Pathways to God: The Islamic Acoustics of Turkish Berlin

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Pathways to God: The Islamic Acoustics of Turkish Berlin

A dissertation presented

by

Peter McMurray

to

The Department of Music

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of Music

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Pathways to God: The Islamic Acoustics of Turkish Berlin

Abstract

In fall of 1961, the Berlin Wall was erected and West Germany, the Bundesrepublik, initiated a guest worker program with Turkey. These two events would dramatically reshape Berlin, as many immigrants settled just west of the Berlin Wall—especially in the boroughs of Wedding, Kreuzberg, and Neukölln—transforming, augmenting, and adapting to local cultural life. Among these transformations, new sonic cultures emerged, with Islam, in all its diversity, playing a crucial role in that process. The Islamic acoustics that continues to thrive today in Berlin raises significant questions about the nature of sound in Islamic practice: How does Islam sound? In what ways does sound articulate and generate difference both between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also among different Muslim communities? How can an acoustics of Islam help elucidate the workings of a metropolis like Berlin, and vice-versa? Turning to Islamic thought as a theoretical framework, I consider how indigenous notions of pathways enunciate these sonic processes and their material manifestations. After sketching a brief sonic history of Turkish Berlin, I attempt to sonically map some of these Islamic pathways through the city. Charting a route through these major diasporic neighborhoods, I focus on a single religious community, or pathway, in each chapter, along with a particular material aspect of sound as a sacred articulation of difference. I begin with an exploration of the voice in Cerrahi Sufi zikr ceremonies in Wedding, where reciting God’s names becomes an act of tasting (Chapter 1). Then in Kreuzberg, I consider the relationship of bodies (especially
fingers) and instruments through the Alevi bağlama, a musical instrument called “the stringed Qur’an” (Chapter 2). I continue to expand outward in the following two chapters, which examine mosques in Neukölln as sonic spaces: first, the interiors of a Caferi Shi‘i mosque as they commemorate the deaths of martyrs; then, the exterior courtyard space of the Sunni Şehitlik mosque and cemetery. I conclude with a media archaeology of angels and a brief meditation on Islamic teachings about God’s hearing, both of which suggest ways a more attentive listening to Islam might expand our conceptions of sound.
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Notes on Maps and Figures

All maps labeled as “Map” were created by Scott Walker of the Harvard Map Collection and the author. For images labeled “Figure,” all photographs were taken by the author. Mapped routes labeled “Figure” are generated from screen-shot images also produced by the author.
Notes on Spelling, Translation and Media

According to hadith traditions, the Prophet Muhammad received the Qur’an in seven distinct styles of recitation (ahruf). At times, writing this dissertation has felt like consolidating nearly as many disparate styles and spellings (Turkish, German, Arabic and Ottoman, along with English). As a general rule, when a technical term of or about Islam is used widely in English, I use English spelling, e.g., sheikh, zikr, tekke, tarikat, namaz, and Karbala. In a few cases, I have retained key diacritics, e.g., Qur’an, Shi’a/Shi’i and shari‘a. I have included a brief glossary at the back with many of these key terms..

I generally use standardized contemporary Turkish spellings for Islamic terminology. In many cases, this distinction will have little impact, but with certain key terms repeated throughout (e.g., those starting with c, or the sound j in English, like Cerrahi, cem, and Caferi but sounding like Jerrahi, jem, and Jafari), basic knowledge of Turkish pronunciation is helpful, especially with the following letters:

- a (in Turkish) is pronounced like a in father (in English)
- c is pronounced like j in jazz
- ç is pronounced like ch in chump
- e is usually pronounced like e in fell, or slightly more open like the a in fan
- g is pronounced like g in goat (i.e., always hard)
- ğ is not pronounced but instead slightly lengthens the preceding vowel
- h is always pronounced but never voiced, like h in high
- i (undotted) is pronounced like i in disturb
- i (dotted) is pronounced like ee in cheese
- j is pronounced like z in azure (or like a French j like in jeune)
- o is pronounced like o in bone
- ö is pronounced like the German ö as in schön or roughly like the British u in fur
- r is rolled lightly except at the end of words
- s is pronounced like s in sing
- ş is pronounced like sh in shout
- u is pronounced like u in tuba
- ü is pronounced like the German ü as in über
- y is always pronounced like y in yellow (i.e., as a consonant, not a vowel)
In both the Bibliography and Glossary I have alphabetized using the English alphabet, so diacritics do not affect word order (e.g., Çağlar comes before Cüvelek). I have generally opted not to mark length on Turkish vowels, following current standard practices, except when a term is quoted in a source with those markings. Some names have multiple spellings (e.g., Safar vs. Safer, Cüneyd vs. Cüneyt); I have tried to use the name most clearly favored by the individual in question and remain consistent throughout.

Where I transliterate Arabic or Ottoman, I have marked vowel length but avoid diacritics on consonants for ease of reading. For the most part, I have avoided German renderings of Arabic terms unless quoting from a source in which German spelling seems important to retain. For ease of reading, I have replaced the word Straße, “street,” for Strasse. Otherwise I leave German spellings unaltered.

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted or cited from an already-translated source. In a few instances, I have amended or augmented an existing translation, typically making it more literal, and have noted that with [square brackets]. For translations of traditional Islamic sources (i.e., the Qur’an and hadith traditions) I have consulted some published English translations (noted in bibliography) as well as the outstanding online resources (www.sunnah.com, www.quran.com) but have typically created a slightly different version, either to simplify (again to make translations more literal) or to highlight particular aspects that may not be clear in a single extant translation. For more poetic texts, I supply bilingual texts.

Finally, the media portions of this dissertation are deposited at the Harvard Film Study Center as part of the archives of the Critical Media Practice program.
Abbreviations

al-Bukhari  
* Sahīh al-Bukhārī,* collection of *hadith* traditions

al-Tirmidhi  
* Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī,* collection of *hadith* traditions

Ar  
Arabic

BTMK  
Berlin Türk Musikisi Konservatuari (Konservatorium für türkische Musik Berlin)

Bundesminister  
Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung.

DITIB  
Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği

DITIB-Şehitlik  
DITIB-Şehitlik Türkisch Islamische Gemeinde zu Neukölln

Diyanet  
Diyanet İşleri Bakanlığı

Ger  
German

Halveti  
Halveti Brotherhood “Nureddin Cerrahî Türbesi ve Mesçidi Koruma Derneği”

Muslim  
* Sahīh Muslim,* collection of *hadith* traditions

Ott  
Ottoman Turkish

Per  
Persian

TTMF  
Türk Tasavvuf Musikisi Folklörünü Araştırma ve Yaşatma Vakfı

Tur  
Turkish
Acknowledgments

A project of this scope necessarily brings with it some ontological problems, not least of which is: when and how did it begin? Late in college, I had the privilege of working with two of my three committee members in the context of my senior thesis work. I met Kay Kaufman Shelemay, my current advisor, ten years ago in her Musical Ethnography seminar. I had returned from fieldwork in the former Yugoslavia and was struggling to process and understand some rather remarkable experiences I had there working with some of the last epic singers in Montenegro. From that seminar to the present, she has not only taught me ethnomusicology, she has patiently sat and worked through a seemingly endless parade of other (mostly related) issues surrounding fieldwork, academic life, and a number of personal challenges as well. I will always treasure the correspondence (and occasional urgent phone call) we had while I was in Germany and Turkey—going all the way back to college, Kay always seemed to recognize how rich my experiences and encounters were well before I did. In addition, she has been tireless in responding to writing, helping me shape ideas from the roughest of drafts to this present version. At every stage of the project, her responses were both prompt and thorough—attributes that tend not to coexist well.

I met Cemal Kafadar even earlier as I took his survey course on the history of the Ottoman Empire. As my interests began shifting toward Turkish music, his courses (on earlier Ottoman history, on Istanbul) and—not insignificantly—the cohort of brilliant students and professors he has built up around him have offered a tremendously helpful community for me to work out ideas that have sometimes only tangentially related to their interests. Even when our paths were more divergent, he always seemed to hover at a
distance. At one point he offered to set up an interview with Orhan Gencebay, should I need it—my only regret now is that I failed to work Orhan Baba into this project somehow. Among his colleagues and students who shared in many conversations and hours of language study, I am especially indebted to Himmet Taşkömür, Engin Sezer, Aleksandar Šopov, Mehmet Ali Sanlıkol, Hesna Ergun Taşkömür, Merih Danalı, Akif Yerlioğlu and Eda Özel among many others.

I had completed a year of doctoral studies before I had the opportunity to work with Richard Wolf in a sustained way, but perhaps he more than any other steered me toward the topic of sound in Islam. From my first paper for him on the Mevlevi Şeb-i Aruz to angelology and other more esoteric themes in this dissertation, he has always readily supported my explorations, even when they make more work for him. The project has benefited from its earliest inception from his keen eye as a reader, even on the most heady of topics, as well as his nitty-gritty pointers on the art of writing clearly. More broadly, the intertwining of our interests on questions of Islam, music and sound has allowed for a powerful learning opportunity for me as a student—to see not only how he responds to my own work but how he goes about his own.

