



## Tour-guiding as a pious place-making practice: The case of the Sehitlik Mosque, Berlin

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### ABSTRACT

The Sehitlik Mosque in Berlin, led by the second and third generations of ethnically Turkish Germans, has risen as an exemplar of public engagement through its tourist enterprise. Drawing from ethnographic research in this mosque, driven by questions on the potential social impacts of piety, I analyze how the tour becomes itself a pious place-making practice: an innovative way of “doing religion” for the post-migrant generations in Berlin. I center on how two key aspects of religious place-making in diaspora are accomplished through the tour: the management of difference and belonging, and the embodiment of faith. This research demonstrates the ways in which tourism in sacred spaces provides unique opportunities for tour guides to have agentive and transformative experiences.

### Introduction

“I am performing *jihad* right now!”

This proclamation silences the room, a small space perched above the Sehitlik Mosque in Berlin, where non-Muslim neighborhood residents sip Turkish black tea following their tour of the site. Babbling voices stop mid-sentence, with cups removed in sync from lips. Eyes opened wide, a middle-aged woman seated beside the tour guide, Dervis<sup>1</sup> (male, 35) startles, visibly shaken. Dervis continues without pause:

*Jihad* is to be kind while others are attacking you for your beliefs. It is an ongoing endeavor. You can fight when your life is on the line, just as you can here in the German law (*verteidigungsrecht*). This is laid out in the Qur’an. Today, *jihad* is misused, as an ideology, that we are always at war... But this right here [he gestures to the mosque tourists] is *jihad* too.<sup>2</sup>

At the Sehitlik Mosque in Berlin, tour guides break down assumptions about Islam through active engagement with Islamic space, leading shoeless tourists through a crash course in the religion’s theology, history, and architecture. They see this as a “calling”, a form of practicing an authentic Islam, and a means to assert belonging in the face of deep stereotypes dominating public perceptions of Islam in Europe, today. During these twice-daily tours, school children hold turquoise prayer beads in their hands, police officers invited to run their fingers along the large ostrich eggs inscribed into the interior of the mosque. Today, curious neighborhood residents sit on mosque grounds, tipping tea glasses with Muslims, side-by-side. Dervis encourages those touring the mosque to speak

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<sup>1</sup> All names and identifying information have been changed.

<sup>2</sup> As scholars of Islam attest, “Islam is represented in the west as a ‘*jihad* culture’”, in which *jihad* (literal translation, “struggling or striving”) has become exclusively equated with a culture of violence (El Hamel and Chouki, 2002: 296; Said, 1997; Robinson, 2009).

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their minds, raising common concerns (e.g. over radicalism and gender inequalities) related to the growing Muslim populace in Germany. Yet they are concurrently challenged in their preconceptions and, according to Dervis, misconceptions of Islam, whether of gender disparities, ties to terror, or the exclusively violent notions of *jihad* that proliferate in the media. The tour becomes a place-making practice in which Muslim Berliners seek to overcome difference without compromising piety.

Nearly every day of the year, professionally-trained guides lead tours that create an open space for cross-cultural exchange within this physically representative religious edifice in the German capital. Exploring this space in its unique role as a tourist site demonstrates the interlinked experiences of tourists and tour guides, as tourists seek to access an “authentic” Islam and Muslim Berliners to both embody and express piety, an “authentic religious subjecthood” (Avishai, 2008: 409). These lived encounters in which both grapple for an authentic rendering of Islam offer tour guides the opportunity to deconstruct stereotypes about Muslims in Germany as they lead outsiders through the space of the mosque. At the same time, they provide an opportunity for tour guides to enact piety, perceiving tours as *jihad* (defined by my interview subjects as “a spiritual struggle in the name of God”), in the tradition of the *Sunnah* (the ways—both sayings and doings—of the Prophet Muhammad) and even “more important than prayer” (Dervis). These tours thus raise questions about tour guiding as a site for the transformation of piety.

Piety is the way in which religious identity is embodied and expressed. It is a dynamic state of being in the world, as a “semi-conscious, self-authoring project” based on the “search for authentic religious subjecthood” (Avishai, 2008: 409, 413). The actions of the believer, a central narrative in the Qur’an, are a fundamental aspect of piety in Islam; “Indeed, mankind is in loss, Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.” (Q 103:2-3). The practice of piety in the everyday life of Muslim Berliners, “doing religion”, entails myriad embodiments—what Winchester, (2008: 1753, 17558) terms “a Muslim moral habitus” (“a thoroughly embodied and practical form of moral subjectivity”)—and social interactions (Avishai, 2008; Jouili, 2015). By providing tours of the mosque, guides move beyond the five pillars of Islam through both “rehearsed” and “spontaneous” acts (Mahmood, 2001: 833). In what Charles Taylor (2007) calls a “secular age”, however, including increased sentiments of disenchantment and dislocation from tradition, new conceptualizations of identity and belonging emerge through direct engagement with difference. By invoking and re-appropriating politically-loaded terms like “*jihad*”, guides confront deep-seated stereotypes while explicitly rooting their tours in Islamic discourse, ethics, and tradition.

