



## CONFERENCE REPORT

# Being Muslim in Europe - Orienting oneself in the context of „good“ and „bad“ diversity



**Conference Report**

**Being Muslim in Europe -  
Orienting oneself in  
the context of „good“  
and „bad“ diversity**

## PUBLICATION DETAILS

### The conference was organised by the

Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG)  
Goethe-University Frankfurt  
Varrentrappstr. 40-42, 60486 Frankfurt am Main  
For more information: [www.aiwg.de](http://www.aiwg.de)

Swiss Center for Islam and Society  
Rue du Criblet 13  
CH-1700 Fribourg  
For more information: [www.unifr.ch/szig/de](http://www.unifr.ch/szig/de)

### Responsible for this publication according to press law

Prof Dr Bekim Agai

### Edited by

Prof Dr Bekim Agai (AIWG)  
Muhammed Ragab Ahmed (AIWG)

### Written by

Zeinab Ahmadi  
Sébastien Dupuis  
Prof Dr Amir Dziri  
Dr Dominik Müller  
Prof Dr Hansjörg Schmid  
Dilek Uçak-Ekinci

### Report Design

Stefanie Golla-Dehmamy (AIWG)

### Photography

Aynur Caglar/AIWG (cover picture and pages: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,  
10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 )

2024

This conference is funded by



Bundesministerium  
für Bildung  
und Forschung



Mercator  
Foundation  
Switzerland



# Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>1. Preface</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2. Opening remarks</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>3. Keynote 1: Whose Diversity? Some Reflections about Categories of Religious and Cultural Inclusion and Exclusion Processes with a Particular Focus on Muslims in Europe</b> | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>4. Keynote 2: European Islamic thought: Revisiting moral categories</b>   | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>5. Panel 1: Diversity as a normative construction: ‘Islam’ and ‘good’ / ‘bad’ diversity in European social discourses</b>   | <b>10</b> |
| <b>6. Panel 2: Means of orientation: Young Muslims navigating multiple belongings in the context of diverse societies</b>  | <b>12</b> |
| <b>7. Panel 3: Negotiating and navigating diversity in Islamic knowledge discourses</b>  | <b>14</b> |
| <b>8. Syntheses</b>  | <b>16</b> |
| <b>9. Conference Programme</b>   | <b>18</b> |
| <b>10. Participants</b>  | <b>20</b> |
| <b>11. Bibliography</b>  | <b>21</b> |



# 1. Preface

The concept of diversity has emerged as important framework for both societal and intra-Muslim discourse in Europe. However, the underlying understandings of diversity differs significantly depending on whether one is engaging in mainstream societal discussions or internal Muslim debates.

From Muslim perspective, issues of negotiating Islamic identity in the context of plural, post-secular European societies tend to be a priority. Meanwhile, references to diversity in broader public discourse often serve to describe and contextualize questions of social belonging.

While initially interpreted differently across these various contexts, strong interconnections between them have become evident. The negotiation of belonging within European society shapes how Muslims live in these countries with their religious identities. On the other hand, how Islamic identity is discussed impacts the understandings of the broader community. As such, diversity emerges as multidimensional, overlapping term that underlies complex process of religious identity making, social belonging and orientation of individuals and communities.

From this background, the Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG) and the Swiss Center for Islam and Society (SZIG/CSIS) at the University of Fribourg organized together the two-day international conference “Being Muslim in Europe – Orienting oneself in the context of “good” and “bad” diversity” on 17th and 18th of November 2023. Researchers from Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Italy gathered at Campus Westend in Frankfurt am Main to discuss the increasing significance of the concept of diversity in (post-)migration societies. The discussion focused on the discrepancy between ‘good’ or legitimized forms of diversity and other categories of diversity that are rather ‘negative’ in connotation implemented in social discourses. At the same time, both organising institutions are confronted with the challenge of diversity not only in society but also within Muslim communities themselves. In

this sense, engaging with this topic becomes a key issue not only from a perspective of social sciences, but also from a perspective of Islamic-Theological Studies. This discipline faces the task of providing orientation in the face of diversity in the community and society.

The conference brought together different perspectives and approaches on its key themes. It aimed to share the latest academic works in these areas and created a space for productive dialogue. Several topics were examined through keynotes, presentations and discussions, including the framing of diversity and orientation in public debates, educational contexts, youth programs, and Islamic theology. The overarching goal was to debate questions surrounding how diversity is understood today, how identities are defined both internally and externally, and what societal bounds are placed on belonging. The conference also explored strategies for emancipation in pluralistic, post-secular societies and the obstacles that must be overcome. The variety of views and approaches helped to gain new insights on these complex, interrelated issues impacting not only Muslim communities, but broader societies in contemporary Europe.