A number of faculty members who were not officially advisors nevertheless somehow got wrangled into this project and many related conversations that I greatly benefited from. First and foremost of these is Alfred Guzzetti, who has spent countless hours teaching me how to make movies and also helping me think through how the media aspects of this dissertation might best be realized. His mantra, borrowed from William Carlos Williams, “No ideas but in things,” has influenced this project more than I can articulate. He along with Robb Moss, Mary Steedly, George Olken and Ernst Karel...
provided a framework in which to explore ethnographic film- and soundmaking, has already proven indispensable. Sindhu Revuluri taught one of the best seminars I took in graduate school and opened my eyes to a number of scholarly directions that I have found very fruitful. But even more so, she has been a great support, always ready to put things in proper perspective. Many of the most substantive conversations I had during the actual writing process were with Alex Rehding, who also made the time to read through multiple chapters and provide feedback. His tireless energies as department chair during much of this process also provided tremendous intellectual and personal support, from a tutorial on German media theory to the Hearing Modernity seminar this past year to insightful advising on life beyond (but always entwined with) academia. Hans Tutschku’s guidance in listening to space and then composing sound in space have also contributed in significant ways that I look forward to pursuing more fully when all these words have been written. The Core Faculty of the Hearing Modernity seminar—Ingrid Monson, Sindhu Revuluri (again), John Hamilton, Jeffrey Schnapp, Laura Frahm, and Ernst Karel—have at one point or another all shared important insights in writing, formal talks, and conversations. As an honorary member of that group, Jonathan Sterne’s encouragement in both the earliest and latest stages of research was an empowering influence. I also had the good fortune to read through a number of texts on voice and body with Carolyn Abbate in sessions that months later are still providing food for thought. Along with Giuliana Bruno, Eric Rentschler introduced me to film studies and supported the project from its earliest stages. In Berlin, Wolfgang Kaschuba and Wolfgang Ernst helped make it possible for me to toggle back and forth between the academy and research, to whatever degree that distinction makes any sense.
In addition, a number of graduate student colleagues have also read drafts, shared substantive ideas and precious office space, or simply been supportive at the more difficult junctures of this project, including Sarah Wright, Jesse Shapins, Hannah Lewis, Luci Mok, Julia Yezbick, Elizabeth Craft, Matt Henseler, Micah Wittmer, Rich Nielsen, Peter Conti-Brown, Gavin Williams, Kythe Heller, Jon Withers, Sarah Politz, Panayotis League, Shayak Sarkar, Wenqi Tang, Luis-Manuel Garcia, Zeynep Bulut, Mike Heller, Andrea Bohlman, and Meredith Schweig. These colleagues and friends made learning, teaching, relaxing, and kvetching all more enjoyable. In addition, an expansive team of administrators and other staff have provided the infrastructure and support for me to do this work, including Nancy Shafman, Sarah Adams, Andrew Wilson, Sarah Barton, Seth Torres, Ean White, Peter Laurence, Cozette Russell, JK Koczera, Pete Grana, John Rybicki, Luis Arnias, Garth McCavana, Bob LaPointe, Cynthia Verba and Annett Peschel. Scott Walker at the Harvard Map Collection designed the exquisite introductory maps at a dizzying pace.

My research was generously funded by the Deutscher Akademiker Austauschdienst (DAAD), the Mellon Foundation, the International Institute of Education, the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) program, and several institutions within Harvard University, including the Department of Music, the Film Study Center, and the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies.

So that’s the easy part. But where and when did field research begin? I am tempted to trot out a number of key moments, but without question, a turning point was my trip with Mirsad Kunić of Lukavac, Bosnia, to attend a Sufi zikr in the small town of Špionica during a visit to Tuzla. Even before that, a whole host of friends in Macedonia,
Kosova, Turkey, Serbia, Bosnia and Germany (especially Katrin Schamun and Susann Minter), helped me get my bearings geographically and intellectually. Many sheikhs, dervishes and other friends I met in Prizren, Gjakova, Tetova, and Prishtina (especially Xhevi and Julie Kolgjini, Refki and Esma Alija, Sokol Sylejmani, Baton Haxhibeqiri, and Valbon Kastroti) helped me begin to sharpen my focus on Islamic ritual more seriously.

Circumstances were fortunate enough—nasip, as İsmail Baba would say—that through those relationships I was able to find a group of friends in Berlin who shared interests in these same topics and would let me tag along with them (or drag them along with me) on many occasions: Samet Yalçın, Feyzullah Yeşilkaya, Muhammed Kaplan, Fatma Ağca, Özgür Özlük, Petra Stawowczyk, Yusuf Karagöz, Hayal Düz and Mustafa Erkovan. Without their insight and generous giving of time and energy to help me better understand Berlin and Islamic life, this project would have floundered badly. Sinan and Zarife Şimşek were always wonderful company—drop-by visits to their bookstore was not just a useful research stop (though it always was), it was a chance to sit and get my bearings on the city again.

Relationships in “the field” are so complex; they defy easy reduction to academic-style acknowledgments. I was close with many of the groups I worked with but almost certainly spent more time with Cerrahi dervishes than with any other group. To İsmail Baba and those dervishes, I offer my deepest gratitude. I remember coming back from my first trip to the zaviye there with the clear sense that it was something special. I especially appreciate the kindness and candor of Zülfikar Abi, Fehmi Amca, Sait Abi, Deniz Abi, Vedat Abi, Serdar Abi, both Hasan Abis, Kabir Abi, Murat Abi, and both Ihsans. I am also grateful for the openness and warm welcomes I received from Özcan Efendi in
Susurluk; Sinan Baba, Ufuk Abi, Enver Abi, and Akın Abi in Bursa; Fatih Abi and Kadir Abi in Istanbul; Tosun Baba, Yurdaer Baba, and Sevin Hanım in New York.

At the Berlin cemevi, I particularly appreciated Dede Hasan Doğan, who welcomed me so enthusiastically at Nevruz and beyond, as well as Erdal Çağlar, who was always (somehow) able to conjure time from his jam-packed schedule to answer emails or talk to me, and the ever-affable Dede Hasan Göçer. The friendly interventions of Yusuf Karagöz, Hayal Düz, Kadir Şahin and their group of friends left a lasting impression on me personally and on my research. In addition, I consider myself fortunate to have met and spent time with so many wonderful musicians through my research, including Defne Şahin, Kasım Yıldız, Taner Akyol, Halit Çelik, and Hasret Tiraz.

The congregations in the trio of Neukölln mosques I attended most regularly (Şehitlik Camii, İmam Rıza İslam Merkezi, and the Tekke-i Kadirîyye Mescidi) all went out of their way to accommodate my visits, both among institutional leaders there and among rank-and-file members of the community. The same holds for the İmam Cafer-i Sadık Camii in Wedding, which I encountered relatively late in my research but was one of the highpoints as well. I greatly enjoyed my visits to Naqshibandi and Burhani zikrs and sobhets in Charlottenburg and Neukölln, though I do not discuss them here and thank all those who helped me get there in the first place and welcomed me once I had arrived. I am especially disappointed not to be able to include material still in-progress on the Mevlevi-Kubrevi Sufi order based in Trebbus, Brandenburg. Scheich Abdullah Halis, Scheicha Nuriye, and their students in Berlin were wonderfully funny and kind while still fostering an intensive environment for religious devotees. There are simply too many stories to be told! But I hope to get to more of these yet.
Documentary media production was always complex but I had great help on shoots from Bastian Hopfgartner, as well as Leah Striker, Austin Brown, and Stephan Talneau. Heiko Aufdermauer and Jorgos Loukakos offered essential advice as well.

I have omitted three names of teachers who cut across these various communities and projects: the late Nuri Karademirli, Adil Arslan and Imam Nizam. Nuri taught me oud lessons and rehearsed a choir/instrumental ensemble I participated in, especially during the early months of my research. During my first trip to Berlin in 2009, a student of his described him as “special”—he was certainly that. Passionate, even fiery, but fiercely devoted to teaching music. Although we were not particularly close (I’m certain I wasn’t even the most memorable American ethnomusicologist he taught in recent years), the shock of his untimely death has not yet passed.

I spent more time with Adil Arslan than any of my other teachers. Our relationship grew well beyond music lessons, as we found occasion for lunch, concerts outside the city, and many good conversations. As I would learn over time, a certain sense of rivalry existed between Nuri and Adil—both master musicians running large music schools in a city that failed (and still fails) to realize just what a musical treasure they have in their midst. Time and again, Adil offered important reminders about the political implications of music and sound, whether in Turkey, Germany or beyond. His commitment to multikulti community-building through music, as obvious a gesture as it may seem now, seems to have been a radical approach when he first arrived in Berlin. Because of our lessons, I am a better musician, to be sure, but also a more incisive scholar.
And finally to my imam: Nizam Hoca. Even before I knew the trajectory of my research—in and through Islam, rather than considering Turkish music more generally—it was clear that Nizam was my hoca, my teacher. He not only taught me the fundamentals of quranic recitation, he was always the person I felt I would turn to if something ever went completely wrong during my research—an important role in fieldwork! Without his welcoming assurances and helpful planning, I would not have made it to Balıkesir/Susurluk with the Cerrahi dervishes during my first spring of research, nor would I have likely pursued quranic recitation in any serious way. And while memorizing the first juz’ of the Qur’an alone has seemed a herculean feat confirming my own mental frailties, Nizam stands as a role model for intellectual focus and commitment even when life circumstances may not be particularly conducive to it.