Tour are thus an opening through which Muslim tour guides can show non-Muslims what Islam “really is”, defining Islam on their own literal and metaphorical grounds, distancing themselves from dominant associations with terror and threat while actively fortifying religious identities. There exists a “constitutive relationship between action and embodiment” in Islam (Mahmood, 2001: 224). As in Mahmood’s (2001: 837) work on the women’s piety movement in Egyptian mosques, the body of the Sehlik Mosque guide here emerges “as a tool or developable means through which certain kinds of ethical and moral capacities are attained.” And the mosque—neither private nor public, but rather a civic space located between these two realms—becomes the literal grounds on which tour guides enact these “capacities” both for themselves and for tourists, in an act of concurrently making place and self.

“Religion begins—and ends—with bodies” (Tweed, 2006: 98). And, Tweed, (2006: 98, 101) argues, “bodies cross and dwell”; that is, they both move across new horizons, as “pathways to the wider universe” and settle in new places, not least of all through the migrations that proliferate in a globalized world. Just as places are left by the migrant body in search of opportunities, if not survival, they are also made by the migrant/post-migrant body in diaspora. Vasquez and Knott, (2014) identify embodied performance, the spatial management of difference and belonging, and multiple embedding across networked spaces as the three key dimensions of diasporic religious place-making. In this article, I focus on the first two dimensions—embodied performance and the spatial management of difference and belonging—as they emerge at the urban tourist site of the Sehlik Mosque. On the one hand, religious place-making vis a vis embodiment is accomplished through acts of representing religiosity through the body, e.g. by donning symbols or in outward facing performances. On the other, minorities in diaspora “draw from their religious resources” to overcome difference (Vasquez and Knott, 2014: 326).

The Sehlik Mosque is a relatively new lived religious space and therefore invites visitors into the daily life of a Muslim community currently practicing Islam. Its founders, Sunni Muslims from Turkey, migrated as guestworkers in the 1960s and 1970s (among a larger Turkish populace including significant Alevi and atheist/agnostic populaces). They are seen to belong to “mainstream Turkish Islam”, as Sehlik is a Turkish-Muslim Religious Union (DITIB, *Diyanet İşleri Türk-Islam Birliği*) mosque and therefore directly linked to the Turkish state through its Presidency of Religious Affairs (Castles, 2006; Allievi, 2009). The tour guides who are the subject of this article are the children and grandchildren of these migrants—i.e. second and third generation Turkish German Muslims.

The Sehlik Mosque tourist enterprise importantly diverges from others in Europe, such as the Great Mezquita of Cordoba or long-present mosques in Bosnia, engaged as historical sites of Islam on the continent or remnants of previously successful multicultural societies (Monteiro, 2011; Grodach, 2002). While Islam has long been present in Europe, deliberations over its place and form in Germany today relate specifically to contemporary guestworker migrations. The ethnic Turkish populace is the largest minority in Germany, but even half a century after the initial wave of migration remains highly stigmatized, contrasted with *bio-deutsche* (biological Germans) and *Leitkultur* (leading culture) (Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2012). The inclusion of Muslims in Germany remains unresolved, with foremost politicians disagreeing on whether or not Islam belongs at all (Jonker, 2005; Droeber, 2018). Ongoing debates over the belonging of Islam, and Muslims, are not exclusive to Germany, however, but reverberating across the continent, having recently deepened in the face of large-scale refugee migration and growing right-wing nationalisms (Vorländer, et al. 2018).

## Post-migrant Muslim youth and the mosque tour

European mosque communities are highly securitized and targeted bodies in larger debates over religion and belonging (Khawaja and Line, 2009; Kaya, 2009). It is therefore not surprising that Europe has witnessed astounding growth in Islamic youth organizations aimed at cultural engagement over the past decade. These ascend educational initiatives that seek to teach mainstream society the “basics” of Islam. Instead, youth have focused on dismantling stereotypes while “reviving” religion as a primary identity, taking an authoritative stance on Islam’s compatibility with Europe (Jacobsen, 2005; Street, 2016; Herding, 2013).

From the poets of i-SLAM, who foster the sociopolitical engagement of European Muslim youth, to the senate-supported JUMA (Young, Muslim and Active) Project, combining activism and political participation among young Muslims, such activity can be seen in numerous innovative social spheres in Germany (Teichelmann, 2013; JUMA Projekt, 2016). As the second and third generations come of age, crossing the threshold into young adulthood, however, the mosque remains an important space for the expression of piety (Mahmood, 2008; Allievi, 2009). Over the past decade, youth have increasingly organized in new ways inside of the mosque—developing dialogue initiatives, educational opportunities and creative ways of engaging mainstream society.

This article centers on the last of these outreach developments, the mosque tour, as a form of cultural tourism. I examine the mosque tour not as a commodity or marketing technique, but instead as a pious place-making practice among Muslims in contemporary Berlin, accomplished through managing difference and belonging, and the embodiment of faith. Through daily tours, Sehlik’s youth contest associations of Islam with threat, demonstrating its, and thereby their own, harmony with German society. In his study of American converts to Islam, Winchester (2008: 1755) argues that embodied practices, such as the five pillars of Islam, transform individuals’ moral habitus”, allowing them to become “good Muslims”. The Sehlik tour enterprise takes this process one step further, transforming the moral habitus—how to be a “good Muslim”—through the tour itself. Guiding tours therefore provides a unique opportunity for young Muslims to concurrently translate and reinterpret their piety in a lived sacred space (Winchester, 2008). The tour is also a deeply agentive moment for a minority group that faces high levels of marginalization in the public sphere—including discrimination in schools, housing, and employment (Luciak, 2004; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2006; Open Society Institute, 2010).

