

Transnational Islam, Immigrant NGOs and Poverty Alleviation: The Case of the IGMG

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Introduction

Today the existence of a large Muslim population and identity in Europe is regarded as one of the most urgent challenges facing European countries. Initially invited as a cheap labor force, in great demand to enable the development of Western economies, Muslim populations have settled in Europe permanently since 1960s. As a result of this process, Turkish immigrants today dominate German cities with their organizations, businesses and investments (Mandel 2008). Much of the debate on Turkish immigrants in Germany has been focused on multiculturalism, terrorism, Muslim's compatibility with western values and policy response of Germany with regard to the request of immigrants on identity (Kucukcan and Gungor 2009; Odmalm 2009; Yurdakul and Yukleyen 2009; Warner and Wenner 2006; Avci 2006; Boston 2002). In general, Muslim immigrant organizations in Germany are very active, disorganized and very much decentralized (Ogelman at all 2002). They even have different perspectives not only on domestic issues within Germany but also about Turkey, global politics and Islam. Although, all of them have projects directed toward to Turkish immigrants, some have projects beyond Germany- a challenge to call them *only* an immigrant organization in Germany. This article intends to look Turkish immigrants from a different perspective by analyzing the *Qurbani* project of an immigrant organization, Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Gorus (IGMG), in the context of economic development, poverty alleviation and domestic/transnational identity politics.

Below, first I outline the theoretical approaches on economic development and the role of immigrants. Through co-development policy a new line of scholarship is emerging designating a positive role for immigrants in economic development. In the second part, I analyze the *qurbani* as a poverty alleviation project by locating it in a transnational identity context to make claims at broader level and improve the situations of immigrants. In the last part, I discuss whether such projects may pave the way for a new ground between host country and immigrants.

Development, Immigrants and Transnational Identity

The term "development" was not connected to migration in academic and public discourse in explicit way until the 1960s. Since then direct link between the two became a prominent one but it has only mirrored and stemmed from the dominant economic development paradigms. During the 1960s, it was emphasized on the labor gap in the North and development in the South. It was assumed that the development would result from financial remittances, return immigration and transfer of human capital (Kindleberger 1967). These optimistic ideas had changed in the 1970s and 1980s and the term development came to be replaced by 'dependency'. As long as dependency existed as a structural condition of the

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periphery dominated by center, underdevelopment was an inevitable result. Dependency theorists argued that underdevelopment led to loss of highly-skilled due to immigration to industrialized countries. This out-immigration, in turn, was thought to create even more underdevelopment and increased migration flows (Martin 1991; Delgado and Covarrubias 2005).

Since the 1990s, however, the trend seems to be turning to positive contributions of immigration in development. The idea of “co-development” best describes this new policy approach to immigrants as development agents and has been propagated by several countries including France, the UK, and the Netherlands as well as the World Bank (Faist 2008: 26, and Raghuram 2009). It is argued that international immigration is an ingredient to fuel development in the South, but this time not only via financial remittances as was in 1960s but also through knowledge flows and social remittances (Maimbo and Ratha 2005). Co-development approach is focused mainly on the role of immigrants in the country of origin (Weil 2002; Lacomba and Boni 2008). Their contribution to create business networks, investments, transfer of technology and knowledge in favor of the country of origin have attracted too much attention that the transnational nature and the role of immigrant organizations have been overlooked (Allievi and Nielsen 2003). Even when it is analyzed, the dominant perspective on Muslim immigrants in Europe has been on security issues and terrorism (e.g. Leiken and Brooke 2006; Neumann 2006). This often derived from, first, considering the transnational ideas and beliefs as a negative element in analyzing immigrant organizations (for an exception Van der Veer 2002), and second not taking them as development agents within the development endeavors. Similarly, the role of religion as a transnational idea in international affairs and in projects of immigrant organizations have been considered to have limited role - which is mostly related to identity - rather than creating a broader agenda within which immigrant organizations act, produce projects and contribute to global political economy.

Religion is frequently portrayed in international relations scholarship as the source of considerable evil. Religion is rarely seen as positive contributor to global politics let alone in development projects (Rakodi 200; Selinger 2004: 526). Newly emerging Muslim immigrant NGOs as an agent of development are challenging this tradition of scholarship, not only on the theoretical ground but also with empirical data.

