿAbbās*, but later it became a sign of deference to Ḥusaynī rituals and was recommended.

Methods

1. The Research Methodology and Why It Was Chosen

The method of the present study is a kind of autoethnography and draws on diaries, documents, and reports from cultural events as well as numerous interviews. "The central aim and signifier in autoethnography is the researcher himself as an object; because he prepares the data based on his personal life" (Fazeli 2014, 13) and "he searches for the meanings hidden in his experiences, but he does not only try to put himself at the center; rather, he tries to achieve the understanding of others (culture and society) through himself" (Hashemian and Zolfaghari 2019, 35). The reason for the choice and effectiveness of this method, besides the long stay, was the presence of my wife and four sons and a daughter in different age groups from kindergarten to university, which contributed to the depth and accuracy of the study.

2. Definition of Autoethnography with a Three-Dimensional Model

Chang (2008: 98) introduced autoethnography into "ethnographic" methodology, "cultural" interpretation and "autobiographical" content, but it seems that the following three-dimensional model can describe it better: (1) Philosophical characteristics, (2) substantive characteristics (essence), and (3) functional characteristics.

Philosophical features of autoethnography

1	Scientific value of partial information	4	Validity of emotional truth during sensory reality
2	Life as a source of knowledge	5	In relation to the supertheory of self-reflection
3	Personal experience as immediate practical understanding	6	

Substantive characteristics of autoethnography

1	Documenting experience and sharing	8	The overall texture of society as a social ecosystem
2	Scholarly narrative	9	Understanding and discovering culture
3	Being objective researcher	10	Generalization of lived experiences
4	Courage for self-expression	11	representation
5	"Self" representation, analysis and rethink	12	Creative construction of reality
6	"Self-assessment, self-reflection" and critical self-awareness	13	Differentiation from travelogues and novels
7	Reflecting on the life of the social world	14	Differentiation from historiography

Practical features of autoethnography

1	Indigenization (adopted country)	10	labeling
2	Conscious social presence	11	Combined with quantitative results
3	Development of cultural studies	12	Mental organization
4	Scientific observation of events and production of particular experiences	13	Choosing a writing approach
5	Accumulation of data	14	Visualizing yourself
6	Using other people's data in the scene	15	Systemic autobiography
7	In-depth interviews with owners of similar experiences	16	integrated writing (storytelling)
8	Daily journaling	17	Cultural analysis and interpretation of field observations
9	Recording experimental data in the form of words and sentences	18	Rewriting the narrative text

3. General Descriptions (Time, Sign, Conditions, Informants)

1- Date: July 2012 to March 2023 for ten years.

2- Location: Shia centers in Hamburg

3- Conditions: The research was conducted at three different times: a) two months of tourist life in the summer of 2012, b) six years of administration of the Islamic Academy of Germany (IAD) affiliated with the Islamic Center of Hamburg (summer 2013 to summer 2019), and c) the period of administration of the new and independent Academy of Islamic Theology (AIT).

4- Informants: Eight interviews with people of Iraqi, Iranian, Afghan, Lebanese, Pakistani, Balkan, German, and Spanish origins of different genders and ages were conducted up to the point of theoretical saturation.

Results

This section consists of two parts: (1) A narrative of the sensory observations and (2) a description of the long-term experiences.

Narration of the early vision

1	The mood of travelers in Deutschland	21	The old engineer's party	41	Haj Hasan Valadi and his son Firouz
2	Wandering in Bonn Airport, Cologne	22	Iranian embassy and cultural center	42	Bad statistics of Muslims!
3	Iranian House in Cologne	23	The sensitivity of Muslims to news from the East	43	Impeding legitimate protest
4	Eggplant curd in Germany	24	Wandering in Berlin	44	Greetings to you, O detached mind!
5	Evangelical girls of the street	25	Speech in the cultural center	45	Street touring again
6	Making conquests!	26	Vital notoriety was not more than two days	46	Qur'nic Potsdam project
7	Most diverse half of the Sha'ban reception	27	Dawn at the railway station	47	Mohammad Irani and Mohammad Tounsi
8	People expect from Iran!	28	The long fast of Ramadan	48	Offal (Kaleh Pacheh) at the consulate general
9	Not even like the people of the prophet Lot!	29	Heart speaks to the heart	49	Report on the fiftieth anniversary of the mosque
10	Foreign languages of identity	30	The attraction of the revolution for Muslims	50	Content report of Open Door Day
11	General view of Hauptbahnhof	31	The concern of authenticity	51	edible (*maʾkūl*) legacy
12	The Blue Mosque in the beautiful landscape street	32	Daily challenges of immigrants	52	Farewell, God's Mosque
13	My first days in Hamburg	33	Behind and facing the religion	53	Behind the wall of Berlin Alley
14	Do not forget Professor Samii!	34	Integration of the institutions of science and religion	54	*Sarīʿ al-ijāba* (prompt in responding to supplications); *tawassul*
15	From the University of Hamburg to Jena	35	The lost commanders in Khorramshahr City	55	Meeting with the German ambassador in Tehran
16	Kitchen diplomacy!	36	You smell Mashhad perfume		
17	Iranian medical clinics and complexes	37	Scarf, German, Iranian		
18	Iranian elites commuting	38	The new station of Humanism		
19	Do you count separately?	39	The experience of performing a wedding ceremony		
20	General meeting of Qur'an teacher	40	Connecting the hearts of the West and the East		