Youth have been at the forefront of shaping creative forms of pious expression in Muslim communities in diaspora, specifically in Europe and the United States (Salvatore, 2004). Khabeer (2007) argues that hip-hop provides an innovative means to both preserve and practice Muslim identity, as well as teach non-Muslims about the faith. Jouili (2014: 1079) explores the domains of music and performative arts in France to track trends in publicly-visible “pious self-cultivation” among Muslim youth. Tour guides at Sehlik focus on “pious self-cultivation” by expanding “the moral and social order” of the representative mosque beyond its traditional role to manage difference and belonging in a diasporic setting (Jouili, 2014: 1079; Salvatore, 2016: 7; Vasquez and Knott, 2014). The central goal of these tours sits at the intersection of place-making and piety, as the guides have a shared aim: to make a place for German Muslims in sociocultural life (managing difference) without comprising religiosity (embodying faith).

### State of the field

Hosting regular tours in a lived religious space presents unique challenges. It requires an understanding of the experience of the tour from both sides, as the tourist and the religious community concurrently engage with the site in different, at times overlapping or conflicting, ways. While underdeveloped in terms of Islamic space, the complexity of sacred sites has emerged in analyses of tourism. Through cathedral tourism in England, Winton and Gasson (1996: 172) and Williams, Francis, Robbins, and Annis (2007) consider the “commercialisation of heritage” and the contending experiences of pilgrim or “secular” tourist at these sites. Brayley (2010) divides visitors (in this case to the Latter-Day Saints sacred site of Palmyra, New York) into categories of “pilgrims” or “curious onlookers”; and Shackley (2001) analyzes the varied motivations for visits to sacred sites, including worship, nostalgia, and education. Olsen (2009) explores the Temple Square in Salt Lake City as a space where individual and group identities emerge.

The role of tour guides in both sacred and non-sacred sites is largely understood as linked to site management through performance (Fine and Speer, 1985; Edensor, 2000; Olsen, 2012). This results in an exclusive focus on the effect of tours vis a vis the religious tourist (e.g. LDS to Palmyra, Muslims to Mecca and Medina) or tours as an opportunity for emotional transformation among tourists but not tour guides (e.g. at slave museums in the American South) (Brayley, 2010; Henderson, 2011; Modlin, Alderman, & Gentry, 2011). Tourism research also perceives tours to sacred sites by non-coreligionists as interrupting or undermining experiences of sacredness—“strangers within our gates” (Olsen, 2009: 1). Griffiths (2011), for example, exposes the discomfort of churchgoers to observance by tourists, despite overall support of their visits to Australian cathedrals. The limited scholarship focused on the agentive experience of tour-guiding pays heed to the political, but not the ethical, motivations of the guide in contested cultural milieu, overlooking the transformation of moral subjectivity through this act (Hercebrgs, 2012; Dahles, 2002).

This article pioneers by theorizing tours of a traditional, albeit diasporic, religious space—the Sehlik Mosque in Berlin—as an innovative and generative pious place-making practice for the tour guides, themselves. This is a process of “self-authoring” a “Muslim moral habitus” through “alternative narratives of observance” that emerge in the form of a mosque tour (Winchester, 2008; Avishai, 2008: 413, 419). Specifically, as noted above, I explore two key aspects of religious place-making in diaspora accomplished through the tour: 1) the management of difference and belonging, and 2) the embodiment of faith (Vasquez and Knott, 2014).

### Study methods

The primary method of data collection for this article was ethnographic research, through regular attendance at the Sehlik

Mosque over twenty-six months, beginning in May 2013 and ending in July 2015, including mosque tours, German language sermons, Qur'an lessons, and prayers. This entailed both participant observation and community participation, in an attempt to understand “the culture that locates experience” in everyday life (Willis and Trondman, 2002: 305; Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003). I was guided by questions on if, and how, piety influences social life in diasporic Muslim communities in European cities; and the role of second and third generation Muslims in urban religious communities. I aimed, through this research, to trace the agency of Muslim collectivities in contexts of marginalization to impact social life. To this end, I participated in daily activities at the mosque. I also attended weekly lessons on Islam held in German on Wednesday evenings and Qur'anic recitation classes on Saturday afternoons. The majority of my interactions were in German and Turkish, with a few in English, both when American students visited the mosque (on two occasions) and when mosque youth spoke English fluently and preferred to converse in that language.

Through my ethnographic approach, I focused on gaining an in-depth, detailed understanding of the social structures within a single mosque site—both the first German mosque to institutionalize daily mosque tours and that with the highest number of tours per year. I sought at once to capture ordinary experience and “magnified moments” (e.g. of contention or debate) of life within the mosque (Hochschild, 1994: 4). While I took formal education classes on Islam in graduate school and in multiple European Islamic institutions, throughout my ethnographic research I relied heavily on how self-identifying community members at the mosque described their beliefs and pious practices as well as my own observations of patterns within these descriptions and practices. I operated from the role of an ethnographic “particularizer”, seeking to understand the specific experiences, underlying motivations and sense-making of a single community in a discrete period of time (Spickard et al., 2002).