The conference consisted of two keynotes and three panel discussions. **Prof Dr Monika Salzbrunn** from Lausanne University, Switzerland held the first keynote with the title “Whose Diversity? Some Reflections about Categories of Religious and Cultural Inclusion and Exclusion Processes with a Particular Focus on Muslims in Europe”. In her lecture she shed the light on different political and social examples within European society to show the different ways of staging diversity.

**Dr Mohammed Hashas** of the LUISS University of Rome held the second keynote, titled: “European Islamic thought Revisiting moral categories”, with the question of Muslimness both in traditional Islamic literature as well as in contemporary European-Muslim ethical discussions on the subject, where he tried



to illustrate the differences within the typology of such ideas.

Over three panel discussions the conference participants presented various approaches and research projects regarding the conference subject. The first panel, titled “Diversity as a normative construction: ‘Islam’ and ‘good’ / ‘bad’ diversity in European social discourses”, featured **Prof Dr Schirin Amir-Moazami** from Freie Universität Berlin and **Sébastien Dupuis** from the SZIG/CSIS at the University of Fribourg. They shed light on how diversity is framed in European discourses and the normative dimensions involved, specifically the dual categorization of “good” versus “bad” diversity. The panelists shared findings from empirical studies on strategies used by Muslim communities to define their own identities and affiliations.

In the second panel “Means of orientation: Young Muslims navigating multiple belongings in the context of diverse societies”, **Dr Betül Karakoç-Kafkas** from Goethe-University Frankfurt and **Zeinab Ahmadi** from the SZIG/CSIS at the University of Fribourg presented their projects exploring the challenges

faced by young Muslims in pluralistic societies with examples from school context in Switzerland and young Turkish imams in Germany. The discussions centered on processes of inclusion, exclusion and border drawing in society as seen through narratives that construct “us” versus “them” dichotomies. The conference’s final panel focused on the topic “Negotiating and navigating diversity in Islamic knowledge discourses”. **Prof Dr Yaser Ellethy** from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and **Dr Dominik Müller** from the SZIG/CSIS at the University of Fribourg discussed diversity as represented in theological, ethical and legal facets of Islamic traditions of learning. They examined questions of conceptualizing and interpreting diversity in contemporary Muslim thought and practice.

The conference was concluded with a synthesis conducted by **Prof Dr Bekim Agai**, director of the AIWG, and **Prof Dr Amir Dziri**, director of the SZIG/CSIS.

This report contains a brief of summary of the keynotes and panel discussions of the conference to give the readership an overview of the significant approaches and research trends regarding the concept of diversity and orientation and their societal implications in contemporary Europe and its Muslims.

## 2. Opening remarks

**Prof Dr Bekim Agai**, Director of the Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG), welcomed all attendees to the conference. As this was the first official collaboration between AIWG and the Swiss Center for Islam and Society (SZIG/CSIS) from the University of Fribourg, Prof Dr Agai expressed his pleasure at further developing this relationship and enlarging the scope of AIWG's work beyond Germany.

He began by explaining that while diversity is often positively portrayed in marketing materials where diverse groups are united by their smiles, in practice it is far more complex. There appears to be a distinction made between "good" and "bad" diversity when it comes to religion. Islam is at times represented as an example of good diversity, such as a smiling woman with a headscarf in an advertisement, yet can also create unease and be seen as "bad" diversity in other scenarios.



»It becomes clear that diversity in the Muslim European context is not good or bad but rather represents a field in which Muslims are located and locate themselves.«

**Prof Dr Bekim Agai, Director of the Academy for Research and Society**



»It is important to note that this is an applied research project, which is why the exploration of practice, its in-depth scientific reflection and transfer are closely intertwined. With this project, we want to make a contribution to living together in a diverse society.«

**Prof Dr Hansjörg Schmid, Director of Swiss Center for Islam and Society**

In conclusion, he stated that the conference aims to discuss how Muslims navigate this ambivalent field of diversity, with consideration of both internal and external perspectives, as well as the opportunities and restrictions they face.

**Prof Dr Hansjörg Schmid**, Director of the SZIG/CSIS at Fribourg University stated that the Center has been working at the intersection of academia, society, and Muslim communities through interdisciplinary research, education, and knowledge transfer. Their research takes both theological and social scientific perspectives to link systematic research with practical applications through participatory projects involving Muslim groups, government institutions, and other stakeholders. This conference is connected to a project they have been conducting on diversity and orientation, supported by the Mercator Foundation Switzerland. The project includes applied research and engagement.