My family has been a tremendous support throughout this entire process. I dearly wish my two grandmothers, whose deaths bookended my doctoral studies, had been able to see me through to the end of this process. The unflagging enthusiasm of my own parents, Lynn and Charlene, and my siblings has been an ongoing source of positive energy throughout an arduous process. My in-laws have been similarly generous with time, energy, good company, refuge in the face of pestilence, and help with childcare. Finally, my wife, Eunice, and daughter, Penny, have provided grounding and perspective through a project and period of life where such commodities are scarce. As engaging as the listening, reading, singing and dancing of research was, it pales in comparison to Ella Fitzgerald sing-alongs, family trips to Fenway and “Yüksek Yüksek Tepelere” dance parties. “Living,” Nazım Hikmet reminds us, “is no laughing matter.” Perhaps he’s right, but I thank them both for their patience and the many shared laughs.
For Penelope,
who makes every return home worth the journey.
The Opening: Sonic Pathways to God

_In the name of God, the compassionate and merciful, praise be to God, the Lord of the universe, the compassionate and merciful, the king of the judgment day. It is You we worship and You we ask for help. Guide us on the path of the upright—the path of those You have blessed, not those who provoke your wrath or do not listen to You._

— Surah al-Fatiha (“The Opening”), Qur’an

_I am the city of knowledge, and ‘Ali is the gate._

— Prophet Muhammad

_One ventures from home on the thread of a tune. Along sonorous, gestural, motor lines that mark the customary path of a child and graft themselves onto or begin to bud ‘lines of drift’ with different loops, knots, speeds, movements, gestures, and sonorities._

— Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

_Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance—nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city—as one loses oneself in a forest—that calls for quite a different schooling._

— Walter Benjamin, “A Berlin Chronicle”

Historical time in Islam begins with migration to a city. In 622 C.E., that migration, _al-hijra,_ led Muhammad and his followers to Yathrib, later known as Madīna al-Nabī, the City of the Prophet, or as it is better known, simply Medina: the City. When Muhammad and his people returned to the other holy city, Mecca, they marked the occasion in sound, as the muezzin Bilāl ibn Rabāh climbed to the top of the Ka’aba and recited the call to prayer, using the city as a medium to sound itself. This intersection of sound and pathways in Islam is prefigured by the first verses of the Qur’an, _al-Fatiha,_ or the Opening. It begins with the familiar invocation, “In the name of God, the compassionate and merciful, praise be to God” (1:1-2). These verses highlight the fact of their own recitation, a fitting opening for a _qur’ān_ literally “a recitation.” Partway through this opening surah (chapter), this recitation shifts from a statement about God to
direct address: “It is You we worship and You we ask for help.” (1:5). And what kind of help is being asked for in this Opening? “Guide us on the path of the upright—the path of those You have blessed, not those who provoke your wrath or do not listen to You.” Perhaps the most oft-cited utterance in a whole variety of Islamic practices, this opening passage intones a request for guidance on “the path of the upright,” sirāt al-mustaqīm.

Although the Qur’an is not typically memorized in the order of its surahs, or chapters, al-Fatiha is the first surah memorized and is widely understood to be a distillation of the entire message of the Qur’an. I take the Opening of al-Fatiha as my opening here too. Here Islam is characterized as a pathway of upright living (sirāt al-mustaqīm), of blessing, and of auspicious encounters with the divine, including explicit mention of the kinds of sonic articulations the righteous should utter (“praise be to God, the Lord of the universe”). But crucially, it is not the only pathway—others exist, marked (in al-Fatiha) not solely by unrighteousness, but by a set of interactions with God that elicit divine wrath. In other words, these pathways are from the outset relational, positioning humankind in a literal conversation with God. After all, not only do these verses exhort mortals to call on God in particular ways (in the name of Allah, literally the God; and again, uttering praise to him), he responds to them and does so in particular—as evidenced by the very existence of al-Fatiha—through revelatory utterance.

The sonic insinuations of this qur'anic surah—and there are many passages in the Qur’an with an even more pronounced emphasis on sound—prompts a more general question: how does Islam sound? This question immediately prompts others: Which Islam? In what time and place? And finally, what is meant by “how”: by what means or with what qualities? As suggested by al-Fatiha, Islamic thought has generated a rich
tradition of theorizing difference through a notion of pathway; but this difference is not merely between Islam and non-Islam. Differences within Islam, or between a variety of Islams, have themselves also been conceptualized through diverse notions of pathways: shari’a (divine law in Islam), tarikat (Sufi order), mezhep (juridical school), sīra (prophetic biography), and sabīl ullaḥ (closely related to jihad) all relate etymologically to a sense of pathway and passage. Even a distinction as fundamental and widely known as that between Sunni and Shi’a could be explored etymologically in terms of pathways: Sunni Muslims are those who adhere to the sunna, “way” or custom (i.e., the things the Prophet did and said), while Shi’i Muslims are literally “followers” (i.e., of the Prophet and his family). I explore this fecund terminology of pathways at the beginning of each of the major case studies (Chapters 1-4) that follow.

Theory, whether theological or scholarly, often emerges from the evocative use of metaphor, as seen briefly with these examples. But so often the original sources of these metaphors—that is, the literal reading of these metaphors’ referents—can prove equally productive. In this case, the theological metaphor of pathways, taken rather literally, can similarly elucidate urban life: the city, like Islam, can be seen both as a singular place (e.g., Berlin) and as an overlapping assemblage of paths, lines, roads, social and media networks, grids, transit systems, and other infrastructures that simultaneously mark out difference and facilitate passage through that space. In several settings during fieldwork, I heard permutations of the hadith oral tradition I cite above, in which the prophet Muhammad (is said to have) said, “I am the city of knowledge, and ‘Ali is the gate,” referring to his nephew and son-in-law, ‘Ali (‘Alī), the son of ‘Abū Tālib.¹ In Turkish,

¹ This hadith can be found in many Shi’i and Sufi sources (e.g., Dabashi 2012:32, Khalidi 2009:137-138, and Amir-Moezzi 2011:471, which includes a lengthy discussion of what “gates” mean in Shi’i teaching).
the term typically used for “city of knowledge” is *ilim şehri*, where “knowledge” is a loaded term derived from the Arabic ‘*ilm*, meaning “science” both in a mundane sense (e.g., it is used much like the suffix –*logy* in English for words like biology, anthropology, and political science) as well as a particularly Islamic sense of a “religion science,” or systematized form of knowledge closely bound up with the Qur’an, Islamic jurisprudence, and related theological understanding. When I first heard the phrase *ilim şehri*, I misunderstood it as ‘*ilm-i şehir*, not “the city of knowledge” but “an Islamic

For Turkish sources, cf. Ulusoy 1986:150, 156, Baba and Çelik 2004:91, and Diyanet 2013. In Turkish, the phrase is usually translated (from Arabic) as “*Ben ilim şehriyim, ‘Ali ise kapısındır.*”
science of the city.” The possibility of imagining a city as a site of sacred knowledge (even if that thought originates from a mishearing), whether as a codified body of Islamic urban science (i.e., ‘ilm-i şehir) or simply as a metaphor for the Prophet’s divinely-acquired knowledge, suggests that a literal reading of these variegated Islamic pathways could be fruitful without wresting these terms too far from their intended usages.

Such a model of a city as a literal and figurative assemblage of heterogeneous pathways resonates strongly with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s ideas of the rhizome, a fertile space (literally related to plant roots) rife with multiplicities, connections, intersecting lines, fragmented cartographies and unexpected ecologies. Although perhaps too “music”-focused, their formulation of leaving home through sound could almost be a commentary on Bilāl’s sonic repurposing of the Ka’aba upon returning to Mecca: “One ventures from home on the thread of a tune. Along sonorous, gestural, motor lines that mark the customary path of a child and graft themselves onto or begin to bud ‘lines of drift’ with different loops, knots, speeds, movements, gestures, and sonorities” (1987:311). At the heart of my inquiry here lies the strange being of a city—with its energies, its sonorities, its lines and loops of gesture, movement and sound, its incomprehensibility, its customary paths of children and the elderly and immigrant cab drivers and hipster club-goers and even the dead. The city in question is Berlin, an urban entanglement that has been narrated as a Great City (Großstadt) by filmmakers, as a World City (Weltstadt) by Nazis, and a Divided City by Cold War politicians. Beyond these tales, it is also the home to highly sonorous forms of Islam—a multi-threaded tune, to repurpose the phrase, that would accompany waves of immigrants as they ventured from home in Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia and Yugoslavia to settle in Berlin and West
Germany. My methods are topographical and haphazard: they entailed (and continue to entail) listening for these sonic threads, following various lines of sensory drift, and on (too) many occasions losing myself (or at least feeling lost) within an urban expanse, as suggested above by the original Berlin flâneur, Walter Benjamin.