As a Jewish American woman, I was recognized as an outsider to the Sehlikli community on multiple counts, albeit increasingly included over time in activities because I actively participated in all aspects of daily life. Additionally, my own religious and cultural background shaped the ways in which I understand theologically-motivated behaviors as well as how the community viewed both me and my research project (Belhassen, 2012). My positioning facilitated my engagement in specific activities (e.g. women's recitation classes) and prevented it in others (e.g. men's learning circles).

I attended mosque tours throughout my research: in the early stages, before many people knew me at the mosque; in the middle stages, when I was a regular presence; and in the latter stages, when the community had adjusted to my presence. I asked tour guides in advance if I could attend their tours. In total, I attended fifteen tours with four different tour guides (two led in English and thirteen in German) and observed over thirty additional tours at the mosque. On these tours, I spoke with tour groups, asking them to reflect on their perceptions of the mosque, Muslims, and Islam both prior to, and following, the tours. I also undertook fifty anonymous semi-structured interviews with mosque constituents, visitors, and tour guides. This article focuses specifically on my participation in, and observation of, tours, including interactions with tour guides and tourists, as well as semi-structured interviews with ten youth leaders, who currently work (6) or previously worked (4) as tour guides in the mosque.

I transcribed all interviews and analyzed the data (both interview transcriptions and fieldnotes) with Nvivo qualitative coding software, organizing the data across themes that emerged through an inductive approach. It is important to note that the data cannot be generalized beyond the Sehlikli Mosque, although similar phenomena may be occurring in other mosques in Germany and beyond.

### *The Sehlikli Mosque as a diasporic site*

Mosques are a central community space in Sunni Islam—an arena for prayer, holiday celebrations, education, psychological support, and outreach (Esposito, 2002). Mosques in Europe are also one of the most contested religious symbols, lasting markers on the physical landscape laid in cement and stone. In Germany, purpose-built representative mosques have only proliferated since the turn of the 21st century, emerging as tens of thousands of Turkish guestworkers settled in Germany and bore children who are today largely citizens of the German state (Schmetkamp, 2007). In the German context, however, most mosques maintain direct linkages to Turkey to this day, and are thereby situated in transnational social fields. This is the case for Sehlikli, as it is a DITIB mosque, with both imam and board structure originating from Turkey.

While located in central Berlin, the Prussian authorities gifted the piece of land on which Sehlikli stands to the Ottoman Empire in 1798 (Sehlikli Camii, 2016). Reaching towards the sky on the broad Neukölln Columbiadamm Boulevard, the traditional Ottoman structure of a grand white dome and twin minarets marks the landscape of Berlin. The Sehlikli Camii, in English *Mosque of the Martyrs*, stands in a working-class neighborhood, home to many of the city's Turkish guestworkers in the late 20th century and a combination of ethnic Turks, ethnic Arabs, Jewish migrants, and increasingly students, today. As a physically representative mosque, it has become an exemplar of Muslim presence in a country long denying its migration status but admittedly home to over 4.3 million Muslims of the first, second, third, and now fourth generations (Brenner, 2015).

Architecturally designed by Muharrem Hilmi Senalp from Turkey, the building of the mosque was carried out under the supervision of Berlin architect Tarkan Akarsu from 1999 to 2004. Its name hails from physical positioning at the burial place of Turkish embassy employees gifted to the Ottoman Empire by the Prussian State (beginning in the 18th century) and later Turkish soldiers who died in World War I (Sehlikli Camii, 2016). The architecture reflects the 16th and 17th century design of Ottoman Empire era mosques, such as the famous Sultan Ahmed (“blue”) Mosque of Istanbul.

Turkish influences on the mosque abound, including the Turkish architect, renowned calligraphy artist (Hamid Aytac) and specialized workers who temporarily migrated from Turkey to participate both in the initial design and implementation of these plans. Today, one of course witnesses Turkish cultural engagement with the mosque on an everyday basis. This includes first-generation ethnically Turkish men drinking tea inside of the small tearoom; women undertaking Qur'an classes taught in Turkish; and individuals participating in prayers followed by a Turkish imam's sermon in Turkish. Upon closer examination, however, the mosque as a lived space is not only a site for its majority ethnic Turkish constituents to participate in religious rituals and social events, but

also provides bilingual lectures on depression, weekly German sermons for both Muslims and non-Muslims, and twice-daily tours. Itself expressive of the Islamic, Turkish, German, and European cultures, the Sehlik Mosque has become both a material and symbolic expression of the overlapping identities that emerge in diasporic life.

### *Managing difference and belonging*

The Sehlik Mosque tour began as an informal enterprise more than a decade ago, before the mosque's completion in 2001. In 2008, Sehlik's second and third generation youth took over this task—as a handful of young volunteers providing tours to those who approached the mosque with interest, learning of the opportunity through word of mouth. As demand rapidly grew, Sehlik implemented an in-depth training process for guides and an interactive webpage for interested parties to sign up for tours.<sup>3</sup> Demand has increased to the point that leadership now limit access to two tour-groups per day, seven days per week.