## 3. Keynote 1: Whose Diversity?

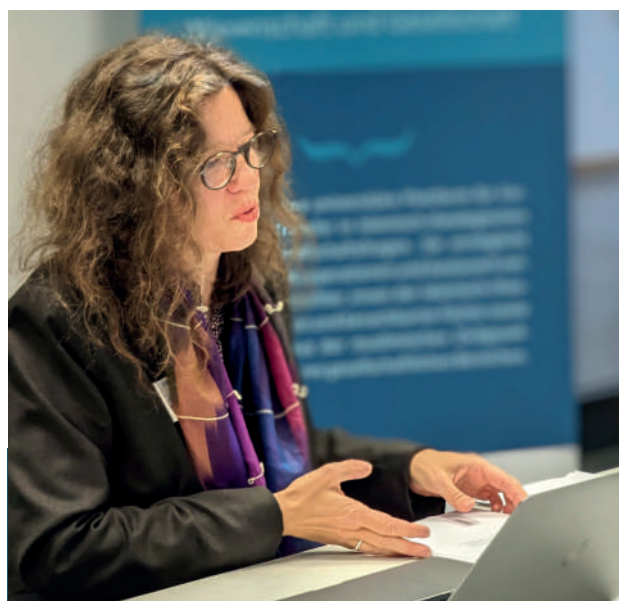
### Some Reflections about Categories of Religious and Cultural Inclusion and Exclusion Processes with a Particular Focus on Muslims in Europe

Who defines 'diversity'? What is meant by 'diversity'?  
Who has the power to define 'the other'? Who is perceived as the other?

The first keynote speaker of the conference was **Prof Dr Monika Salzbrunn**, professor of Religions, Migration and Art at the University of Lausanne. She started with the above-mentioned key questions that would be discussed throughout the conference. She further explored through example from French politics.

She described the events surrounding the election of the two French ministers Rachida Dati and Rama Yade in 2007. Former President, Nicolas Sarkozy was keen on emphasizing their diverse backgrounds in media coverage. This became particularly meaningful because of the fact that his own Hungarian roots were rarely discussed. By introducing this example, Prof Dr Salzbrunn led the participants to the core essence of the questions raised previously. She went on to draw examples from her research in Switzerland illustrating the wide range of meanings diversity policies can take.

Currently focusing on the Senegalese community of Murids in Geneva, she described the shift from a community that was consciously "invisible" before 9/11, to one that needed to gain visibility in order to be heard politically and receive recognition. This meant that the Murids began to strategically make themselves visible, for example, by shifting practices, which were usually kept private, to a public sphere, hence, performing a certain way of being Muslim.



»We are now living in the age of super diversity. Super-diversity means that, as my colleagues in the introduction have already mentioned, we have a diversification of immigration, a diversification of religious beliefs and practices, and even within a religious group, there is diversification of different law schools, beliefs, and practices.«

**Prof Dr Monika Salzbrunn, Lausanne University**

An illustrative example of how multiple belongings can be performed was the 'Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes' who reinterpret their multiple belongings within their events by combining different acts, practices, and customs that would seem to be irreconcilable. For this purpose, Prof Dr Salzbrunn suggested using the method of "situational analysis" to demonstrate how individuals express their sense of belonging in specific situations and events. The analysis considers not only ethical perspectives but also situational and event-related factors.



## 4. Keynote 2: European Islamic thought: Revisiting moral categories

**Dr Mohammed Hashas**, Lecturer at the Department of Political Science at Luiss University of Rome, introduced four ways of conceptualizing Muslimness in the Islamic tradition: a theological way, a juridical way, a philosophical way, and a Sufi way. For instance, in theology, a Muslim is defined by his certainty in faith, in both heart and intellect. The Philosophical perspective tends to focus on the universality of the Islamic message, whereas Muslim jurists emphasise on the right behaviour of Muslims.

Finally, in Sufism, the spiritual leaders tend to avoid formal status, as they perceive it as a symbol of engagement with the worldly matters. With this inner-Islamic diversity in conceptualizing Muslimness in background, Hashas then posed the question of how to rethink one's own moral tradition as a Muslim in contexts shaped by multiple and intersecting forms of diversity, such as European society.