Indeed, a quick look at the history of humanitarianism actually challenges the current association of religion with conflict, violence, and instability. Religious beliefs and organizations, most notably those influenced by Christian theology and ethics, helped to create modern humanitarianism in the early nineteenth century and have shaped its expanding scale, scope, and significance ever since. Today faith-based agencies are scattered throughout the world and involved in various kinds of projects, enterprises, and programs (Clarke 2006; McDuie-Ra and Rees 2010).² However, in the literature much of what is known about faith-based agencies derives from Christian organizations originated from missionary activities and there is very little knowledge about religiously-inspired organizations outside of Christianity. This has been especially noteworthy especially in the cases of Islamic charitable and philanthropic organizations until recently (Benthall 1997;

² World Faiths Development Dialogue project, established in 2000 by James D. Wolfensohn, then President of the World Bank and Lord George Carey, then Archbishop of Canterbury, can also be seen as recognition of this trend. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/PARTNERS/EXTDEVIALOGUE/0,,contentMDK:21955861~menuPK:5555051~pagePK:64192523~piPK:64192458~theSitePK:537298,00.html> (5 January 2010)

Cizakca 2000; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Benedetti 2006). Nevertheless, there is still hardly any research on charitable Muslim immigrant organizations.

Although charity has a long tradition in Islamic history through *Waqf* (Cizakca 2000) and *Zakat* (Kochuyt 2009), the modern world Muslim charities have developed steadily since the early 1980s, starting with modest aid and relief activities in conflict-driven cities. In the 1980s, due to their inexperience and limited numbers, Islamic NGOs had been less prepared to fill the places of Western NGOs in territories occupied by Muslims. However, in the 1990s, as the number of Islamic NGOs has increased, the more ambitious and successful development/relief projects started to develop by those NGOs (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003), resulting a visible Islamic humanitarian activism in many countries.

By taking the *Qurbani* project of a Turkish organization in Germany, the IGMG, this article does not only portray the endeavor of Muslims to combat against poverty at worldwide, but also intends to challenge to two assumptions theoretically. First, the misconception that the positive role of religion in international affairs is minor, especially among immigrants. Second is to defy the assumption that immigrants are *only* consumers, or exploiters of the countries in which they reside and do not contribute to development projects and alleviating poverty in the world in any significant measure.

The IGMG and the *Qurbani* Project

The IGMG has its origins in Turkish politics in the late 1960s and organized among Turkish immigrants since the early 1970s in Europe. Its headquarter is located near Cologne, in Germany, and has regional federations in ten other European countries. According to its Secretary-General Oguz Ucuncu, IGMG has 54,865 members and manage 323 mosques in Germany, and 86,866 members and 514 mosques in Europe (quoted in Yukleyen 2010: 446).

The IGMG as one of the strongest and biggest Islamic organization in Germany was established originally to serve Turkish immigrants in religious matters, however it has extended its activities to certain degree such as claims-making geared toward the German state and supporting projects in many countries, that no longer be considered as only a religious organization. A better definition for the IGMG is that it is a multi-dimensional organization and displays overlapping identities and aims (Sezgin 2008). Since 28 February process in 1997 in Turkey, all organizations belong to Milli Gorus underwent a transformation and the IGMG is the one that transformed itself more than others in terms of its orientation by changing its focus on from Turkey to Europe.³ In line with this argument, the IGMG cannot be seen anymore as European branch of a Turkish political affiliation as was in 80s and 90s (i.e. Amiraux 2007), but it is a multidimensional German-based NGO representing Turkish Muslims in Europe against discrimination and assimilation (Canatan 2001:239-242). It aims to improve the lives of Turkish Muslims in Germany by demanding equal rights and generate public discourse for this purpose (Sezgin 2008:90)

Using the typology of Clarke (2006: 840-845), the IGMG can be defined as a *faith-based socio-political organization* that interprets and deploys Islam as a socio-political construct by organizing and mobilizing a social group (Turkish migrants) on the basis of Turkish-Islamic identity in pursuit of broader socio-political objectives. However, a broader

³ This can be observed through its activities and themes they deal in their publications and projects.

view on its projects and services indicates that the IGMG has also characteristics of the *faith-based charitable/development organization* that usually mobilize the faithful in support of poor, and manage programs to tackle poverty directly or indirectly. Such type of organizations, first, play a role in tackling poverty by funding and/or managing programs that help the poor directly and facilitate a new opportunities for the poor. Second role is an indirect one that involves raising awareness of poverty among its own members and community (Clarke 2006: 841).

The IGMG has several ways of acting as such. Colleting *zakat* and distributing it through aids and scholarships to students is considered a permanent one as it is year-long project. In the cases of emergency, such as earthquake, flood, drought and other grave situations, the IGMG mobilize its members to extend their hand to those who need. For example, when the earthquakes took places in Turkey (1999) and in Pakistan (2004), the IGMG did not only send aid convoy to severely damaged areas but also contributed in construction process through establishing school, dormitory and even houses. These occasional projects do not deal with the poverty directly but create awareness among its constituencies about poverty and grave situations around the world.