A framework for describing long-term experiences

1	Religious Contexts in Hamburg
2	Evidence and signs of religiosity
3	Challenges of religiosity in Hamburg

Religious contexts in Hamburg

1	Human and demographic factors	4	Institutions that facilitate religion
2	Soft cultural, social and legal factors of the environment	5	Influential religious figures
3	Religious, missionary, scientific and educational centers		

Human and demographic factors

1	Early immigrants	4	Indigenous Deutsche Muslims
2	New immigrants with racial diversity	5	The high birth rate among Muslims
3	*Mustabṣirūn* movement (religious transition to Shia)		

Religious, missionary, scientific, and educational centers

1	Mosques and Islamic centers	6	Weekend educational centers
2	Governmental and non-governmental cultural associations	7	Shahid Beheshti School
3	Non-governmental academic higher education centers	8	Hafez School
4	Governmental higher education centers	9	Muslim publishing houses
5	Two round-o'clock seminaries	10	Islamic libraries

Institutions facilitating religiosity

1	Religious organizations and unions	4	Offices providing religious services
2	Councils of leaders	5	Muslim cemetery
3	Halal market		

Influential religious figures

1	Islamic clerics in Germany	4	Remembrances of Ahl al-Bayt
2	Short-term missionaries dispatched from Islamic countries	5	Benefactors
3	Qur'an reciters		

Evidence and signs of religiosity

|			
1	Ceremonies of marriage, divorce, and familial care	12	Increase in *istiftāʾāt* (religious inquiries)
2	Gatherings and *ṣilat al-raḥim* (maintaining family ties)	13	Media activities
3	Ceremonies of birth and death	14	Written heritage of Shia

4	Expansion of activities for determining prayer times	15	Eid celebrations
5	Halal occupations and businesses	16	Ashura rituals
6	Sharia (religious) funds	17	Qur'an reciting sessions
7	Expansion of linguistic symbols	18	Festivals and mourning ceremonies, especially during the Nights of Qadr
8	Friday prayer, Congregational prayer and Kumayl Supplication	19	Home religious meetings and Women's religious gathering
9	Fasting and providing food during Ramadan	20	Hajj and pilgrimage to the holy land
10	Islamic hijab for women	21	Special pilgrimages for Shia Muslims
11	Halal food and restaurants		

Challenges of religiosity in Hamburg

1	Negative, insulting, and excessive advertising	11	Moral coercion to approve of homosexuality
2	Political and partisan movements of extremists	12	Legal prohibition of hijab-wearing women from certain jobs
3	Idea of establishing a new Islam!	13	Media injustices
4	Provoking value-based conflicts in the field of education	14	Gender-based advertising and its destructive psychological effects
5	Provoking methodological conflicts in the field of training	15	Inducing a misinterpretation of Sharia
6	Assault on the social security of Muslims	16	Restricting parents' rights
7	Forcing programs opposed to Muslim traditions in schools	17	Focusing on minorities while ignoring the majority
8	Deprivation of the free choice of educational fields	18	Prohibition of building mosques and minarets, and broadcasting the call to prayer
9	Unequal working conditions in the educational environment	19	Making religion a security issue
10	Requirement to shake hands with the opposite sex		

Distribution of mosques and Islamic centers in Hamburg
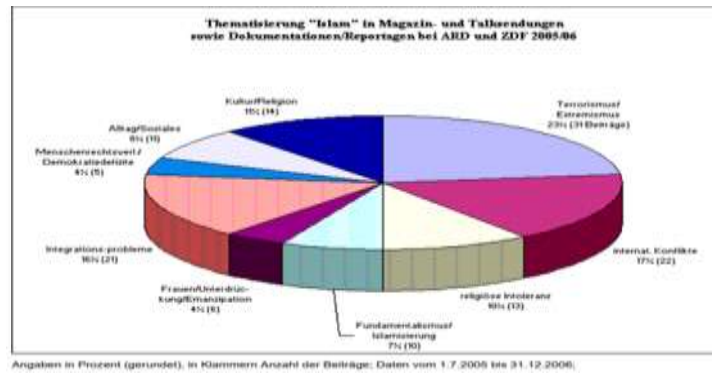
Comparison of television programs with a negative perspective on Islam with other programs on German public broadcasters

Discussion

The first issue is the compatibility of religion with rational criteria. It seems that the Hamburg Shias have achieved a balanced interaction between religion and modernity through an adaptive approach and consider their religion as rational and valuable. Global conditions can be influential in this regard. The second one concerns Shia spirituality. Spirituality, in this context, means transcending the material and having a deep belief in the Unseen, which has expanded among the Hamburg Shias by following Ahl al-Bayt, Shiite rituals, and the establishment of worship, missionary and educational centers. The third issue is Shiite ethics and education. Characteristics such as leniency (*tasāhul*), tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), gentleness, religious coherence and adaptability are particularly pronounced among the Hamburg Shias.