»In my research I tend to adopt the view that Muslimness is dynamic and it can be defined, activated or become salient in different historical moments«

**Dr Mohammed Hashas, Luiss University of Rome**



Applying this question within political debate, Dr Hashas discussed how the categorization of Muslims as “good” or “bad” is influenced by factors such as majority-minority dynamics and international relations. Such categorizations are complex and often involve historical legitimacy and the fear of losing identity or power. This segues into the notion of ‘othering’ and externalization of Muslims, fed by different fears, historical rivalries, modern biases, and concerns about compatibility with democracy and human rights. Dr Hashas highlighted the fear and anxiety that both Muslims and non-Muslims may have about identity, community cohesion, and power dynamics.

This discussion naturally leads to a conversation about the very nature of ethics and morality within Islam. Therefore, he discussed Muslims’ historical engagement with ethical questions and the various schools of thought that have emerged over time.

Making the shift to contemporary discourse, Dr Hashas categorized modern Muslim thinkers into three groups: idealists, realists, and a third group, which could be termed as ‘realist-idealists’ or transcenden-

talists. Idealists tend to look to the past and traditional interpretations of Sharia as ideal, while realists push for a reformation of religious understanding to fit with secular, liberal values.

The ‘realist-idealists’ or transcendentalists strive for a balance, recognizing the need for contextualizing the Islamic law, while also recognizing the importance of its moral and ethical guidance in both private and public life. To illustrate these with practical examples, Dr Hashas provided instances of European Muslim thinkers of the third group who are rethinking their moral traditions, finding commonalities for integration, and embracing the diversity within their community to fit into the secular and liberal paradigm despite externalization pressures. The three thinkers are Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), Alija Izetbegović (1925-2003) and Shabbir Akhtar (1960-2023).



## 5. Panel 1: Diversity as a normative construction: 'Islam' and 'good' / 'bad' diversity in European social discourses

This panel discussed how the notion of diversity is socially constructed within European socio-political discourses. By highlighting the normative character of this notion, it has shown how Islam is situated within this discursive framework, particularly through the dichotomous construction of 'good' and 'bad' diversity. The panel also attempted to demonstrate, through empirical analysis, the performative strategies developed by Muslim communities to emancipate themselves from essentialising interpretations of their multiple belonging.



**Prof Dr Schirin Amir-Moazami**

**Prof Dr Schirin Amir-Moazami**, a professor for Islam in Europe at Freie Universität Berlin, examines diversity and the politics of integration and recognition in relation to the 'Muslim question'. She distinguishes three forms of diversity: diversity as a social fact, as a social movement, and as a political program. She situates these forms in the German context as she argued that multiculturalism, a forerunner of diver-

sity discourses, was never properly institutionalized. Instead, it was limited to the celebration of folkloristic notions of difference and the consumption of culture in specific spaces and temporal boundaries.

Prof Dr Amir-Moazami then traces the discursive shift from the multiculturalism paradigm to the integration paradigm and its accompanying diversity programs. She argues that the genealogy of integration is rooted in the formation of modern nation-states and the simultaneous production and inclusion of religious and cultural minorities. Therefore, integration policies towards Muslims in Germany are shaped by the liberal secular matrix in which the state is seen as the sole authority for organizing plurality. Accordingly, it is the state that decides what is (in)proper religion and thus determines the conditions under which Muslims are considered to be integrable and can therefore become subjects of diversity programs.

Prof Dr Amir-Moazami concludes by arguing that the call for integration takes discursive distinction between minorities and the majority for granted and re-enacts it. Minorities are thus subject to the scrutinizing gaze of the unmarked majority and must adapt to an undefined and ever-changing demand from this majority, making integration a lifelong endeavor. To

scrutinize and problematize these power relations, Prof Dr Amir-Moazami argues, we should shift the analytical gaze from the minority to the majority, which would imply questioning the unmarked majorities rather than replicating minority issues.

**Sébastien Dupuis**, Junior Researcher at the SZIG/CSIS at the University of Fribourg, examines the normative framing of diversity through the lens of the controversy over ‘decent’ and ‘appropriate’ clothing in public swimming pools in Geneva. Initially, Geneva’s regulations banned certain types of swimwear (e.g. the burkini for women, the two-piece swimsuit for men) as inappropriate. As a result, certain groups of people were excluded from using these public spaces due to their religious orientation or gender identity and related clothing practices. Dupuis describes how a collective of feminist and Muslim activists successfully campaigned for more inclusive regulations. However, political opposition to these inclusive regulations arose after their introduction, whereas the burkini in particular became an issue in media discourses.