The main project linked directly with poverty alleviation which has a consistency and regularity is the *Qurbani* project. It is the second biggest project of the IGMG beyond Germany after the *hajj* (pilgrimage) project every year for European Muslims. It has started in 1986 and since then it has continued without any intermittance. Initially it was organized in Turkey and directed at Muslims in Turkey. However, it has changed its focus, attention and scope since early 1990s. Only in 2009, the IGMG has organized this project in 78 countries ranging from Asia to Latin America and from the Middle East to Southern Africa.

In terms of choosing the countries, initially majority muslim-populated countries were the primary concern. However, president of the social services of the IGMG, Ali Bozkurt indicates that the IGMG has started to open up muslim minority countries too as well as continuing the projects in the former ones.⁴ This divesification can be observed with the list of countries where the *qurbanis* sent in latest years. Among others, this list includes countries with Muslim minority such as Venezuela, Colombia, Ivory Coast, Brundi, Russia, Romania, and Liberia.⁵ In a sense, it is truly global in its outreach and with its financial backing it is relatively enormous as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: The Last 7 years *Qurbani* project statistics (2004-2009).

⁴ See 'Kurban Kampanyasi Basladi', *IGMG Perspektif*, Vol 13, No 155, November 2007, p.15.

⁵ See 'Kurban Kampanyasi Basladi', *IGMG Perspektif*, Vol 13, No 155, November 2007, p.15; and <http://www.igmg.de/tr/teskilat/kurban-kampanyasi.html> (15 February 2010).

	Year-1424 (30 Jan-4 Feb 2004)	Year-1425 (20-24 Jan 2005)	Year-1426 (10-14 Jan 2006)	Year-1427 (31 Dec 2006 /3 Jan 2007)	Year-1428 (20-24 Dec 2007)	Year-1429 (8-12 Dec 2008)	Year-1430 (27-30 Nov 2009)
Price	100 €	100 €	100 €	100 €	100 €	100 €	100 €
Donations	28.740	39.151	61.016	63.615	75.264	64.304	75.618
Executed <i>Qurbani</i>	31.635	47.177	76.926	84.560	88.889	65.691	82.363
Delegation	65	75	122	161	199	222	261
Country	52	60	65	68	73	75	78
Project value (€)	2.874.000	3.915.100	6.101.600	6.361.500	7.526.400	6.430.400	7.561.800

Source: It is drawn from the official journal of the IGMG, *Perspektif* (until 2009 *IGMG Perspektive*) between January 2005- December 2009 and is confirmed by the Department of Social Services of the IGMG in 15 January 2010.

The *qurbani* is a religious duty and act of worship performed by Muslims during Eid ul-Adha (on specific days (10th, 11th or 12th of Thul hijjah in the Islamic calendar), whereby livestock are slaughtered and distributed for consumption to the poor, and friends and relatives of the performer. Thus both for the Muslims in Europe and the IGMG, the *qurbani* as a religious duty occupy as a central place. Indicating this, in the IGMG publications, this project has always attracted greater importance both at its legitimization and presentation. For example, in January 2003 the official publication of the IGMG, *Milli Gorus & Perspective*, clearly states that it is difficult to find 'really needy Muslims' to distribute 1/3 of slaughtered *qurbani* as urged by Islam. Similarly, in Europe the circumstances make difficult to 'utilize fully' skin leather and domestic organs of *qurbani* thus resulting that the *qurbani* duty is not completed as required by Islam (Mollaoglu 2003: 16-17). Such religious arguments are frequent in IGMG publications but the main focus has always been in social, identical and cultural dimension of the project. Among Muslims in Europe who have two *qurbanis* have been advised to send at least one of them to Muslim brothers and sisters in other countries for variety of social, economic and religious reasons. Among others, the most emphasized ones are to develop a conscience of *ummah* among Muslims, to carry out brethren responsibility through economic aid if possible, to get the blessing of oppressed and needy; and to perceive and put into practice the transnational character of Islam as a religion of peace, tolerance and relief (Mollaoglu 2003:17). Before the implementation of the *Qurbani* project, the IGMG campaigns for participation through its publications, pamphlets and TV ads. However, once the project is completed, photos, articles, commentaries and video records are made available to public through its website and publications as well as a CD that presents the project with facts and figures to donors.⁶

As stated, through this project, the IGMG indirectly contributes poverty alleviation by creating awareness and bringing the situation of poor in all over the world to its

⁶ For example details about the last qurbani Project in 2009 can be found in official website, <http://www.igmg.de/tr/teskilat/kurban-kampanyasi.html> (15 February 2010).

constituencies.⁷ However, there are also cases that this project helps directly economic development. Businessmen usually are invited to take part in delegation to visit and execute the project in selected countries. This invitation is especially aimed at creating an opportunity for possible investors to see economic and political situations along with the needs of society at large. For businessmen and the IGMG, this is a win-win situation. For the former, it is a great opportunity to see the ground and evaluate for future investments; for the latter if an investment took place it is a success in terms of helping to alleviate poverty by creating jobs and opportunities for poor.⁸