This issue is primarily attributed to the presence of moderate religious leaders who are well-versed in philosophy, as well as the conditions of the new ecosystem. The fourth is the social and political position of the Shia, which should not be overlooked. Shias, especially Iranians in Hamburg, enjoy a good social status, and Islamic councils have been established at various levels. However, political activities have not increased significantly. Meanwhile, the government's security approach to Shiite centers affiliated with Iran is becoming more acute .The fifth issue is the specific manifestation of Shi'ism, which has put modern means and methods at the service of religious behavior in combination with tradition. The avoidance of dogs, alcohol, gambling and a preference for lawful business are evident, as is the prevalence of Sharia terminology, religious symbols, and distinct dress and adornment styles among Muslim men and women.

The sixth is the aspect of philosophical conversion (disbelief in religion and God) and religious conversion (from Shia to Sunni), which is relatively rare. However, there are occasional conversions from Islam to Christianity, which are primarily due to migration and are often artificially induced. In contrast, the attraction of the Islamic Revolution's foreign policy has drawn some intellectuals to the religion. The seventh issue is the influence of time and place on religiosity, where the waning of blind fanaticism and negligence in burying the deceased can be identified as two positive and negative manifestations, respectively. The closure of Saturdays and Sundays, the length of day and night and the observance of national and traditional occasions in the ecosystem have also had an impact on cultural activities. Ultimately, the cultural resilience of Shi'ism to modernity is evident, which can be attributed to the cultural richness, historical experience and religious organization of Shi'ism, in addition to positive environmental factors.

Conclusion

Based on what was said, the Shiite life in Hamburg can be represented with nine types.

1. **Traditional Religiosity:** This type of religiosity can be observed above all among the first generation of Muslim migrants. They strive to practice Islam as they have seen or heard it in their home country, regardless of local conditions. This group is strongly represented in mosques, Husayniyyas, and religious ceremonies.

2. **Liberal and Secular Religiosity:** This type of religiosity is often practiced by Western-oriented intellectuals. They strive for a balance between secular values and Shiite beliefs in favor of modernity across a broad spectrum. This causes concern among traditionalists and encourages both the government and the media.

3. **Identitarian Religiosity:** This group consists of first and second generation children of migrants who were born and raised in Germany. They identify as Shia Muslims but have limited knowledge of peripheral religious tenets and may even struggle to remember the names of the Prophet and the Imams.

4. **Minimal Religiosity:** This type of religiosity is characterized by a weak commitment to Islamic jurisprudential tenets and minimal interaction with the co-religious community. They are usually only seen a few times a year during rituals such as Ashura, the Night of Destiny, and the festivals of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha in Islamic centers.

5. **Extremist Religiosity:** A notable feature of this group is "public cursing". Some centers promote this type of religiosity even though they pose no practical threat to the security of society.

6. **Opportunistic Religiosity:** This type of religiosity applies to some merchants and politicians who prioritize social, political and economic interests in their religious engagements.

7. **Protest Religiosity:** This type of religiosity focuses on opposition to the Shiite government of Iran, which works closely with anti-religious groups and is supported by the German government and political parties.

8. **Moderate Formal Religiosity:** This type of religiosity refers to centers affiliated with the Islamic Republic, managed by dispatched clerics. This movement strives to operate within the recognized Fiqhi framework but suffers from a lack of understanding of the local context and culture.

9. **Authentic and Conscious Religiosity:** This group consists of a new generation of educated individuals who are both attached to their religion and striving for a new identity. They strive to understand religion independently and consciously adapt it to the conditions of time and place. They are the driving force behind the future movement of Shia Islam.

Final Remarks

Shia Muslims in Hamburg have developed a vibrant, independent, and adaptable identity using cultural resources such as myths, rituals, and Shia ethics, which is recognized in Germany and even in Europe and revolves around the Blue Mosque (Imam Ali, peace be upon him). Although they face growing intellectual, value-based and practical challenges from political parties, the government and the media, the realized Shia community with its nine-fold diversity has become an integral part of Muslim life and a dynamic aspect of the modern world.

A Further Suggestion for Completing the Project: It is suggested that field research be conducted separately on each of the nine categories.

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