A highly-educated, German-born Muslim youth lead the tours at Sehlik today. As a DITIB leader explains to me over coffee, “the new generation has marked that they can't just stay in the mosque, but also have to open into general society” (Bera, male, 31). This has, at the same time, entailed opening the mosque for society writ large. To effectively bridge and forge a place for themselves in broader society, tour guides portray an Islam fused with German values and similar to the other Abrahamic traditions. Guides utilize both the semantic, providing explanations of, and hands-on experience with, the material space of the mosque to this end. Tours begin with the gathering of participants outside of the mosque, where tourists do small talk with preconceptions. The vast majority have never visited a mosque—be they students, elderly, political representatives, or police officers, Germans, other Europeans, or Americans.

#### *Building bridges: “We are like you”*

Tour guides at Sehlik evidence the “natural” unity of Islam and liberal citizenship by forging linkages to contemporary democratic ideals (for instance, highlighting the role of female leaders, human rights initiatives, and a democratically-elected mosque board). They allow outsiders to experience this version of Islam, creating bridges between groups not traditionally in contact from across and beyond German society with the mosque. They do this by employing the foundational and authoritative sources of the faith: the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad. Their hope is that mosque tourists will leave changed, transforming views of Islam as “other”, if not dangerously deviant, into feelings of compatriotism and unity. In the words of a tour guide, Yusuf (21, male):

When we started tours here, our motto was not to discuss with people, or not to justify anything, or not to debate. Our intention is to build bridges... building bridges is the most important thing, to have a connection, a healthy connection, and to live in peace. Islam means peace. And that's why this is our intention.

Similarly, mosque teacher, Aria (female, 24) reflects, “As you see, we are very tolerant, open, we always want to show this to the outside. To say ‘we are like you, so to say. We can live together with one another.’ That is what we show...I am everything, I have a piece in me from all.”

Regardless of its enduring, deep linkages to Turkey, the Sehlik Mosque is physically located in the German nation-state. It is thus concurrently situated within, and affected by, a realm of discourse on German civic ideals. These ideals include equality, freedom, human rights, rule of law, and environmental concern, among others. Each tour guide attempts to deconstruct damaging associations with Islam that make it appear alien to Europe by demonstrating these ideals as not only compatible with, but in fact inherent to, Islam. They forge empathy by illustrating how Islam is not only compatible with—but itself demonstrative of—central German civic ideals, such as openness, equality, and diversity, and thereby accessible to outsiders (Modlin et al., 2011).

German-Islamic harmony is first and foremost stressed through direct Qur'anic quotation upon entering the doors of the mosque. For example, the following quotations are used to explain respect for diversity in Islam at the onset of most tours, as constituents seat themselves on the carpeted floor.

“One day, We shall make the mountains move, and you will see the earth as an open plain. We shall gather all people together, leaving no one.” [Sure 186, Verse 48, Qur'an]

“People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another.” [Sure 49, Verse 13 Qur'an]<sup>4</sup>

Guides also invoke strong German environmentalist concerns (as “the Greenest Nation”), with claims that “the whole world is a mosque” and the mosque itself, a smaller replica of the globe that must be cared for and preserved (Uekotter, 2014). They engage mosque tourists in this exercise, asking them to locate representations of the environment in the mosque.

Your task. Look around—do you see anything that makes you think of the world outside... Now use your imagination...the carpets are seas, the blue and white decor the heaven and clouds. The gold chandelier in the middle of the room, the sun... What would happen to this mosque if I were to cut down all the trees here? [the pillars]. It would collapse. What would happen if we cut all of the trees in the world? It would fall apart. You take off your shoes, sit, are respectful—but this is a copy—there are no real rivers,

<sup>3</sup> The webpage is: [http://sehlik-moschee.de/?page\\_id=271](http://sehlik-moschee.de/?page_id=271).

<sup>4</sup> For Qur'anic citation, *The Qur'an*, translated by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2004) is used.

no real trees, and when I treat this well, then I also have to treat the true trees, the true lakes, the true world with respect. And if I don't do this, I am not serious. Muslims here answered life's questions through architecture. -Yusuf

Despite highlighting the civic ideals of broader German society in their tours, guides at no point break with a rootedness in their religious tradition. Rather, they employ verified Islamic sources that evidence latent commonalities between German civic ideals and Muslim ethics.

#### *Overcoming discomfort: Constructing affect and diversion in the tour*

Since most of the individuals who attend mosque tours are entering a purpose-built, representative mosque in Germany for the first time, this experience is often one of notable discomfort. In order to overcome the reticence of individuals who feel insecure in their engagement with the mosque, guides not only preach openness but encourage tourists to approach the mosque as an accessible, shared space: to “feel the feel of carpets underneath your feet”, “walk under its archways”, “touch prayer beads”, listen to the “sound of birds flying through the room” or the “call to prayer with intent.” “Hold this in your hands”, “*the mosque is a space open to everybody.*” Through multiple sensory experiences, guides encourage tourists to “feel the mosque”—forging affect if not empathy. The same university student who expressed discomfort with the “conservative” nature of the mosque at the onset of this paper exited *Sehitlik* with a changed perspective: “I didn't expect it to be so colorful, beautiful. It's much more inviting than I expected, with everyone sharing the space.” Another interjects, “It was beautiful...just wow. This was very family-style, the feeling of being really inside. I felt really at home. Maybe it was the warm carpet under our socks.”