In the *Qurbani* project, there is another dimension that can be called as a direct cash entrance into the implemented countries. As it can be seen in Table 1, the amount of money allocated for this project is not little given the fact that organizer is an immigrant organization. Under the project, each country receive equivalent price of the allocated *qurbani* and this money is directly spent in the country in question by buying animals for slaughtering. In many poor areas, for those who raise animals it is very difficult either to sell in the same area due to poverty or take them to city which might be costly. With the *Qurbani* project, poverty-ridden areas do not only have an opportunity to sell its animals but also eat its meat by distribution in the area. Although this fast cash entrance happens once a year, it might be vital for the economy of some areas where raising is a means of survival.⁹

Yet, the broader question arise the very nature of such a huge transnational project that immigrant communities have. Generally speaking, immigrant communities have projects that aim to connect themselves to the country of origin for cultural and identical reasons; many of them neither seek nor act in much broader area than their principal (mostly local) urgencies. Why, and for what reasons, has the IGMG needed to have this type of projects? Part of the answer may be found in the national context of German political system. Whether the political system of the host country has opportunities rather than constraints is very important in determining the outlook and visions of immigrants. Odmalm (2009:153-154) argues that in Germany ‘the lack of formal political opportunities have led migrants to develop alternative and more civil society-oriented means of participation’. Such tendencies do not only have a direct connection with the perception about, and definition of, immigrants in Germany as ‘foreigners’; but also to make claims at more broader level and improve the situations of immigrants. The *Qurbani* project of the IGMG should be seen in this context. Along with the lack of formal platform in the host country that force immigrants to deviate toward supra-national and transnational levels, the IGMG itself has been seen as a ‘threat’ by German authorities and kept under observation for years by the German state.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the fact that the German authorities view the IGMG as ‘dangerous’ neither retrain them not having claim-making projects within Germany, nor supporting and defending the rights of Muslims through legal means. Today, the IGMG are vigorously active in German domestic politics with regard to themes related

⁷ This is expressed in the official website of the IGMG and its publication *Perspektif*. For example, see ‘Bir kurban, binlerce dua...’, *IGMG Perspektive*, Vol 14, No 157, January 2008, p.20-23.

⁸ Personal communication with Unal Koyuncu, member of the *qurbani* commission. January 2010.

⁹ Personal observation in Xinjiang, China, December 2008.

¹⁰ For a legal and polemical response of the IGMG to such ‘threat’ conception by German authorities in its official publication, see Mustafa Yeneroglu, ‘IGMG Neden Anayasa Koruma Raporlarında yer alıyor?’, *Perspektif*, No 15, No 175-176, July-August 2009, pp.8-9.

to Muslims as it is so at transnational level through its projects like *qurbani*. Nevertheless, as Nielsen (2003:28-29) argues, it is ‘never satisfactory to think these transnational networks in terms of formal structures only’, because ‘such networks are much more flexible and essentially informal’. The *Qurbani* project shows this point clearly.

A second answer to the question posed above may have something to do with the nature and characteristics of Turkish immigrants in Germany. There is an often overlooked fact in immigrant research that might be an indispensable in understanding transnational dynamics (Mandaville 2001). Turks are not ‘typical immigrants’ in Europe and particularly in Germany. Turkish immigrants should be compared with neither North African nor sub-continent immigrants. They have two distinguished characters that beg a special treatment in analysis. Turkish immigrants were not imported as former colonial subjects, thus the background of the majority of Turkish Muslims in Europe differ significantly that of Muslims in France, the UK, Spain and other European countries. Whether the inclination to have transnational project especially by Turkish immigrant organizations such as the IGMG has something to do with the above-mentioned characteristics of Turkish community are both open to debate and theme for further research. However, it seems that a strong tendency persists toward transnationalism among Turks in Germany. The *Qurbani* project has both the characteristics of this transnational leaning and strengthening domestic identity within Germany. In that sense, it serves at least in four ways, which will be analyzed in details in following section.

Strengthening domestic identity through transnational networks

Increasing both immigration to Europe from outside and problems that immigrants face within Europe not only have fuelled the growth of immigrant organizations in host countries but also created a feeling that immigrants need to maintain their strong links to the homelands. Most of those organizations representing immigrants have a strong religious dynamic that makes them to connect to pan-national faith community ummah. For example, the IGMG has strong links in Turkey and realizes the biggest share of its *Qurbani* projects in various Turkish cities.¹¹ This cannot only be seen as a sign of the IGMG’s strong intention to help more to motherland society, families and nationalities; but at the bottom of this it also serves to help its own faithful Turkish community to maintain their cultural and religious identity (Clarke 2006:839).