In this dissertation I explore the Islamic acoustics of Turkish Berlin, an urban configuration that stretches back centuries to Ottoman emissaries but dates much more emphatically to a formative year just over a half-century ago. On August 11, 1961, the German Democratic Republic, the GDR or East Germany, erected the Berlin Wall, cutting the western part of that city off from the rest of the German Bundesrepublik, or West Germany. In October of the same month, facing labor shortages especially in the island-metropolis of West Berlin, the West German government signed a labor agreement with Turkey, initiating the migration of hundreds of thousands of Gastarbeiter, or “guest workers,” to West Germany. Berlin, allegedly “the most dangerous place on earth” at the time, stood on the threshold of significant cultural transformations as Turks, Kurds, Alevi, Azeris and other groups from Turkey flowed (predominantly) from rural Turkey to the literal shadows of the Berlin Wall. They came—and then many stayed, to the surprise and perhaps dismay of the West German government. In so doing, they brought a sonically rich set of religious practices ranging from Sunni Islam, with its Friday prayers and mosques, to less familiar configurations of mystical Sufism (itself a catch-all for a broad spectrum of practices), Shi‘i Islam from the eastern frontiers of Turkey, and Alevism, an ethno-religious tradition that has long thwarted any neat classification within or beyond Islam.
Migration histories aside, Berlin may seem like a strange site for the study of sound in Islam. The classic hallmarks of Islam—the call to prayer, large gatherings for communal Friday prayers, monumental architecture—are either absent entirely from Berlin or so subtly hidden within the infrastructure of the city that they become inaudible. In contrast to cities like Cairo, Egypt (Hirschkind 2006), Fez, Morocco (Spadola 2014), or Kano, Nigeria (Larkin 2008), where Muslims have lived for centuries and an obvious “soundscape” of Islam emerges, Berlin lacks—and in some quarters, actively rejects—such an acoustics. But in fact, these absences and constraints allow for (and perhaps entrain) a more focused listening less encumbered by centuries of cultural encounter (e.g., imperialism) and the reductive discourses that so often resulted. In particular,
through transnational processes of migratory flow (back-and-forth), conversions, commerce, vacation, and other movements, the city has become an unpredictable remapping of Islamic practice in Turkey, where Shi’i mosques with roots in eastern Turkey end up down the street from community centers affiliated with the Black Sea, both of whom now have stronger ties to Istanbul, thanks to massive (and sometimes forced) migration within Turkey since the 1950s. I am interested in the contingencies and creative “transfers” that make these various forms of Islam work in Berlin. Or in terms of the original hijra example, the critical issue is not Bilāl’s call to prayer, but rather the fact he skillfully repurposed the Ka’aba—the stuff of the city—to do so.

This remapping of God’s path(s) constitutes the “flight lines” I sought to follow and also draw in my research, as I dragged myself and often friends from one congregation (where they “belonged”) to others (where they did not). We listened and sang and played music and recited and sat quietly and conversed together, all the while teasing out the Islamic acoustics of Turkish Berlin. In navigating these various religious pathways, I paved my own “counterpath,” or Contre-allée, as Catherine Malabou and Jacques Derrida have written (2004). And like them, this counterpath was, at its best, very much a case of “traveling with,” including actual trips between Berlin and Turkey traveling with those groups with which I was working, as well as many more passages through Berlin itself.

My counterpath, then, traces with and through that transnational remapping of Islamic sound in Berlin—especially the former West Berlin and even more particularly, those boroughs near the Berlin Wall that became home to so many immigrants. Thus I was simultaneously listening and also excavating a past no longer audible. In his Berlin
Chronicle, written on the eve of Adolf Hitler’s ascension to power, Walter Benjamin makes the following note that aptly characterizes my approach:

[M]emory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theatre. It is the medium of past experience, as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie interred. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging….He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil….True, for successful excavations a plan is needed. Yet no less indispensable is the cautious probing of the spade in the dark loam, and it is to cheat oneself of the richest prize to preserve as a record merely the inventory of one’s discoveries, and not this dark joy of the place of the finding itself (1932 [1999]:316)

My central “discovery” here, or rather locus of exploration (since these communities needed no discovery), is the complex of sonic pathways that constitute contemporary life in Turkish Berlin. By “Turkish Berlin,” I understand—and in fact, emphasize—those groups who may not self-identify as ethnically Turkish; as a city, it is intrinsically a heterogeneous space, a gathering of too many people to make up any single identity. Thus I argue that Berlin cannot be understood as a city without taking into account the acoustics of these communities; at the same time, the Islamic acoustics are deeply diverse and highlight the instability of any singular vision—and it is so often a vision, often tokenized by a mosque or an image of calligraphy—of Islam as a monolithic whole.

Berlin, and particularly Turkish Berlin, resonates as a heterophonic space, one in which the appearance of ontological unity is cut through by a near infinitude of pathways passing through and around and beneath it. The how of these sonic pathways—in what ways they sound, their characteristics, their articulations of difference and the material manifestations of that acoustics of difference—occupies the bulk of this study. Embedded as they are in the city, these pathways are deeply material and indeed, the overall arc of this narrative charts a line through these materialities: from the voice (and particularly the tongue and throat) to the interface of body and musical instrument (in this case, the bağlama) to architectural acoustics (first focusing on interior spaces, then on exterior
courtyards). Geographically, that route maps onto Wedding, Kreuzberg, Neukölln and Tempelhof—essentially a move clockwise (and a counterpath) through West Berlin.2

While I give a fuller overview of each chapter at the end of the Introduction, I would make a few brief comments about materiality here. Materiality, along with closely related studies of sensation and presence, has touched off a number of exciting scholarly conversations in recent years in many fields, including history of science, science and technology studies, neurobiology, literature, and visual studies. Within the realm of the no-longer-nascent field of sound studies, it has played an integral role in conceiving of musical and scientific instruments, sound technologies, performance, and urban space.3 A few scholars have begun the process of situating Islam within these conversations, suggesting productive ways that Islamic thought and practices (again, to the degree they constitute a singular whole) have long raised issues about materiality, sound, bodily and thingly presence, mediality, and the urban.4 I consider this work part of that broader consideration of how this multiplicity of Islams, construed primarily here through sonic ethnography, speaks back to the assumptions of sound studies, offering a gentle reminder of the multiple sensory and media histories—and presents—that populate our world. It is

2 Like so many road construction projects, this one will (I hope) extend slightly farther still to include a fifth case study on the Mevlevi-Kubrevi Sufi order, with gatherings in Schöneberg (continuing the clockwise movement) and more permanently outside the city to the south in Brandenburg (Trebbus). Their digital presence online highlights the vanishing point of both materiality (as the digital seems to become almost immaterial) and also location (as it seems to be almost everywhere).


4 In addition to the scholars cited above with regards to sound and cities (Hirschkind, Spadola, and Larkin), the work of Flagg Miller on various genres of Islamic cassettes (2007, forthcoming), Siegfried Zielinski and Eckhard Fürlus on Arabo-Islamic media histories (2010), and Laura Marks on Islamic visual cultures and new media all contribute significantly to these questions (2010). Navid Kermani’s work on the aesthetics of sound (specifically in the Qur’an) has also played a major role in my thinking (1999).
through the materiality and irreducible physicality of sensation, I ultimately argue, that we are able to make good on Benjamin’s offer of “return[ing] again and again to the same matter” to discover “the dark joy[s] of the place of the finding itself.”
Introduction. Berlin: Heterophony of a Great City

Berlin is condemned to perennially becoming and never being.

— Karl Scheffler, “Berlin: Fate of a City” (1910)

This is the main theme, the Hauptmelodie sung everywhere today: “Oh my father! How you have changed!” For this is no longer the same city...It is still called Berlin. But it is long gone...It is always slipping to the East.

— Kurt Tucholsky, “The Face of the City” (1920)

Noisy, matter-of-fact Berlin, the city of work and the metropolis of business, nevertheless has more, rather than less, than some others, of those places and moments when it bears witness to the dead, shows itself full of dead.

— Walter Benjamin, A Berlin Chronicle (1932)

Said the old Indian chief, “Wild is the West, difficult is the labor.” [Indian cries.]

— Gus Backus, German pop song (1959)

Propaganda broadcast over Berlin Wall from East Berlin (GDR) (1961)

Journal entry, November 5, 1969: On the corner there are street vendors. A few kids are playing with the green water pump on the corner of Kohlfurter Strasse and Admiralstrasse. I thought I was in a different city. This is my first day in Kreuzberg.

— Aras Ören, “Kreuzberg Stories” (1991)

Beautiful city I first came to / I have experienced you, Berlin
Sometimes I am filled with hope / Sometimes I endure despair, Berlin ...


The city is a medium.

— Friedrich Kittler, “The City is a Medium” (1996)

“Berlin is like a filled-in granite crater...Here, you have to dig first to get at the treasure,” explained Wolf. “Berlin—it was a metropolis, a world city, the gate to Eastern Europe. Shit, Berlin was always an international plaza, where Jews, Poles and Huguenots converged, pollinated each other...” While he talked, he made circles in the air with his hands, as if the pollination was about to take place right there.

Cities mark the passing of time in their gradual accrual of sediment: physical, cultural, remembered, imagined. When circumstances are right, these strata can be heard, sometimes all at once. In the forests at the westernmost edges of Berlin stands the highest point in the city—an artificial mountain constructed from the rubble of the city after World War II, piled high atop a Nazi military academy that was under construction when the war ended. It was part of architect Albert Speer’s design of a fantasy city for the Third Reich, to which I will return. This massive hill of dirt hauled away from the city became the highest point of the city and was given the name Teufelsberg, or the Devil’s Mountain. American and British occupying forces after the war determined that this site would be the ideal site for a “listening station,” a massive complex of radomes from which they could monitor radio and other communications traveling in and out of “the East.” With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the reunification of Germany the next year, the site became obsolete (or at least its function was replicable by other means, as made clear by Edward Snowden’s recent revelations about American surveillance in Germany at present). Standing atop these abandoned radomes, one hears the sonic detritus of a war fought (at least in Europe) through its media configurations of radios, satellite TVs and computers. During techno’s heyday, legend has it that major parties took place there, though I never found anyone who had personally attended.