An equally important aspect of overcoming discomfort in the tours is diversion. When parallels between Islam and German civic ideals cannot be easily drawn, tour guides divert attention from perceived problematic aspects of Islam (e.g. gender separation) to its idealistic underpinnings (e.g. of human equality) that act as ethics-based bridges between “the Muslim” and “the mainstream”. When asked about gender division within the space of the mosque, mosque tour guide Dervis discusses how women and men pray separately. “Since you are shoulder to shoulder when you pray and you want this to be an exclusively spiritual experience. Also, women and men might feel uncomfortable and ashamed if the opposite sex is watching them kneel, bend forward etc.” Dervis then diverts the conversation to the equality bestowed by prayer, as it “an incredible opportunity to be neighbors with a millionaire, with a black man and a white.”

Such diversion again occurs on an afternoon tour led by Yusuf with American college students. After Yusuf explains the respect for plurality in Islam, the group's organizer asks, “How can we be divided into two categories of believers and non-believers if Islam welcomes diversity?” Yusuf, responds by citing a hadith (saying of the Prophet Muhammad) that stresses equality:

*Kafir* does not mean unbeliever but “those who cover something up.” Those who don't believe, how can I categorize them? I don't know people from the inside. Even the Prophet Muhammad was judged because he ate at the same table as black people. But in prayer, everybody stands next to each other, shoulder-to-shoulder and are not different. Everybody has the right, rich or poor, young or old, Indian or Spanish—everybody has the right to stand anywhere. If you are the poorest man or king of the world you have the right to stand anywhere...it reflects the meaning of the mosque, to be nose-to-nose, to be equal.

When faced with difficult questions, tour guides also list the historic successes of Muslim communities, such as including often-excluded groups, underscoring the inherent importance of equality to Islam. On one tour I attend, a man next to the tour guide, Aycan (male, 32) asks about homosexuality. Aycan immediately responds by noting the countries in which homosexuality is (somewhat) accepted. “There are now some Muslim institutions in Turkey and Iran for this. And in Indonesia it is officially allowed, a *fatwah* was passed to allow homosexuality...There are theologian homosexuals, and in South Africa there is a congress of homosexual Muslims.”

#### *From Abraham to today: Locating Christianity and Judaism in the mosque*

Finally, to evince the rootedness of the mosque and Islam, more broadly, in Germany, tour guides draw parallels with Christianity (and at times, Judaism), a key historical and many argue, present-day, normative cultural structure throughout the country. On all of tours that I attend, including the Day of the Open Mosque, guides highlight the Christian origins of the dome structure, as suggesting connections to a higher place and higher being. They reference prayer beads held in their hands, passed around the circle of visitors, as similar to a rosary. They note the importance of Jesus to Muslims; and the long line of prophets that include many important Judeo-Christian figures (prophets noted during tours—Moses, Abraham, Joseph, Jesus—are always easily recognizable Biblical figures). One tour guide, Aycan, even explains on all of his tours that the word *Allah* is used by Christians in Muslim-majority societies when they speak of God, e.g. in Egypt, where Coptic Christians too call on *Allah* in their prayers. In his tours, Yusuf centers on connections to Judaism, as he describes the physical layout and material symbols within the mosque.

You won't find any traditional mosques without the Star of David—even in Russia directly above the *mihrab*. In the village of my mother [in Turkey], there is the first verse of the Qur'an and under it the Star of David. 200, or 150 years ago if you had a Star of David around your neck, they thought you were Muslim, not Jewish. You will find them in every traditional mosque.

On multiple occasions, those touring the mosque join the discussion by articulating their own parallels between (the other) Islam and (the familiar) Christianity. On a neighborhood tour, one woman cites the crusades “as proof that not only Muslims, but also Christians have misused and employed violence for political means.” A young man in worn-out khakis, at the mention of Jesus, claims he was also the “second most important prophet for Islam...not the same, but still majorly important.”

Discussions drawing from the Abrahamic traditions do not always undermine perceptions of difference. On an early autumn evening in 2013, a particularly provocative guest, an old man from the mosque's Schillerkiez neighborhood, insists on discussing

suicide bombers. This evokes a conversation demonstrative of the tensions inherent in drawing such parallels. “What religion allows you to strap bombs to your body and [blow] other people up?”, he asks. The tour guide answers “no religion” and many voices in the room respond in unison, “great answer!” A middle-aged woman in a tan trench-coat interrupts, explaining that other religions, including Christianity, have “also used violence” and that “danger lies in all forms of radicalism”. A man, about 40, in old jeans and a ragged button-down shirt, seated next to the mosque leader responds defensively, “but that was a different time. Christians don’t do that anymore!”

#### *Embodiment of faith: Touring as a devotional act*

Tours conclude with encouragement to keep learning about Islam and a reiteration that Sehitlik’s tour guides are open to continued dialogue and exchange. Yusuf calls on the visitors as they exit the mosque to build on their knowledge about Islam. Again, employing the hadith literature, he smiles widely and says: “The Prophet Muhammad may peace be upon him, said that ‘seeking knowledge is an obligation for everybody, from the cradle to the grave.’” Yusuf later describes his *duty* as a Muslim as not only seeking, but imparting knowledge.