Identity politics and projects are important for the IGMG not only for it be established since the 1970s, but also the character of its members’ profile force and require so. The survey of the Center for Turkish Studies in Essen report that the average age of the IGMG supporters in Germany is 35.5 (quoted in Yurdakul and Yukleyen 2009: 219). It is the younger third generation which face identity crisis at most neither being Turk nor fully German, rather than the older generation who usually by and large have a settled belief and identity. Comparing to other Muslim organizations in Germany, perhaps this explains what makes the IGMG to act differently, albeit sometimes having a ‘clash’ with German institutions. A comparison with the other biggest Muslim organization in Germany, Diyanet Isleri Turk-Islam Birliđi (DITIB), may better illustrate this point. Since its existence in 1983, DITIB has developed relatively good relations with German authorities and even partly received support from them. A closer look at the projects and the message of DITIB

¹¹ See ‘Kurban bizi ummetle birlestirdi’, *Perspektif*, Vol 15, No 169, January 2009, pp.14-15.

indicates that not only it has few projects directly related to identity and youth, but its message ‘resonates more with the first generation than the younger generations, who are concerned with improving their living conditions in Germany’ (Yurdakul and Yukleyen 2009: 219). As a sign, or/and result of this, the abovementioned survey found that the average age of DITIB supporters is 41.8 (quoted in Yurdakul and Yukleyen 2009: 219) – higher than those of the IGMG.

The IGMG organize projects to support integration of immigrants into German society and promote Turkish and Islamic identities (Sezgin 2008:89). Such projects toward strengthening abovementioned identities among youth are also directed to assist them to integrate into German social and political life. The *Qurbani* project, though it is a religious obligation for Muslims, serve well for supporting and preserving Islamic identity among Muslim immigrants. By connecting Muslims in Germany to other Muslims in all over the world certainly strengthen the consciences of *ummah* and Islamic identity. The IGMG’s *Qurbani* project is well publicized through TV ads, pamphlets and the official website of the organization. Upon completion of the project, observations and comments along with project photographs and videos are put in website and distributed in a CD.¹² Considering that the representatives who travel to execute the *Qurbani* project also share their experience with their local communities after their return,¹³ the *Qurbani* project from its initial preparation to post-execution do contribute and strengthen Islamic identity among Muslims in Germany.

Aid, Ummah and Investment

Aid and *ummah*, the humanitarian aspect and the religious aspect, are intimately interwoven and make up the essential part of the identity of the both transnational Islamic relief organizations and immigrant organizations. However, for immigrant organizations, aid indicates only a small part of their activities, thus becoming either short-time oriented in a year (usually in *Qurban* and *Ramadan* period) or comparatively little in its quantity compared to that of Islamic relief organizations. The *ummah* is a moral and imaginative concept that indicates the community of Muslims.. It is generally considered that helping the *ummah* in creating or/and connecting is a religious duty for each Muslim.

The activities of Muslim NGOs in all over the world should not be reduced to a mere mimicking of western NGOs. It has far beyond implications and repercussions that deserve special attention. Today, Islamic charity organizations are not only important locally as they try to improve the material and moral livelihood of people by humanitarian aid, but also offering rules of behaviour and a sense of belonging to *ummah* (Kaag 2007:85).

The main strategy that the IGMG follow in its implementation of the *Qurbani* project is very similar to that of Islamic relief NGOs. It arranges partnerships with local organizations in the countries designated for project. These partnerships are an important element of creating a network of *ummah*¹⁴ and identity formation. First of all, it enables the indigenous/local Islamic NGOs (or partners) to obtain supra-national recognition and legitimacy in their own society. Second, it gives an opportunity for asserting their identity

¹² For the 2009 project, see <http://www.igmg.de/tr/teskilat/kurban-kampanyasi.html> (15 February 2010)

¹³ Personal communication with Unal Koyuncu, member of the *qurbani* comission. January 2010.

¹⁴ Interview with Oguz Ucuncu, 12 October 2009.

and strengthening it.¹⁵ This identity often works in two ways helping each other. For those who donate their *qurbanis* to Muslims all over the world, it is completion of an Islamic duty and satisfaction that religious responsibility has been fulfilled. For those who receive this aid, it is a feeling that there are other Muslims who care about their problems, poverty and future. For that aim, many countries chosen for project are where Muslims live as a minority or live in a conflict-ridden area. While many Latin American and African countries are examples of the former; Palestine, Pakistan and Kashmir are representatives for the latter. Within the project, the places where Muslim minorities live under tight and conflict-ridden conditions such as Eastern China (Eastern Turkistan) are especially chosen because it is considered that there is an immediate danger for endangering Islamic identity. A representative who went to Eastern China in 2008 told that when they distributed *qurbani* meats in cooperation with local authorities in Chinese governmental buildings; many of those who came to collect thought that it was a governmental aid. However, when he explained through his interpreter to the gathering, that it came from German Muslims as an expression of Muslim brotherhood for Eid celebration, ‘all eyes shined’. Even after they left, ‘they made prayers for them in all mosques’.¹⁶