Using this empirical example, Dupuis analyses how diversity is utilized by various actors in the processes of boundary making to draw lines between some ways of being different, which are accepted and promoted, and other ways of diversity, which are rejected or banned. This debate shows that certain forms of diversity associated with practices and bodies perceived as Islamic are rendered illegitimate. Dupuis’s contribution demonstrates further that the distinction between good and bad diversity is not fixed but is constantly renegotiated and shaped by the socio-political context in which these issues unfold.

However, since the resources to engage in these social negotiations are not equally distributed in society, these discourses reproduce structures of power and domination and lead to the intensified stigmatization of already marginalized groups. Based on these findings, Dupuis concludes by asking whether Muslim belonging is perceived as unacceptable diversity when it is socially visible.



»Nonetheless, while the definition of „good“ diversity is dialectical, it is also embedded in a social context shaped by structures of domination and power relations. In this sense, the resources needed to decide what constitutes acceptable diversity and thus to include it in social space are not equally distributed.«

**Sébastien Dupuis**, Swiss Center for Islam and Society at the University of Fribourg

## 6. Panel 2: Means of orientation: Young Muslims navigating multiple belongings in the context of diverse societies

This panel investigated the resources and challenges that Muslim youth experience within diverse societies, by focusing on mechanisms of boundary and belonging. Societal processes and debates such as narratives around the construction of an “us” and “them” dichotomy do not stop at the lives of young people and the spaces in which they move. Moreover, the panel aimed at highlighting how the understanding of hybrid affiliations or multiple belongings can provide a way to emancipate oneself from imposed patterns and hence create other ways of self-positioning.

**Zeinab Ahmadi**, junior researcher for the project “Islamic-Theological Studies: Orientation and Diversity” from the SZIG/CSIS at the University of Fribourg focussed in her presentation on the question of how processes of diversity and orientation are occurring within the realm of public schools in Switzerland. She drew attention to the fact that public discussions and even research are often one-sided and particularly dismissive of the interdependency between both processes. Ahmadi's research is based on interviews with young Muslims, during which she inquires about their experiences in school. The material at hand indicates that school experience strongly consists of processes leading to feelings of alienation and belonging. For example, an interviewee said that her environment could not take her feminist stance seriously, since she openly identifies as Muslim.

When confronted with such an experience, she only felt relief when she shared it with other Muslims experiencing similar situations. Ahmadi concludes that an overall societal and discursive pressure to label identities and classify belongings contradicts the young adults' need to develop their personalities in terms of life values and visions. Therefore, she advocates for allowing personal experiences more space within both the realms of schools as well as within the private environment of social Muslim life.



»Schools have to be acknowledged as places where diversity is not only dealt with but also (re)produced and stabilized. Schools, however, also have the potential to be a place where societal transformation is initiated and formed.«

**Zeinab Ahmadi**, junior researcher for the project “Islamic-Theological Studies: Orientation and Diversity” at Swiss Center for Islam and Society”

In her presentation, **Dr Betül Karakoç-Kafkas**, research and teaching associate at the Department of Educational Sciences at the University of Frankfurt, turned to the specific environments of Turkish mosques in Germany and analysed how a new generation of Imams implement their professional understandings. A new program established by DITIB in recent years offers bachelor's and master's degrees in religious education at Turkish universities for young adults who grew up in Germany and wishing to engage in religious community work.

This program was initiated as an alternative to the current practice according to which Imams were brought in from abroad to lead mosques while having little relation to the cultural and social environments in Germany. During her interviews with young Imams, Karakoç-Kafkas identified important challenges addressed by the Imams. According to Karakoç-Kafkas many of her findings indicate that a younger generation of Imams represents new pedagogical and professional understandings. In light of these results, she concludes that mosques should also be considered as places of social transformation. New pedagogical and professional understandings, particularly brought in by a new generation of Imams stimulate intra-community discussions, and also reformulations of religious as well as social norms and values.



»To ensure that Islamic religious education includes diversity in its approaches and concepts, the areas of tension must be taken into account. It can be helpful to consider transnational living environments, the diversity characteristics within a community and the interdependencies between different axes of inequality as gender, generation, religion etc.«

**Dr Betül Karakoç-Kafkas, research and teaching associate at the Department of Educational Sciences at the University of Frankfurt**

## 7. Panel 3: Negotiating and navigating diversity in Islamic knowledge discourses

The panellists reflected on the conceptualisation and understanding of diversity within contemporary Islamic thought. They engaged with theological, ethical and legal perspectives from various Islamic knowledge discourses, to explore how these resources can inform and facilitate the negotiation and navigation of diverse social landscapes and contexts. It also discussed the Islamic knowledge and its potential role in addressing the complexities of contemporary diversity.