Today large canvas panels drape off the buildings’ frames, blown by the wind with a hypnotic rhythm as they slap hauntingly against the metal frame, amplified uncannily (along with footsteps and voices) by the hyper-resonant architecture. The acoustics of different spaces vary but the highest dome must have had a reverberation time of somewhere near 10 seconds, overwhelming any vocal utterance with an
incomprehensible wash of post-Cold War echo. The smell of urine wafts through rooms lined with leftover wiring jutting from their walls, with graffiti covering every flat surface of the compound, sharing their own odd wisdom and synaesthetic reveries: “Rules of Teufelsberg: No Violence * No Vandalism. We leave the place cleaner as [sic] we found it. The RainboWarlord.” “Earth is hell, heaven is life” next to a mustachioed man wearing a turban. “Yo peach peach dance” alongside a five-armed alien DJ-virtuoso who is apparently capable of scratching two records, toggling between them, and picking a new record all at the same time. At the very top—the uppermost point of the tallest structure built atop the highest elevation in the city—lurks a gaudy pink, red and blue image of a bald, six-fingered man in a polka-dot sweater vest, playing a djembe drum silently between his legs, accompanied only by the rhythm of the canvas-on-frame and occasional airplanes flying through. Emblazoned across his legs is—or was; who knows for how long?—a simple phrase: *Sinfonie der Großstadt*, Symphony of the Great City.¹

That phrase comes from Walter Ruttmann’s 1927 film, *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, an imaginative meditation on urban life in which Ruttmann makes the case through silent, moving pictures that a city and its cultural life function like a piece of art—a musical composition, specifically. A city requires careful viewing and listening in order to understand its rhythms, movements, spatial organization, and the ways it symphonizes, or sounds together. But cities also sound difference. By way of historical introduction to the contemporary acoustics of Islam in Turkish Berlin, I explore here Berlin’s acoustic past (and in a limited way, its present) as an articulation of such sonic difference, or what I call urban heterophony. In traditional Western musicology, the term

¹ The translation of the film’s title in English has used both “Great City” and “Big City.” I follow Nora Alter’s scholarly usage here of “Great City,” though the film’s title is also suggestive of a “metropolis.” (A distinct German word for “metropolis,” *Metropole*, also exists.)
refers to “simultaneous variation, accidental or deliberate, of what is identified as the same melody” (Cooke, 2007). Pierre Boulez goes a step further, speaking of a sonic “density...consist[ing] of various strata, rather as if several sheets of glass were to be superimposed, each one bearing a variation of the same pattern” (1971:118). Urban heterophony, like its counterpart in traditional Western music theory, is the sounding of “simultaneous variation”—an expression of difference and multiplicity—while being identified as a single entity (i.e., a city, a neighborhood, a street); or as Boulez puts it, a kind of layered density, but now within a city space.2 Like Charles Keil’s idea of “participatory discrepancies,” in which sonic processes and textures allow for (and even encourage) “push’ or dynamism” (1987:277), urban acoustics allow for co-existence, overlap and even conflict through the hitches and snags in the sonic fabric of the city.

The urbanness of this heterophony is not simply a question of location—i.e., the idea that difference just takes place in a city, as though the city were merely a passive backdrop for such contestation. Rather, the architecture, pathways, and topographies of a city materially enact, foster and constrain a variety of creative impulses. Urban space becomes an assemblage, or ensemble, sounding its own unique timbres and registers, sounds that are “humanly organized” in concrete and steel.3 For this reason, the material predominates my narratives, though the material soundworlds of urban heterophony are

2 Edward Campbell finds in Boulez’s ideas a connection to Deleuze and a notion of heterophony as “the production of virtual melodic lines” (2013:20). However, Campbell’s summation of Boulez ends up reinscribing an “original line surrounded by a number of secondary lines” (21), which seems to overemphasize the centrality of that line. Marc Perlman notes that his gamelan teachers resist precisely this potential hierarchy of lines and so avoid “heterophony” but instead use a language of pathways and travel (e.g., “walking together,” “following” or “accompanying” on a journey, etc.) (2004:62-63). Urban heterophony is contingent on precisely these kinds of sonic pathways and passages.

3 While I intentionally leave the terms “assemblage” and “multiplicity” undefined, they generally draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “rhizomes” as explored in A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1987:4, 7ff.), which similarly avoids precise definition. “Humanly organized sound” is John Blacking’s classic definition of music (1973:3-31).
always relationally ensconced in sonic configurations of flesh and stone, of the human
and the built. In this Introduction, I sketch out a tentative history of those configurations
of sonic difference in the history of Berlin, especially from 1961 to the present, drawing
on historical and ethnographic case studies ranging from Cold War “listening” to
contemporary Islam and anti-gentrification protests. The sensory traces of passage
through and contestations within urban space suggest that dominant narratives of Berlin-
as-metropolis effectively mute these rituals of difference, failing to adequately account
for several waves of immigrants, especially from Turkey, in the last half century.

Writing from Humboldt University in the former East Berlin shortly after the fall
of the Berlin Wall, Friedrich Kittler has suggested that the city (understood generically) is
a medium which records, processes, and transmits cultural information (1996:721). His
intriguing claim begs the question (which he leaves unanswered), what kind of culture?
For Berlin, contrary to many narratives of the city as an (implicitly homogeneous)
cosmopolitan center of art, architecture, film and fashion, such cultural mediation is
necessarily multicultural, requiring those listening to the city to hear it first and foremost
as a mediation of difference. In once again telling the tale of Berlin as City, I hope to
bring these two narratives into closer contact—into a heterophonic relationship,
perhaps—where the history of the Divided City of the Cold War is bound up with the
history of how it got its labor force, what the devotional lives of those laborers sounded
like, and how its sonic legacy continues to reverberate today. This multivalent,
heterophonic history of sounding and listening in/to the city then sets up the in-depth
ethnographic case studies that follow as specific articulations of the Islamic acoustics of
Turkish Berlin.
Berlin: The City as Sonic Genre

Almost like the ancient Hebrew cosmos, Berlin seems to have been narrated into urban existence. It has long been the impetus, occasion and/or inspiration for an outpouring of creative production of and about the city through sound, words and images. This tradition dates back at least to the 19th century, but in the early 20th century, it struck a new tone, namely the idea that Berlin was a Großstadt, literally a big city, a metropolis. Films like Walter Ruttmann’s celebratory Berlin: The Symphony of a Great City or the more sinister feature film, Metropolis, both released in 1927, and the almost cinéma vérité film, People on Sunday (1930), explored not just what it meant to be a metropolis,
but what it meant for Berlin to be a metropolis. While Ruttman’s Berlin was not the first film to make its entire subject a city,\(^4\) it gave rise to the idea of a city symphony, a filmic construction of a city, often capturing “a day in the life” of the city (as here).

Furthermore, some of the most poignant incarnations of the city symphony (e.g., Berlin, Vigo’s À propos de Nice or Vertov’s Man with a Movie Camera, both premiered in 1929) were made as silent films despite coming of age as a genre at the same time as sound film. In Ruttmann’s case, he actually worked with Austrian composer Edmund Meisel to create a five-movement work that would have originally been performed with a particular musical accompaniment (cf. Alter 2009:196). But even (or particularly?) without a soundtrack, the film’s rhythmic sensibilities as well as its depictions of highly sonorous activities (e.g., trains, heavy industry, musicians, dancers) evoke a metropolis that is overflowing with sound. Ruttmann’s title suggests that this urban soundworld is not cacaphonous but symphonious (sounding together), even when constructed through fragmented images, non-linear editing and (at times) a rapid pace that leaves the viewer uncertain of what has flickered across the screen. One might argue that it constitutes filmic flânerie, a sensory-rich urban wandering, but Ruttmann’s pacing and montage suggest something else—an industrial-urban way of encountering the world, not experienced corporeally (on foot) but through the sprawling prostheses of camera and celluloid and also of trains, cars, and buildings, all of which offer (often mobile) vantage points and productive obstructions for a city spectator.

Metropolis and People on Sunday offer a cluster of counterpoint to Ruttmann’s portrayal. Metropolis, directed by Fritz Lang with a screenplay by his wife, Thea von

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4 The distinction of first “city film” typically goes to Manhatta (on New York) by Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler (1920) or Rien que les heures (on Paris) by Alberto Cavalcanti (1926).
Harbou, is not explicitly about Berlin (and according to Lang drew some inspiration from New York), but it was filmed just outside Berlin (at Ufa’s Neu-Babelsberg studio), premiered in Berlin (at the Ufa-Palast am Zoo), and “played at the refurbished Ufa Pavillon at the Nollendorfplatz for several months. The theater’s exterior walls were covered with a gleaming silver coating. Brilliantly shimmering at night and faintly glistening during the day, the building radiated an eerie otherworldliness” (Kaes 2009:174). The expressionistic film portends cyborg dystopias and civil unrest that unfold upon a city, only to come to a happy ending as workers (“hands”) and management (“head”) become united through a prophetic mediator, Maria (“heart”). But the film-as-event, with its massive Berlin opening and subsequent run in a glistening cinema, suggests that it not only commented on but was simultaneously producing the metropolis of Berlin. In contrast, People on Sunday created a cross between idyll and what almost looks like reality television today, as untrained actors (a cab driver, a record store employee, a traveling wine merchant, one actress, and a model) escape the bustle of the city—otherwise reminiscent of Ruttmann’s Symphony—for a Sunday afternoon at a lake outside Berlin.\(^5\) Although the city scenes are marked by active montage and rhythm, the lakeside scenes are slower and pastoral, commenting in just as pronounced a manner as Ruttmann on the sensory tempos of urban living but also, significantly, the environs surrounding and creeping into Berlin. It too is silent but achieves a similarly suggestive feel as if it used synchronous sound from the observational shots of this urban ecology.