It is obvious that the *Qurbani* project of IGMG alone cannot alleviate poverty or cater for the magnitude of needy created by nature and/or other reasons in many countries. Neither can the *Qurbani* project be seen as a social welfare program that aims to eliminate the roots of poverty. However, the major contribution of the *Qurbani* project in alleviating poverty is its ability to create awareness among Turkish-Muslim immigrants to donate and help more to the poor. Especially the reports of those who realized the project on behalf of IGMG about the country, conflict and future projects are for this purpose. Similarly, as mentioned above, businessmen are also invited to take part in implementing project not only exercise a voluntary service but primarily to create an opportunity for them to see the ground for future investments in the country in question to tackle poverty directly.¹⁷

Gathering direct information: reports and observations

The *Qurbani* project is a way to acquire knowledge, resources, experience and expertise about other Islamic countries and Muslims societies. In this sense, this project is a vital for collecting information and knowing the real situation in Islamic world through first hand information. The IGMG considers this as an important element of the project not only for using data for planning the future project but most importantly for avoiding the incorrect or incomplete information which is prominent in media. In order for this, the IGMG organize a meeting before representatives depart to their destinations and inform and supply with the earlier years’ reports and data. Along with this first information, representatives urged to read articles, books and media materials about the conflict, latest situation and problems of their destination country. When they arrived to the field, they are asked to have informal interview, talk, and consultation with the local authorities and leaders from all segment of society if possible.¹⁸ Furthermore, a visit to German and Turkish embassies is recommended¹⁹ not only getting for the information which may be vital for them, such as

¹⁵ See Interview with Ali Bozkurt in *IGMG Perspektive*, Vol 14, No 165-166, September-October 2008, p.11.

¹⁶ Personal communication with Ahmet Yilmaz, the *Qurbani* project organizer in China in 2007 and 2008.

¹⁷ Personal communication with Unal Koyuncu, member of the *qurbani* commission. January 2010.

¹⁸ See Interview with Ali Bozkurt in *IGMG Perspektive*, Vol 14, No 165-166, September-October 2008, p.11.

¹⁹ Interview with Oguz Ucuncu, 12 October 2009.

about dangerous areas, also informing them with the project details. On their return, each representative is asked to write their observations, thoughts and suggestions for the next years' projects individually. As a group, it is expected that with the collaboration of each member, a country report will be presented with the details of the projects, execution, and recommendations. Some country reports go beyond this standard form and present perspectives on the country in question and even possible way of helping to solve problems along with suggestion of new partner organizations in following years.

The IGMG is an organization that supports students with scholarships. The *Qurbani* project is also targeted to serve students, researchers and future leaders to gain depth information about conflict areas and the world problems as well as providing them an opportunity to travel to areas otherwise would be difficult individually. Those who are scholarship-holders and postgraduate students are especially asked to join to the project not only is it a help for them in their studies but also with the hope that country reports and feedbacks would be more partial, academic and realist, which is better for the IGMG constituencies. They were also asked to contribute with a commentary to the IGMG publications, such as *Perspektif*, to share their thoughts and perspectives with donors and broader readers.

The *Qurbani* project, Ucuncu argues, serves better to Muslim community in Germany for the long term. In this way, there exist a direct link in exchanging information between European Muslims and the Muslim world.²⁰ It creates an opportunity to evaluate situations, share experiences and gain a better perspective on the Muslim world and their problems. In that sense, Ucuncu articulate that 'while some Muslim minorities learnt from the organizational experiences of the IGMG, we have learnt from the experiences of Muslim minorities in many countries'.²¹

*Consciousness of Vefa*²²

The *Qurbani* project seems to manifest its psychological and emotional part when it comes to decide the number of *qurbani* to each destination. For example, Turkey and Pakistan top the list of countries where the donations are sent. Turkey as a country of origin is especially paid attention in terms of helping to poverty areas,²³ which may be understandable given the fact that the IGMG is a Turkish-immigrant organization. However, the situation of Pakistan is interesting. Pakistan is important for two reasons according to Secretary-General of the IGMG, Oguz Ucuncu. First, historically there exists a strong brotherhood between Turkish and Pakistani societies. It goes back to the establishment of Turkey when Pakistani people sent their private collection to help Turkey's independence war. These historical ties are considered to be very important both in Turkish politics and Turkish-origin organizations. The IGMG's *Qurbani* project represents a continuation of this policy of *vefa* (a type of royalty) to Pakistani people. Second reason is that Pakistan has a large Muslim population and many of them live in severe poverty.

²⁰ Interview with Oguz Ucuncu, 12 October 2009.

²¹ Interview with Oguz Ucuncu, 12 October 2009.