Reflecting on the epistemological foundations of Islamic knowledge, **Prof Dr Yaser Ellethy**, Head of the Center for Islamic Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, emphasized that the concepts of plurality and diversity are not present in the Qur'anic corpus. Shaped by the central notion of tauḥīd (the oneness of God), Islamic Theology can hardly ignore the question of truth, which makes an Islamic theological approach to diversity somewhat paradoxical. If the unity of God implies the unity of truth, and therefore the unity of the community (ummah), how can we negotiate the plurality of religious practices, whether internal or external to the community? Referring to classical authors, Yaser Ellethy argues that adopting a stance that relativizes Islamic truth is epistemologically impossible, as it would threaten the very existence of this religious affiliation. To build an Ummah that acknowledges its diversity, it is necessary to move "from a pluralistic theory of truth to a pluralistic theory of immanent reality".

Based on his ethnographic fieldwork in mosques in Switzerland, **Dr Dominik Müller**, Senior Researcher at the SZIG/CSIS at the University of Fribourg has questioned the notion of authority and its relation to orientation. Müller aimed to address a deficiency in current literature that neglects the role of ordinary Muslims in the process of orientation by examining the ways in which authority is co-constructed within the space of the mosque. Drawing on the concept of Naseeha (giving guidance, giving religious advice to another Muslim), Dr Müller highlights that authority

is not given, but rather emerges through a relational process of attribution and self-attribution within a specific context. In this respect, Dr Müller shows how ordinary Muslims, depending on the situation and an event, give Naseeha and thus influence the religious practice of others. As a resource of orientation, Naseeha plays an important role in the formation of others as well as in the formation of the self.



**Prof Dr Yaser Ellethy, Head of the Center for Islamic Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam**



The two presentations, each from a distinct viewpoint, showcased the complexity of an Islamic theological reflection on diversity. This notion requires a critical examination of the epistemological foundations of a discipline and questions the roles generally attributed to authority figures. While this exchange nuanced certain relativist stances, it also highlighted a form of orientation that needs to be further discussed: the development of a common language.

First, a common language for maintaining inter- and intra-religious dialogue. Second, a common language between different disciplines, especially social sciences and theology. However, this implies an attempt to de-hierarchize and decompartmentalize knowledge, while at the same time attempting to decentralize certain epistemological hegemonies. As Müller himself puts it, “as social scientists working on Islam, we should maintain an epistemic openness and pay more attention to the theological underpinnings of our research. Why should we only do research *about* theology instead of doing research *with(in)* theology? By drawing conceptual inspiration from other intellectual traditions of thinking about the world, we can enrich and refine our own disciplinary perspectives.”



»As social scientists working on Islam, we should maintain an epistemic openness and pay more attention to the theological underpinnings of our research. Why should we only do research about theology instead of doing research with(in) theology«

**Dr Dominik Müller, Senior Researcher at the Swiss Center for Islam and Society at the University of Fribourg**



Prof Dr Bekim Agai, Director of the AIWG, and Prof Dr Amir Dziri, Director of the SZIG/CSIS

## 8. Syntheses

The synthesis conducted by **Prof Dr Bekim Agai**, Director of the Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG) and **Prof Dr Amir Dziri**, Director of the Swiss Center for Islam and Society (SZIG/CSIS) brought together various panels and contents of the conference and allowed the development of an outlook for the different fields.

Prof Dr Agai addressed essential contents of the conference summarizing the main lines of argumentation regarding discourses around “good” and “bad” diversity. He began by underlining that diversity can function as a constructed form of otherness, referred by a dominant group to define others as well as a way to produce difference. He went on to highlight how throughout the conference this was linked to Islam-

ic-theological concepts of dealing with otherness, integrating the empirical realm and at the same time drawing on theoretical contexts. Agai concluded by acknowledging that Muslims as part of the discourses around “good” and “bad” diversity are subject to these categories, while they also apply these categories themselves.

Prof Dr Dziri focused his syntheses on the aim of the conference, which was to bring together different disciplines and discuss the terms of diversity and orientation. As a result, the respective topics and aspects were different in terms of context and situations ranging from swimming pools to schools, to mosques. Depending on the subject affiliation, different approaches were chosen varying between

deconstructive and constructive understandings of science by analysing power critically or integrating participatory approaches, hence trying to unfold the transformative potential of academia.