In these same Weimar years, sensory (and especially sonic) narratives of the city were also being written into existence by figures like Walter Benjamin, Kurt Tucholsky, Alfred Döblin, and Franz Essel. Benjamin’s writings on Berlin include relatively well-

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\(^5\) Lutz Koepnick ascribes the use of untrained actors to a lack of budget (2009).
known pieces like *Berlin Childhood around 1900* and *A Berlin Chronicle*, both written while in exile from the city, but also a number of fascinating commentaries on other writers and artists who also have deep investments in the sensory experience of Berlin, in particular. For example, in 1929 Benjamin wrote a review of his friend Franz Hessel’s book, *Spazieren in Berlin* (Strolling in Berlin), entitled “The Return of the Flâneur,” in which he makes the glowing case for Hessel as the creator of a new tradition of flânerie in Berlin, Hessel’s (and Benjamin’s) hometown:

> And if [Hessel] now sets out and walks through the city, he has nothing of the excited impressionism with which the travel writer approaches his subject. Hessel does not describe; he narrates. Even more, he repeats what he has heard. *Spazieren in Berlin* is an echo of the stories the city has told him ever since he was a child—an epic book through and through, a process of memorizing while strolling around, a book for which memory has acted not as the source but as the Muse. It goes along the street in front of him, and each street is a vertiginous experience....As he walks, his steps create an astounding resonance on the asphalt. The gaslight shining down on the pavement casts an ambiguous light on this double floor. The city as a mnemonic for the lonely walker: it conjures up more than his childhood and youth, more than its own history. (1929 [1999]:262).

Benjamin claims that Hessel has revitalized “the endless spectacle of flânerie” in 20th-century Berlin (as opposed to 19th-century Paris, the city to which Benjamin primarily ascribes it). And Hessel has done so in a manner rife with sound: narrations of things heard, epic tales, and resonance of the streets themselves.

> Writing a year later, Benjamin reflects on 19th-century German author E.T.A. Hoffmann, whom he describes as “the father of the Berlin novel” and “the physiognomist of Berlin” (1930 [1999]:325). He paints a picture of Hoffmann as a kind of proto-ethnographer of urban life at the intersection of human existence in Berlin and the specific built environment those humans inhabit. Benjamin writes: “People—communicating with them, observing them, merely looking at them—were more precious to him than anything” (ibid.). He also makes the case for a situated specificity in
Hoffmann’s writing that ran counter to the rhetoric of Berlin as a special metropolis that seems to have emerged between then and Benjamin’s own lifetime: “The traces of the city [in Hoffmann’s writings] were subsequently submerged in generalities when people began to call Berlin the ‘capital,’ the Tiergarten the ‘park,’ and the Spree the ‘river’” (ibid.). His comments, despite being somewhat vague, suggest a resistance to the more totalizing, de-particularizing character he seems to perceive in urban modernity.

In contrast, Benjamin finds refuge in sensory specifics. He quotes from a character speaking in Döblin’s 1929 novel, *Alexanderplatz*, who self-reflexively comments on Döblin’s writing style, advocating “for setting the scene in Berlin, and calling streets and squares by their proper names” both for the aura of authenticity but also in order to communicate a kind of insider knowledge. Benjamin’s own writing agenda follows suit, at least in its specificity and wealth of particular, highly localized detail: street names, individuals, unique encounters. But where Döblin’s character seeks a surfeit of authenticity, Benjamin is responding to the sensate textures of memory and embodied experience. He details such an encounter with the city at length in his highly evocative pieces explicitly about Berlin (written 1932-1934, revised in 1938), which render the city not in an authoritative way, but rather through the rich subjectivity of personal experience and sensation, colored liberally by “the Muse” of memory. For him, Berlin was a particular place and one awash in sound: a brass band marching through the zoo, where “calls and screeches of these animals mingled with the tattoo of drums and percussion”;⁶ or the life-giving sounds of the telephone (but also the sonic “devastation”

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⁶ From *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, “Two Brass Bands” (1938 [2006]:118). For more on the process of creating a critical edition of the text, see the Translator’s Foreword by Howard Eiland (2006:vii-xvi).
it inflicted on domestic space); or the meditation on memory, sound and image that closes *A Berlin Chronicle*, where he again seems to articulate his own mode of operation in recollecting Berlin, theorized as sound:

> The *déjà vu* effect has often been described. But I wonder whether the term is actually well chosen, and whether the metaphor appropriate to the process would not be far better taken from the realm of acoustics. One ought to speak of events that reach us like an echo awakened by a call, a sound that seems to have been heard somewhere in the darkness of a past life. Accordingly, if we are not mistaken, the shock with which moments enter consciousness as if already lived usually strikes us in the form of a sound. (1932 [1999]:634)

Benjamin thus construes sound not only as a part of the environment but as a structuring device for comprehending the city. While the other writers mentioned (Tucholsky, Döberlin, Hessel) all include rich sonic descriptions of the city, it is Benjamin who most emphatically couples sound and the *process* of narrating the city.

These texts by Benjamin date from 1932 to 1938, an ominous period for the city that may be suggested by Benjamin’s comments about the rhetoric of Berlin as “the capital.” In 1936, the young architect Albert Speer would join Adolf Hitler in planning and beginning to build a very different kind of “Great City,” that of a *World Capital Germania*, which he explained to Heinrich Himmler as a desire to leave a legacy as “a builder” not a hero on the battlefield: “the monuments we shall have built will defy the challenge of time….Berlin will one day be the capital of the world” (in Balfour 1992:81). But Hitler’s fascination was not just with monumentalism; he also took great interest in reveling in the sensuousness of architecture. This aesthetic of sensory monumentalism can be seen in the films of Leni Riefenstahl, most famously in *Triumph of the Will* (1935), a propagandistic observational documentary about intersections of the human

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7 From *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, “The Telephone” (1938 [2006]:48).
body and architecture (in celebration of fascism). Speer’s memoirs suggest that Hitler was not only interested in transforming the narrative of Berlin-as-city (from a “Great City” to the world capital), he also approached his urban conquest as a form of authoritarian flânerie. Speer recounts that he “went to Hitler’s evenings once or twice a week” for movies and drinks. At the end of the night, Hitler would relax and the two would talk about the urban transformation of Berlin, Hitler’s “ruling passion”:

Hitler’s favorite project was our model city, which was set up in the former exhibition rooms of the Berlin Academy of the Arts. In order to reach it undisturbed, he had doors installed in the walls between the Chancellery and our building and a communicating path laid out. Sometimes he invited the supper guests to our studio. We would set out armed with flashlights and keys. In the empty halls spotlights illuminated the models. There was no need for me to do the talking, for Hitler, with flashing eyes, explained every single detail to his companions. There was keen excitement when a new model was set up and illuminated by brilliant spots from the direction in which the sun would fall on the actual buildings....Hitler was particularly excited over a large model of the grand boulevard on a scale of 1:1000. He loved to “enter his avenue” at various points and take measure of the future effect. For example, he assumed the point of view of a traveler emerging from the south station or admired the great hall as it looked from the heart of the avenue. To do so, he bent down, almost kneeling, his eye an inch or so above the level of the model, in order to have the right perspective. (Speer 1970:132-133)

Not entirely unlike Benjamin, Hitler manifests a longing for sensory passage through the city. But in gross contrast, such passage is for Hitler an act of domination, in which he towers over his miniature boulevard with a fabricated environment and faux lighting in order to simulate the actual affect of this (mostly imaginary) “World Capital.” Ironically, in order to facilitate this city simulacrum, Hitler had to deform existing architecture of the Academy of the Arts. His “communicating path” suggests that the desire for passage-through-the-city is not limited to progressive political realms.

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*Alexander Kluge’s film, *Brutality in Stone* (1961), serves as a rejoinder to the fascist excesses of Riefenstahl’s work, creating a richly layered—and highly disturbing—audiovisual montage of architectural monuments from the Nazi years overlaid with sound from mass rallies, political speeches and other sonic artifacts of the period. The intersection of a mythical corporeality with monumental architecture can be seen in Hitler’s almost animistic attitude toward cities: “It may well be that it is impossible for any city to achieve an appearance which is pleasing to our sense of culture, unless at sometime or other some great man has breathed his inspiration into its walls” (Hitler in Balfour 1992:81).
Speer’s final recollection of this “World Capital” came as he left Hitler’s bunker just before the city fell to Soviet forces. In this critical moment, Speer finds that visual monumentality is reduced to a sonorous fatalism:

I left the Chancellor’s residence. I wanted to walk once more through the neighboring Chancellory, which I had built. Since the lights were no longer functioning I contented myself with a few farewell minutes in the Court of Honor, whose outlines could scarcely be seen against the night sky. I sensed rather than saw the architecture. There was an almost ghostly quiet about everything, like a night in the mountains. The noise of a great city, which in early years had penetrated to here even during the night, had totally ceased. At rather long intervals I heard the detonation of Russian shells. (in Balfour 1992:100).

The “noise of a great city”—referencing Ruttmann—and the subsequent near-silence not only spells the end of Hitler’s regime but also of the ideological epoch of the “World Capital.” But the political legacy of the war would long resonate through the city.