²² *Vefa* is a Turkish verb and usually translated as *fidelity* and *loyalty*. I preferred to use the verb in its original version because none of the translations really explains what I want to say. Here a functionalist definition of the verb as a *concept* is intended to use: caring and concerning for the situations of the beloved ones and trying to help them whenever possible.

²³ Interview with Oguz Ucuncu, 12 October 2009.

The policy of *vefa* has also showed itself in times of crisis both in Turkey and Pakistan. For example, because of the severe economic crisis in Turkey in 2000-2001, the IGMG decided to send 1/3 of *qurbani* donations to Turkey in 2003. It was argued that as an organization, the IGMG should help to recover the influences of economic crisis, and the *Qurbani* project is an ideal way to share solidarity.²⁴ Similar *vefa* policy is observed when the earthquake took place in Pakistan in 2004; the IGMG allocated most of its *qurbani* donations in Pakistan. In addition to this, the IGMG has also built dormitory and school in earthquake area and sent emergency aid to Pakistan.

Germany and the *Qurbani* project: Drawing New Lines?

Piper (2009) argues that from an ideational perspective, the debate on the migration-development nexus is not a new in the policy-making world. However, in a political sense it is a new development because immigrants want to be recognized beyond their role as only agents. They want to be considered as partners in development and given more say in their host country political life. Such considerations are not articulated by the IGMG in relation to the *Qurbani* project. However, below, I examine possible ways of interaction and communications based on such project between the IGMG and the German authorities.

A Channel of Communication?

The IGMG is considered as 'the most responsive Turkish Islamic organization to state policies' due to its activities such as providing Islamic education and advocating the right to wear the headscarf in public schools (Yukleyen 2010:446; Amir-Moazami 2005). Furthermore, the IGMG is seen as a 'threat' to German society in the reports of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz-BfV). The BfV reports damage Milli Gorus's relations with German politicians and media, and create a situation in which the lack of communicative channels reinforces the distrust between the IGMG and the German authorities (Yukleyen 2010: 456). Mostly because of this, there is hardly any discussion, critic or commentary on the *Qurbani* project in German media locating it in a context of the IGMG and state relations. However, considering the lack of communication between German authorities and Muslims in Germany (and the IGMG), whether the *Qurbani* project as it stands would create a space for communication and collaboration may worth to investigate. If this is to be the case, there may be, at least, two ways of collaboration between the parties. One possible one is that whether Germany would be interested to list the projects of the IGMG, especially the *qurbani* one, as a possible contributor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

As immigrant NGOs are steadily growing in prominence, it is highly important to cooperation between governments and civil society organizations in order to combat poverty (Bebbington at all 2008). Through civil society participation, society does not feel excluded in achieving MDGs and creating awareness about the fight to poverty. They utilize independent voluntary efforts to promote their values and aspects of social, economic, or political development. Smith finds that in development and poverty reduction there are basically three legs: private, government, and citizen sectors. The citizen sector including NGOs hold comparative advantages in addressing poverty traps and so can play a central role in ending extreme poverty (Smith 2005).

²⁴ See "Kurban kampanyasi devam ediyor", *Milli Gorus & Perspektiv*e, Vol 9, No: 98, February 2003, p.7.

Similar voices emphasizing the importance of NGOs in implementing MDGs have also been raised by UN officials. In 2004, UN Special Ambassador for the MDGs, Erna Witoeler, told that ‘civil society groups and NGOs are the best to help governments get to message out about MDGs and to help them achieve the targets’. This is ‘because NGOs know more about the poor than governments. They work with the poor, while governments only work for the poor (quoted in Macan-Markar 2004). While Germany’s official development assistance was 7, 5 trillion dollars in 2004, it increased to 9.9 trillion in 2005.²⁵ Considering the amount of money that each year the IGMG spent for the *Qurbani* project which can be seen in Table 1, this endeavor cannot be underestimated in terms of its help to alleviate poverty worldwide.

A close analysis of Turkish immigrants shows that they underwent a deep transformation since 1980s and began to realize that their stay in Germany is not temporary. By contrast, they are more settled every year with the third generation (Sohler 2004). With this in mind, it would be more wise and rational for the long run if German authorities look at positive actions of Turkish migrant organizations and draw new line of communication with immigrants. For example, in the case of the *Qurbani* project, Germany may utilize it as another line of aid policy toward the Muslim world by supporting it. Berlin would openly claim that it is a money that earned in Germany, and is sent by German-Turks. As Germany face difficulties to gain grounds in the Islamic world due to its approach to the Palestinian-Israeli issue and immigrant problems, nothing could provide a better legitimacy than this.

Apart from this, the most important gain would come from domestic process through which new channels of communication could be opened between state and immigrant organizations. This certainly has utmost importance given the fact that the efforts of migrant organizations to support the integration of Turkish migrants into the German society have generally been ignored, and they are excluded in many cases from negotiations with the government directly (Sezgin 2008:81).