On their tours, guides consistently note that mosques were, in fact, the first universities. In the words of Aida (female, 20), a young community organizer often found reading in the mosque: “In Islam, you learn that once you know the Qur’an, once you really know it, it is *your obligation* to teach it the best that you can.” Piety motivates the assumption of the role of tour guide and the tour becomes itself a way to express piety. “As a tour guide, one has to think about, reflect on oneself” (Nimet, tour guide, female, 24). Tuba (tour guide, female, 29), explicitly nominalizes tours a community “responsibility”, “*Sunnah*” and “an opportunity” from God.

We would be stupid if we did not take this opportunity of exchange, or wouldn’t we? An opportunity that God offers us, in sending people to the front door! When we suffer inequality and discrimination as Muslims in Germany, this also has to do with the fact that we leave similar opportunities untapped. We are the ones who have this responsibility... In our training, we learn from mosque leaders: community work is relationship work. What will be recalled from the mosque visit is not the definition of “*zakat*” [prayer], but the emotions that you feel when you visit. And that alone is a community in our hands... Let us shine, especially in our mosques, where we act as believers and represent our faith - It’s *Sunnah!*

#### *Being better Muslims*

Touring as an embodied devotional act, in which believers become “better Muslims”, is perhaps best illustrated by the subsequent words of Tuba in a commentary posted on a social media site following one of the tours she leads at Sehitlik in autumn 2013. Here she illuminates the responsibility of Muslims to teach those interested in Islam, gently and without judgment:

Whoever enters a mosque, takes off their shoes, because there is usually a carpet that must remain pure and clean, as the faithful touch it with their faces during prayer. This makes sense to us, and Muslim children grow into it naturally. And then there are people who are not Muslims. They were never in a mosque, do not know how Muslims pray, how they cover and how they should dress. They are insecure, sometimes anxious. If a man decides to visit a mosque, I have great respect for his openness, his interest and his courage. It is not always easy to decide to meet a stranger. Hand to your heart: how many of us dare to do that?

Sehitlik’s tour guides act as direct conduits of public engagement, educators, and as the point of first contact for many, the face to the space of the mosque. While touring becomes an explicitly pious practice, it concurrently guides both Muslims and mainstream society to better integrate Islam into Germany. As explained by Ali (male, 38), one of the first to give tours at Sehitlik:

People change their opinions based on contact. I would see tours as a result of the Muslim world coming into the spotlight after 9/11. Give people a chance to see how Muslim life is, what Muslim prayer rituals mean... I know from Sehitlik they wanted to have better security after the attacks [on the mosque] and the politicians kept saying to them again and again, “but we also need you to open up to the wider community, to the society, engage. If you want this to become a public space then you have to make it available to the public.” Mosque tours and open days of the mosque are also attempts to open to the public, engage with the public.

Tour guides consistently note over my 2.5 years of research in this mosque how this responsibility teaches them to be “good” or “better” Muslims as they bridge the multiple publics to which they belong. One must remember that these guides face the challenge of bridging supposedly incompatible identities: as young German citizens, ethnic minorities, and unapologetic Muslims. Tours are therefore an agentive means of “stand[ing] for something in Germany” as the guides integrate multiple cultures into their understandings of both self and social space.

The goal is also a young Muslim community to bring to life here, through good teaching, mosque tours. To stand for something in Germany. That’s why we have built this all over the years, so that they can walk in our footsteps and say, “Wow this can always be bigger.” That is *the idea* of this mosque. Then it becomes a personal place, not a dead building. –Ali, mosque leader, male, 39

By invoking shared values through examples found within their religious tradition, these tour guides make the mosque, and thereby a specific vision of what it means to live as devout Muslims in Germany, increasingly accessible to both themselves and the broader public. The mosque tour thereby becomes not simply a performance for outsiders, but an innovative, pious place-making practice.

### *Piety in conflict: Innovation and its discontents*

“When I see this place, it reminds me of Turkey. On Fridays, when a specific supplication is performed, I am transported to Turkey. When I enter this place, I find I am transported to Turkey.” –Ayse, mosque teacher, female, 85.

If one was to simply attend mosque tours and follow media coverage on this mosque, it would appear that Sehitlik has built itself the best of public reputations. This began with these now-professionalized tours and grew into regular German-language events addressing pressing societal questions—e.g. anti-radicalism workshops, psychology talks, and hosting the avant-garde Salaam-Shalom (Muslim-Jewish) Initiative. Yet the media and the tours only reveal part of a layered story, made up of multiple histories, generations, and selves. Despite the inroads (bridges built, friendships forged, stereotypes challenged if not dismantled) made through such tours, bringing the public into the mosque’s everyday has also led to a disruption of spiritual life for the first generation. In creating a space for outsider exposure to Islam, tour guides who view tours as a pious practice may undermine the transcendental purpose of the mosque for the first generation, who do not. This reveals not only a tension, but reveals itself in a generational split, a struggle over place, identity, and power within a group long disempowered outside of their religious community (Asad, 2003; Jouili, 2015). It suggests that the pious practices of the first-generation conflict with the pious practices of those born and raised in Germany: while one journey across borders ended in the building of the mosque, the other has only just begun.