**Berlin 1961: Two Narratives**

Between 1945 and 1961, the city was rebuilt and divided, first into four sectors (American, British, French, and Soviet), then into a Soviet/GDR East Berlin and the “island” of West Berlin, occupied by the other Allies and geographically cut off from the rest of the Federal Republic of Germany to which it belonged. The city remained a sensory genre, with films, music, poetry and literature devoted to narrating the strange cityscapes of postwar Berlin and, especially after 1961, the Divided City—a division that would become all the more palpable on August 13, 1961, with the erection of the Berlin Wall. Nikita Krushchev called the city “the most dangerous place on earth,” a phrase Frederick Kempe seized on for the subtitle of his book, Berlin 1961 (2011). Certain narratives dominate this period: geopolitics, spycraft, the looming threat of nuclear war. Cultural histories of West Berlin manage to include the counter-culture, squatting, and
nightlife that emerged, as well. But other stories were coming into being at the time. On October 30, 1961, Germany and Turkey agreed to the terms of a labor agreement to bring temporary guestworkers to Germany; the agreement was made effective retroactively to September 1, just over two weeks after the construction of the Wall, at that time little more than rolls of barbed wire backed by military forces. This agreement was not the first of its kind but the construction of the Wall lent a certain urgency to the situation in Berlin, where formerly day-laborers had freely commuted to West Berlin but were no longer able. The delicacy of Berlin’s situation is reflected in the language of the labor agreement itself, which states, “This agreement is also valid for the state of Berlin, unless the government of the Federal Republic of Germany gives word otherwise within three months from the time the agreement goes into effect” (Bundesminister 1962:69).

Running parallel to city narratives of Cold War (West) Berlin, a wealth of literature, both scholarly and otherwise, has emerged since then, chronicling the social, political, and occasionally musical dimensions of this migration. But these two narratives are almost always held apart from one another, with occasional (token) exceptions: passing mention of “the Turks” settling in the areas nearest the Berlin Wall, or occasionally even of the so-called “Treehouse on the Wall” (*Baumhaus an der Mauer*), where a Turkish squatter built on East German land that happened to fall on the western side of the wall; David Bowie’s song “Neuköln,” allegedly a “tribute” to immigrants (and his neighbors) living in Neukölln; or mention of the U1 subway line, dubbed the “Orient Express,” which ran East-West through Berlin and stopped in Kreuzberg, where it now extends into the former East.10

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In hopes of both re-connecting these two disparate city narratives since the Cold War and also of articulating a historical context for my own research in Islamic contexts within Turkish Berlin, I would like to briefly map a sonic history from 1961 of the intersecting trajectories of “regular Berlin” with Turkish Berlin (and to some degree, bring both of these into conversation with sonic histories of East Berlin). Rather than structuring this around chronology, I opt to construct a narrative in the fragmented, non-totalizing spirit of Benjamin’s sonic flânerie and the pathways such passage might entail—different forms of lines and trails and sites of passage, much like what Kevin Lynch has called urban “wayfinding” or Deleuze and Guattari have described as mapping. For them, a map (unlike a tracing) “is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious….The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves and alleged ‘competence’” (1987:12-13). This performance—this historical sound mapping—will then set the stage for a larger-scale ethnographic passage through the city that comprises the rest of this dissertation. But in so doing it offers an attempt to embed that ethnography in the literally concrete world of the city’s past through an exploration of its plausible pathways, the broader organizing principal I use throughout. Thus I “wayfind” here through three urban features of Berlin that suggest what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a movement of “lines of flight” and “deterritorialization” (9): walls, streets, and waterways.
In listening to the Cold War metropolis, I begin with the Wall itself. The Wall did not merely demarcate geopolitical boundaries; it was both “Architectural war” and at least in some cases an “Architectural oasis” to foster cultural life among the “voluntary prisoners” in the West, as Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis have suggested (1972; 2005:237-238). It also functioned as a medium of sorts, not in the way Kittler

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11 Koolhaas and Zenghelis do not mention Berlin by name but clearly model their architectural intervention in London on Cold War Berlin: “Once, a city was divided in two parts. One part became the Good Half, the other part the Bad Half. The inhabitants of the Bad Half began to flock to the good part of the divided city, rapidly swelling into an urban exodus.” In response a wall was built “around the good part of the city, making it completely inaccessible to their subjects. The Wall was a masterpiece….As so often before in this history of mankind, architecture was the guilty instrument of despair” (2005:237). But while Koolhaas
suggests—for inscribing, processing and transmitting information—but rather as a literal acoustic medium, a material object that facilitated sensory transmission between two sounding, listening bodies. For example, in her recent essay on the “audible cartography” of divided Berlin, Nicole Dietrich highlights the train station at Friedrichstraße, which sat on the border between East and West. The station brought people into such close sonic contact that East German authorities redesigned the acoustics of the train platforms to prevent such aural proximity. But Dietrich also highlights a tendency toward silence: from the East, the Wall was almost entirely inaccessible due to a wide strip of land surrounding it, thus only allowing a silent visual contact across it—waving, smiles, etc. And in many places on the West, it offered solitude and a new path between Kreuzberg and Wedding (two key immigrant boroughs) for cyclists, whose gears and bells presumably sounded as well (Dietrich 2012).

The Wall was also a site of more overtly political sounding and listening. For listeners in the West, gunshots from the East became a starting point for news reports in trying to ascertain political events obscured from view by the Wall.12 In the East, the GDR secret police, or Stasi (a shortening from Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, the Ministry for State Security), began using microphones to monitor activity underground (literally) to prevent tunneling or escapes through sewers (Taylor 2006:290ff.), a practice with predecessors in West Berlin, where in 1954 American and British forces had built a tunnel, equipped it with 600 tape recorders and recorded 1200 hours of KGB telephone lines daily (Richie 1998:699). Other underground spaces resonated in less sinister ways,

and Zenghelis’s idiosyncratic reading acknowledges this painful history, in advocating a similar project for London, they also highlight its culturally creative aspects.

12 For one example of such coverage, cf. “Four Shots Fired Near Berlin Wall” (Associated Press 1985).
like the abandoned “ghost stations” on the Berlin subway, where trains passed for a stop or two underneath East Berlin.

In other instances, the Wall became something of a stage, as music performances and political speeches took place on the West side of the Wall, with the expected result that the sound carried into the East. The most famous instance is perhaps Ronald Reagan’s exhortation to “tear down this wall” in 1987. But performances by David Bowie, in which he aimed his speakers eastward, and the Rolling Stones among others, also caused official consternation (and often arrests of deviant listeners) in the East.\textsuperscript{13}

Early in the Cold War, the two city governments engaged in what Pragal and Stratenschulte call “a loudspeaker war” at the Wall from August 1961 to October 1965 (1999:37). Hostilities ensued barely a week after the Wall’s construction (in barbed wire, initially), as the GDR played the kitschy Schlager hit, “\textit{Da Sprach der alte Häuptling der Indianer}” (“So the Old Indian Chief Said,” 1959), by Gus Backus, at loud volumes during a visit by West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to the border zone. In response, West Berlin rigged Volkswagen vans with loudspeakers which announced itself as “the studio on the barbed wire” (\textit{das Studio am Stacheldraht}) (1999:36ff.). A sonic arms race ensued, culminating four years later as the West unveiled a 5000-watt system mounted on Mercedes trucks with hydraulic lifts extending 30 feet high, capable of transmitting comprehensible sound over five kilometers (ibid.).

In some cases, the performative nature of the Wall was taken to extremes, as in the case of Dieter Bielig, who on October 2, 1971, took it upon himself to climb onto the Wall near Brandenburg Gate then walk along it chanting political slogans (e.g., “Freedom for the capital!”) in one-man protest until West Berlin borderguards tried to pull him back

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Taylor 2006:380ff. These narratives also figure prominently in many museum exhibitions in Berlin.
into the safety of the western side, at which point he jumped into East Berlin and was arrested. Once incarcerated, he allegedly spoke mostly incoherently (e.g., “The slogan is Mao Zedong!”) and sang the GDR national anthem, then was shot as he attempted to escape (Ahonen 2011:180-185).  

Such performances and protests, whether explicitly political or not, hint at the permeability of the wall; a wall does not keep (all) sound out. (Some) people—especially foreign nationals—were able to cross the border with relative ease. In her 2003 book Strange Stars Stare at the Earth (Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde), Emine Sevgi Özdamar recounts (in what appears to be a mostly autobiographical account) her encounters, especially with single Turkish men, who would travel into East Berlin after a day of work in the West. She herself had come to Berlin from Turkey to work—but to do so in the East, working with Bertolt Brecht’s student Benno Besson in the famed Berliner Ensemble theater in the mid-1970s. Her account serves as a useful reminder that although the labor migration of the 1960s mostly offered working class jobs to fuel West Germany’s miracle economy (Wirtschaftswunder), a long history of politicians, diplomats and more recently artists, have come steadily to the city since the first Ottoman diplomats, including ‘Ali Aziz Efendi (discussed in Chapter 3 in conjunction with the city’s Turkish cemetery) to modern-day hip-hop artists and DJs.  

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14 In a falsified report after Bielig’s death that literally and figuratively silenced his story until German reunification, his vocalizations were intensified even further, reporting that he was screaming at guards and calling them pigs before assaulting them—leading to his then being shot. The incident leading to his death was not an isolated incident, as he had a significant experience in protesting the Wall, including dragging a massive cross through Berlin as part of a massive demonstration on the one-year anniversary of the Wall, as well as a later arrest in East Berlin during another protest (Ahonen 2011:180-181).  