For the further development of Islamic-Theological Studies, as this is the specific vocation of both institutions, the conference brought about the following challenges:

**1. While debates in Islamic-Theological Studies are still often linked to one specific linguistic or country context, it proves fruitful to work across contexts, to bring together different “partial perspectives” and thus to benefit from the diversity of conceptual and organisational settings of the discipline. If, for example, specific terms and concepts are defined differently between disciplines or are organised in different subject clusters, this helps to become aware of the need to legitimate Islamic-Theological Studies in terms of scientific theory.**

**2. The interdisciplinary exchange between representatives of Islamic-Theological Studies and the Social Sciences is proving to be particularly fruitful. It can open up new approaches to topics such as diversity and normativity, which can only be adequately explored within an interdisciplinary framework. Interdisciplinarity also requires the ability to speak publicly from a theological perspective and strengthens the impulse to address not only a specific community, but also society as a whole.**

**3. In recent years, empirical approaches have become increasingly important for Islamic-Theological Studies. They enable fields of practice to be opened up and a diversity of experiences and possibilities for action to be discovered. In methodological terms, they often stand alongside text-based approaches. An ongoing challenge consists in bringing both approaches into a constructive exchange and linking them more closely together.**



## 9. Conference Programme

FRIDAY, 17 NOVEMBER

---

**02:00 p.m.**

**Welcoming**

---

**2:30 p.m.**

**Opening speeches**

Prof Dr Bekim Agai  
(AIWG, Goethe University Frankfurt, GER)

Prof Dr Hansjörg Schmid  
(Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg)

---

**2:45 p.m.**

**Keynote 1: Whose Diversity? Some Reflections about Categories of Religious and Cultural Inclusion and Exclusion Processes with a Particular Focus on Muslims in Europe.**

Prof Dr Monika Salzbrunn  
(Lausanne University)

*Moderation*  
Prof Dr Niels Valdemar Vinding  
(University of Copenhagen)

---

**Coffee Break**

---

**4:00 p.m.**

**Keynote 2: European Islamic thought: Revisiting moral categories.**

Dr Mohammed Hashas  
(University of Rome)

*Moderation:* Prof Dr Amir Dziri  
(Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg)

---



---

**Coffee Break**

---

**5:30 p.m.**

**Panel 1: Diversity as a normative construction: 'Islam' and 'good' / 'bad' diversity in European social discourses.**

Prof Dr Schirin Amir-Moazami  
(Institute of Islamic Studies, FU Berlin)

Sébastien Dupuis  
(Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg)

*Moderation:* Nadia Seiler  
(Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg)

---

**7:00 p.m.**

**End of day one**

---

EVENING PROGRAMME

---

**8:30 p.m.**

**Dinner and Discussion**

## SATURDAY, 18 NOVEMBER

---

**9:00 a.m.**

**Panel 2: Means of orientation: Young Muslims navigating multiple belongings in the context of diverse societies**

Dr Betül Karakoç-Kafkas  
(Goethe- University Frankfurt)

Zeinab Ahmadi  
(Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg)

*Moderation:* Dilek Uçak-Ekinci  
(Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg)

---

### Coffee Break

---

**11:00 a.m.**

**Panel 3: Negotiating and navigating diversity in Islamic knowledge discourses**

Prof Dr Yaser Ellethy,  
(Center for Islamic Theology, VU Amsterdam)

Dr Dominik Müller  
(Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg)

*Moderation:* Prof. Dr Bekim Agai  
(AIWG – Goethe-University Frankfurt)

---

**12:30 p.m.**

**Synthesis**

Prof Dr Bekim Agai  
(AIWG - Goethe- University Frankfurt) &

Prof Dr Amir Dziri  
(Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg)

---

**1:00 p.m.**

**Lunch**

---

**2:00 p.m.**

**End of the Conference**

## 10. Participants

| Country | Name                           | Institution  |
|---------|--------------------------------|--|
| GER     | Prof Dr Bekim Agai             | Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG)           |
| CHE     | Zeinab Ahmadi                  | Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg |
| GER     | Muhammed Ahmed                 | Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG)           |
| GER     | Prof Dr Schirin Amir-Moazami   | FU Berlin  |
| GER     | Fatma Aydinli                  | FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg                                      |
| CHE     | Danijel Cubelic                | University of Heidelberg                                   |
| CHE     | Sébastien Dupuis               | Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg |
| CHE     | Prof Dr Amir Dziri             | Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg |
| CHE     | Dilek Uçak-Ekinci              | Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg |
| NLD     | Prof Dr Yaser Ellethy          | VU Amsterdam   |
| ITA     | Dr Mohammed Hashas             | University of Rome   |
| GER     | Dr Betül Karakoç-Kafkas        | Goethe University Frankfurt                                |
| GER     | Dr Stephan Kokew               | University of Münster                                      |
| CHE     | Dr Dominik Müller              | Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg |
| GER     | Prof Dr Armina Omerika         | Goethe University Frankfurt                                |
| GER     | Brenda Otufowora               | FU Berlin  |
| CHE     | Prof Dr Monika Salzbrunn       | University of Lausanne                                     |
| CHE     | Prof Dr Hansjörg Schmid        | Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg |
| CHE     | Nadia Seiler                   | Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg |
| GER     | Jasemin Seven                  | Young Islam Conference                                     |
| DNK     | Prof Dr Niels Valdemar Vinding | University of Copenhagen                                   |