Second line of collaboration would be in implementation. When I asked to Secretary-General of the IGMG about this, his answer was a very clear cut: ‘if the issue is slaughtering animals, it does not create sympathy immediately’.²⁶ However, he emphasized that they strongly recommend to representatives to visit German embassies, wherever they go for the project. He has also pointed out that the overall (negative) German perspective on the IGMG is preventing possible cooperation. Nevertheless, there has been some cooperation with the German-origin humanitarian organizations in Africa and the organization called Together is born out as part of this cooperation. Those who invited to see the project in the ground such as historian and journalist Erhard Brunn has also shared positive experiences with the German public.²⁷

A Reason for Rejection?

It is mentioned above the IGMG has been under state observation as it is considered a ‘threat’ to Germany. Since 2008, the German authorities speed up their pressure on the

²⁵ http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/07_OECD_2005.pdf (20 December 2009).

²⁶ Interview with Oguz Ucuncu, 12 October 2009.

²⁷ Interview with Oguz Ucuncu, 12 October 2009.

IGMG legally. Since then, the IGMG offices have been searched four times and a list of accusation, rather than concrete evident (e.g. court decisions), has been made public.

In December 2009, just after the completion of the *Qurbani* project, the Cologne Public Prosecutor's Office has accused the IGMG with the accusation of fraud in *qurbani* donations.²⁸ In a press release, the IGMG responded that “the alleged embezzlement of *qurbani* donations is very serious and honor-breaking. This claim openly targets the image of IGMG and its credibility among Muslims. Popular searches accompanied by media and ‘storming for pressure’ have not, and will never, reached their aims and this is shown clearly with the support to the *qurbani* campaign and donations.” To show the credibility of itself and trust of donors, the IGMG advertised the number of the latest *Qurbani* project (in 2009), and argued that ‘had prosecutor and responsible fiscal authority looked at consigned photos, lists, and reports about those who accompanied and observed the project, they would know easily exact numbers about how many *qurbanis* slaughtered and distributed, and where’.²⁹

It is clear that the German authorities are not happy with the activities of the IGMG. It has been portrayed consistently as a dangerous and anti-integration organization in the media not by specific threats to the German social and political order, rather by fears and polarizations stemming largely from political and social conflicts within Turkey (Ewing 2003). Somewhat confirming this, each time accusations has been made, the IGMG has more strongly emphasised on their willingness to integrate into Germany, if assimilation is not a condition.³⁰ In the long run, whether the *Qurbani* project will be a reason for rejection of the IGMG by German authorities for communication and consultation is to be seen; but one thing is clear that the *Qurbani* project has implications beyond *only* being a *Qurbani* project. It helps to create social, religious and cultural benefits for Muslims immigrants in Germany by creating transnational links and identity; while providing economic and social benefit for the poor in many countries.

Conclusion

This article has explored the character, working method and effect of an immigrant Islamic NGO through its *qurbani* activities. The transnational character comes to the fore in its funding, the geographical scope of its coverage, the composition of its staff and its objectives, which are most often formulated in terms of *ummah* and enforcing Islamic identity.

Many argue that the situation of Muslim immigrants in Western European countries can be fully grasped only if the local political, social and economic conditions are taken into account (Scott 2007:9). So, for example, a nation’s policy for naturalizing immigrants plays a part in reception of Muslims; as opportunities to participate in political and economic life in the host country. From the perspective of immigrants in general and the IGMG in particular since 9/11 events, they are more interested in German domestic politics and establishing relations with the host country institutions. The response should be an

²⁸ <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4963247,00.html> (2 December 2009)

²⁹ “IGMG’ye yönelik iftira kampanyası boşa çıkacaktır” 3 December 2009,

<http://www.igmg.de/tr/teskilat/basin-aciklamalari/yazi/2009/12/03/igmg-ye-yoenelik-iftira-kampanyasi-bosa- cikacaktır.html> (4 December 2009).

³⁰ For example, the official monthly journal of IGMG, *Perspektif* (formerly known as *IGMG Perspektive*) urges its members to vote and participate in elections and use their citizenship rights. See Ucuncu 2009.

inclusive one utilizing and emphasizing the positive contributions of immigrants to find a better common ground between immigrants and state institutions.

At first sight, aid and the consciousness of *ummah* seems to be intimately interwoven in the *Qurbani* project. However, its implication for Muslim immigrants in Germany and Europe in terms of strengthening identity as Muslims and a feeling of accomplishing Islamic duty among Muslims deserve a special mention. Although it is planned and implemented by a religious motivation as *duty*, the *Qurbani* project has socio-political implications, and organizations that execute similar project can be seen as socio-political actors, using aid to enlarge *ummah* and transnational connection both in a moral and religious sense as well as in a geographical sense.

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