There are elders. They come in their free time, it’s typical. For them the mosque is a place of quiet, a place of peace, but we interrupt this sometimes, this peace. The older people, we had asked by vote “What bothers you? Do we do too many tours?” For some, some said, “Yes, sometimes it is too much, when the media is there and we’re praying and that the prayer and the preaching should not be interrupted” ...Most have worries when, for example, people don’t know and then enter the mosque with shoes or are too lightly dressed. These are things we hear from the elders always; we need to be careful of them: shoes, light clothing and how they sit in the mosque. –Dervis

Despite increasing dominance by young tour guides determined to live and portray fusion between Islam and mainstream German society, the first generation continues to utilize the mosque as a spiritual space exclusive to Muslims. They avidly complain about the prevalence of “tours that interrupt prayer”; “women who enter without headscarves”; and educational “events that disturb” their quiet recitation of the Qur’an. Tours therefore reveal the space of the mosque and the practice of Islam as contested not only for insiders versus outsiders, Muslims and non-Muslims in Germany, but also *within* the Muslim community itself.

### Conclusions

“We look to our buildings to hold us.” –Alain de Botton

The snippets of mosque tours in this article show how guiding has become a pious place-making practice in which young guides at once manage difference and belonging, while embodying this public-facing role as a devotional act (West, 2008). This requires a combination of the semantic, through storytelling (specifically citing the Qur’an, and *Sunnah*) and the material, as they guide visitors through the space and symbols of the mosque; with participants seated in a circle in which they can openly ask questions, no matter how provocative. “We have purposeful provokers”, mosque guide Dervis laments, “but I answer their questions even if they ask them 100 times.” What results is an almost seamless capacity to deconstruct negative perceptions while concurrently constructing perceivable bridges between Muslim life and the mainstream.

The success of this tour strategy is remarkable, as on-the-ground encounters have translated into mass media coverage, come to attract social and political celebrities, and thereby forged the potential to influence society’s perceptions of Islam on a far larger scale (Peter, 2006: 105). At the same time, tours at the Sehitlik Mosque have developed beyond staged or scripted experiences aimed exclusively at outsiders, becoming an immersive practice of the self that contributes to new understandings of moral life (Winchester, 2008). I have herein argued that these mosque tours have the capacity to challenge not only mainstream essentialisms, but also the ways in which post-migrant Muslims internalize, embody, and communicate their piety as they struggle to make a place for themselves in contemporary Germany.

The Sehitlik Mosque has become a tourist site where rootedness emerges through change. At times, conflict occurs, as the first generation built the Sehitlik Mosque in order to reserve and preserve a space for their practice of a traditional, Turkish-rooted Islam. Yet, the latter generations too seek accommodation of their identities, different from their parents and grandparents in the ways in which they straddle Islam, Europe, Germany, Turkey, and Berlin. They thus persevere in innovating, aiming to fuse these identities not only for mosque tourists, but for themselves, in the necessary negotiations entailed by what Avishai (2008) terms “doing religion” in the German capital. This occurs in a symbolically-powerful physical arena—the mosque—that acts as vessel for a religious community’s deepest senses and sentiments of meaning.

In his work on the management of tourism at sacred sites, Brayley (2010: 291) asks, “How can that sacredness be maintained in the presence of hordes of ‘gawking gentiles’ who, by their very presence and curiosity, threaten to detract from its holy, set apart, reverent nature?” The Sehitlik Mosque surprises in that the presence of tourists, for the tour guides, does not detract but rather creates an opportunity to both construct and perform their piety, by enlivening “one of the most important verses Qur’an... God created us as different races and creeds so that we may know one another” (Dervis). The spectacle of the mosque tour unveils driving, ethical considerations in the role of tour guides, who make sense of the tour as a devotional act. In fact, the Sehitlik Mosque tour, by offering not fiscal, but cultural capital, shows the transformative capacity of tourism on the tour guides of sacred spaces.

All publics have power differentials; Muslims remain among the most stigmatized groups in European society (Asad, 2003). The position of “guide” uniquely endows young Muslims in a European capital with the agency to at once shape the understandings of

outsiders and their own understandings of piety as they balance multiple, hyphenated identities in the ongoing journey of diasporic life. Perceiving tours as a pious place-making practice further allows second and third generation Muslims to manage even the most difficult interactions, including blatant provocations. Beginning tours by at once evoking and re-appropriating controversial concepts like *jihad* shows an explicit attempt to break down boundaries, concurrently influencing mainstream perceptions of Islam and self-understandings of how to live as pious Muslims in Berlin, today.

Through twice-daily tours at the Sehitlik Mosque, post-migrant Muslim youth make Islam accessible to outsiders, openly practicing a vision of the religion demonstrative of its “natural unity” with Germany and Europe, at large. It is imperative to underscore that they do not claim this to be a “German-Islam” or “Euro-Islam” but rather civic ideals important to the German nation-state and European society, more broadly, such as equality, diversity, and openness, as inherently Islamic, and ethical ideals as shared across the three Abrahamic faiths. By locating these ideals *within* the religious tradition of Islam, specifically its foundational theological sources, guides both internalize and embody their tours as pious practices. At the same time, they link this invocation of piety to belonging in, and to, both Berlin and Germany. I began this paper with the *jihad* moment, because it exposes the broader context of German sociopolitical ethics in which mosque tourism plays out. It further evidences *why* these tour guides are an important analytical site, as they embody the dynamic intersection of lived piety and place-making strategies that young European Muslims inhabit in their everyday lives.

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