# 11. Bibliography

**Amir-Moazami, S. (ed.) (2018).** *Der inspizierte Muslim. Zur Politisierung der Islamforschung in Europa.* Bielefeld: transcript.

**Amir-Moazami, S. (2022).** *Interrogating Muslims. The Liberal-Secular Matrix of Integration.* New York: Bloomsbury.

**Dziri, A. (2023).** *Tradition und Diskurs. Wandel als Möglichkeit islamischer Hermeneutik.* Berlin: De Gruyter.

**Dziri, A. & Schmid, H. (eds.) (2020).** *Islamisch-theologische Studien. Eine neue Wissenschaftsdisziplin in der Schweiz (SZIG-Papers 10).* Freiburg: Schweizerisches Zentrum für Islam und Gesellschaft. <https://folia.unifr.ch/unifr/documents/308874>

**Ellethy, Y. (2014).** *Islam, Context, Pluralism and Democracy Classical and Modern Interpretations.* Abingdon: Routledge.

**Ellethy, Y. (2020).** Coping with a Quranic truth claim: Muslim hermeneutics of knowledge and pluralism. *Interreligious studies and intercultural theology* 6(1), 66–84. <https://journal.equinoxpub.com/ISIT/article/view/19378>

**Hashas, M. (ed.) (2021).** *Pluralism in Islamic Contexts – Ethics, Politics and Modern Challenges.* Cham: Springer Nature.

**Hashas, M. (2019).** *The Idea of European Islam. Religion, Ethics, Politics and Perpetual Modernity.* London: Routledge.

**Isis-Arnautovic, E., Dziri, A. & Schmid, H. (2023).** *From Zakāt to Theological Anthropology: Systematic and Practical Approaches in Islamic-Theological Studies (SZIG/CSIS Studies 9).* Freiburg: Schweizerisches Zentrum für Islam und Gesellschaft. <https://folia.unifr.ch/unifr/documents/325295>

**Karakoç, B. (2020).** Imamin, Migrantin, Wanderin. Weibliche Repräsentanz im transnationalen Raum Deutschland-Türkei. In M. Kulacatan & H. H. Behr (eds.), *Migration, Religion, Gender und Bildung. Beiträge zu einem erweiterten Verständnis von Intersektionalität* (pp. 253–284). Bielefeld: transcript.

**Karakoç, B. & Behr, H. H. (eds.) (2022).** *Moschee 2.0 – Internationale und transdisziplinäre Perspektiven.* Münster: Waxmann.

**Müller, D. (2017).** „Aber Hocam ...“ – Imame und die Aushandlung islamischer Autorität im Alltag von Schweizer Moscheen. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie / Journal of Social and Cultural Anthropology* 142(1), 67–92.

**Salzbrunn, M. (2014).** *Vielfalt/Diversität.* Bielefeld: transcript.

**Salzbrunn, M. (ed.) (2019).** *L'islam (in)visible en ville. Appartenances et engagements dans l'espace urbain.* Geneva: Labor et Fides.







Akademie für Islam  
in Wissenschaft  
und Gesellschaft

The Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG) is a university platform for carrying out research and debates on Islamic-theological and social issues. It facilitates nationwide projects and exchange among researchers in Islamic-Theological Studies, in related disciplines and with different players in civil society, including Muslim communities.

The AIWG has three main objectives:

1. Enable Research: The AIWG contributes to the establishment of Islamic-theological studies in German academia. To this end, it enables collaborative and interdisciplinary research among different university institutions, and participates in international discourses.
2. Facilitate exchange and transfer of knowledge/expertise: The AIWG enables exchange between researchers, civil society actors, and government officials. The idea is to develop solutions by including multiple perspectives on societal issues.
3. Encourage objective and profound debate: The AIWG is devoted to informing public debate by making little-known expertise visible and accessible.

The AIWG is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

Gefördert vom



Bundesministerium  
für Bildung  
und Forschung

