

## PRACTISING *TAQLÎD* IN SHI'Î MOSQUE ASSOCIATIONS IN BERLIN



Approximately 8000 Twelver-Shi'i Muslims are living in Berlin. The first Shi'i centre was founded in 1978 by Turkish guest workers. Today, there are almost nine meeting places with the common legal status as mosque associations, most of them founded during the last 12 years.

The members of the Berlin Shi'i community have different national and social backgrounds. Most Shi'ites come from Turkey, Iran, Lebanon and Iraq, fewer from Azerbaijan and Pakistan. Furthermore, there are big social differences between the visitors of mosque associations. The spectrum ranges from members of the upper middle class (businesspeople and diplomats) and middle class people, consisting mainly of former guest workers, up to refugees with an unsecured residence permit status and without access to the official labour market. Furthermore, there are big differences between the mosque associations concerning their capacity, means, religious programs and other offers.

After a short introduction to the Shi'i community in Berlin, I will discuss if the mosque associations do have an influence on everyday religious practice (*taqlîd*) of the believers visiting them. *Taqlîd* implies that a Shi'ite layman (*muqallid*) has the religious duty to follow the legal rulings of a high ranking *ulama*, the *marja' al-taqlîd*. It is quite common that each *marja'* maintains transnational networks of institutions and it is generally assumed that these institutions are frequented by the followers of the respective *marja'* only.

My fieldwork in Berlin has shown that, due to the specific local context, all mosque association and religious gatherings are always frequented by *muqallidun* from different *maraji'* and that the decision which *marja'* one follows is the outcome of independent reasoning of the individual believer rather than influenced by the mosque associations. Based on these findings, I will raise the question if it is useful to speak of a privatization of *taqlîd* in this context.

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