This selective permeability was also bound up with the kinds of political listening mentioned above. The entire history of political espionage could be told as a history of science and technology, as surveillance devices were invented on both sides of the Wall to record audio, video and text for political advantage. The Stasi secret police were particularly aggressive in their development of surveillance technologies (cf. Müller-Enbergs 1996:73-89, Dennis 2003:121-126). In Georg Herbstritt’s meticulous account of West German citizens working for GDR espionage efforts, he notes that the Stasi actively recruited immigrants from Turkey which he characterizes as “the work of the Stasi with foreigners and against foreigners” (2007:148), with 30 “foreigners” (Ausländer) working for the Stasi as “Inofficial Collaborators” out of a total of 499 such collaborators in West Germany—roughly equivalent to the percentage these groups constituted in the population as a whole (ibid.). Central to these efforts was the ability of foreign nationals—what Erich Mielke would call “many antisocial and criminally inclined foreigners” (quoted in Herbstritt 2007:150)—to enter into East Berlin on a daylong visa obtainable at the border. \(^{16}\) A small number of Turkish nationals actually lived in East Berlin, including a number of members of the Turkish Community Party, which set up its headquarters in the GDR (Leipzig) in 1957 after being banned in Turkey, eventually setting up a radio station and printing press in East Berlin as well (153).

Inofficial Collaborators in West Berlin were tasked with tracking other “foreigners” in the West, especially those involved in groups perceived to be fascist/nationalist/right wing/religiously fanatic, which Stasi records indicate were clustered in Kreuzberg, the heart of the West Berlin Turkish population (154). Reports by

\(^{16}\) Cf. Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s account of this near-daily border crossing during her studies at the Bertolt Brecht theater, the Berliner Ensemble, in East Berlin in the 1970s (2003).
the handlers of “foreigner” collaborators codenamed “Taruk,” “Kemal,” and “Piero” specifically name the right-wing Gray Wolves and the conservative Islamic organization Milli Görüş as targets of observation (156-158). Perhaps the most famous case of a Turkish national acting as an Inofficial Collaborator was Hüseyin Yıldırım (codenamed “Blitz”) who sought out employment as a mechanic at the U.S. in order to facilitate his work as a potential collaborator with American signals intelligence officer, James Hall (Macrakis 2008:102ff., Herbstritt 2007:158-159. While the entirety of these actions may not always entail actual listening, many of them did, as evidenced by the massive sound and media archive generated by Stasi activities, accumulating over 30,000 “sound documents” (Tondokumente), as well as almost 3,000 films/videos and well over a million photographs. Tapping telephones and other rooms, interfering with radio signals, and simply having people listen and then “inform” on neighbors and coworkers were all common practices of the period as well—practices that highlight the role of other walls besides the Wall.17 Finally, as real estate has shifted, shared walls in neighborhoods like Kreuzberg’s Kottbusser Tor suggest new sonic configurations, as with a major club (liable to run until early morning on weekends) or music venue next to a mosque (e.g., Mevlana mosque and Festsaal Kreuzberg, or SO36 and Ertuğrul Gazi mosque)

**Streets**

Streets sound in unexpected ways—even on the most literal level of the sound generated at or in contact with the surfaces of streets. On a number of occasions, I found myself sitting on a street corner simply listening to the sounds emitting from the interface

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17 The Stasi apparatus is laid out exhaustively in the series *Anatomie der Staatssicherheit*, edited by Klaus-Dietmar Henke, et al.
of street-and-object/person in motion: the slight jingle of a bicycle bell riding onto or off of the one-inch lip between the road and a bicycle path; the rapid-fire clatter of a large truck driving along one of the cobblestone roads of Neukölln early in the morning; a woman in high heels crossing the street; jackhammers at one of the many construction sites that still dot the city; a man in high heels crossing the street; the thud of tables, crates and tents on the ground at the end of a day at the Schönleinstrasse “Türkenmarkt.”

Of course, streets convey and channel far more sounds than just these. As suggested on the website for Sensing the Street: A Street in Berlin, “Colors, sounds, smells. The street is not only a space of transit and business: in passing through the street, sensory impressions, atmospheres and sensations triggered. It is perceived as a landscape of taste [Geschmackslandschaft].”18 Reflecting on this same project, Nicole Dietrich reconstructs a fascinating “sensual geography” of the formerly divided Berlin, with particular emphasis on publicly audible sounds like fountains and automobiles. In a conversation with her, film sound designer Dirk Jacob “was convinced that traffic sounds are the most important acoustic ingredient to make a film historically ‘authentic’ and credible” (2012:100). Dietrich then goes on to explore how East Berliners have a greater aural sensibility for the sounds of cars because of the wide variety of idiosyncratic and historical makes that were available in the GDR.

Focusing in even further than just the level of East or West Berlin, one finds that certain streets generate their own acoustic profile. For example, Kottbusser Damm in

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18 www.sensingthestreet.de. Sensing the Street project explored the sensory worlds of three streets (Ackerstrasse in Mitte/Wedding, Adalbertstrasse in Kreuzberg, and Karl-Marx-Strasse in Neukölln) with exhibitions in those neighborhoods from November 2007 to February 2008. The project was headed up by university faculty members from around Berlin: Alex Arteaga (Universität der Künste), Wolfgang Knapp (Humboldt-Universität) and Rolf Lindner (Humboldt-Universität), with a number of graduate students developing the individual projects.
Map 7. Berlin. Drive

Neukölln becomes an extremely important thoroughfare for protests and demonstrations of all kinds, often beginning at Hermannplatz.\textsuperscript{19} The constraining and channeling capacity of architecture becomes apparent in such situations, as protestors—and their sounds!—make their way along Kottbusser Damm (which is then renamed Kottbusser Strasse when it crosses the canal into Kreuzberg) and into the iconic Kottbusser Tor.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} For now I omit discussion of squares, marked in German by the suffix –platz (e.g., Hermannplatz, Alexanderplatz, etc.), though I return to this topic in Chapter 4 as I consider public gatherings on Hermannplatz.

\textsuperscript{20} I omit discussion of gates (in German, Tor) but could easily imagine an entire topography of the city based on its “gates,” which highlight the path of the former city walls while also mapping a larger geography beyond the city through naming conventions (e.g., Kottbusser Tor is the Tor, or gate, that one would have used to get to Cottbus to the east of the city, Schlesisches Tor to Silesia/Poland, etc.)
This tradition of protest can be traced back to the Cold War (if not further). Indeed, one of the most incendiary events at the intersection of Cold War politics and diasporic life came on January 5, 1980, with the murder of Celalettin Kesim, a Turkish communist who was distributing leaflets at Kottbusser Tor when he was attacked by a group of right-wing skinheads and/or a group of Islamist youth from a nearby mosque closely affiliated with the Turkish Islamist movement, Milli Görüş (Spiegel article 1980, Yücel 2008; cf. Schiffauer 2010 on Milli Görüş). In the immediate aftermath, 15,000 people marched in an anti-fascist demonstration to commemorate Kesim, charting a course from Hermannplatz through Kreuzberg to decry the violence against Kesim, a practice that continues in commemoration each year.

Such protests are, however, relatively minor compared to the uproar that accompanied annual May Day protests in the late 1980s in the same area around Kottbusser Tor. The traditional narrative for these events is that leftists marched against neo-Nazis who bused in from southern Germany, cars were burned, riot police called in, and a pitched battle lasted from late Walpurgisnacht (the night of April 30th) into the night of May 1st (cf. Krautschick 1991). But here again, the politics of immigrant life figure in. A number of Turkish, Kurdish and Alevi acquaintances have told me that at the heart of these clashes were immigrants from Turkey who had similar political affiliations as their better-known German counterparts (i.e., left wing/Communist groups and right wing Islamists/nationalists). This layered map of political affiliations was an important part of both sides of the city, as mentioned above in conjunction with the Turkish Communist Part in East Berlin, which was also made manifest in less violent ways in
cases like that of Emine Sevgi Özdamar, who came from Turkey to East Berlin to study theater while living in the West.

As notions of “the street” become less literal, they begin to encompass much wider musical practices, as well, especially including hip-hop, a musical genre whose emergence in Germany but especially Berlin is closely connected with diasporic communities, and with Kreuzberg’s Turkish population in particular. Levent Soysal’s 2004 account of hip-hop Berlin (coupled with Ayhan Kaya’s work in 1997, 2001) narrows from the entire city—which he also calls a WorldCity, but only after its emergence as a Divided City (2004:67)—to the borough of Kreuzberg, and then from Kreuzberg to a particular youth center, NaunynRitze, on one of the most iconic streets in Turkish Berlin, Naunynstrasse. The street is best known today for its theater, Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, which focuses on experimental postmigrant theater, but it remains a critical site for hip-hop music, as evidenced by the placement of the hip-hop stage at MyFest, the city-sanctioned alternative to burning cars on May 1st in Kreuzberg. But in recent years a sign has hung over the street at the theater, offering a reminder of a longerstanding encounter with the street in diasporic memory and arts by means of a quotation from Aras Ören’s novel, What does Niyazi want in Naunynstrasse?: “Naunynstrasse without Turks would still in fact be Naunynstrasse, but in its old age without a new beginning” (1971 [1980]). Whether in hip-hop or contemporary theater or early Gastarbeiter novels, the sensory temporalities of a street like Naunynstrasse suggest an important locus for listening to Berlin.
Waterways

Few writers can lay claim to have explored post-1961 Berlin with the intensity of Aras Ören, an Istanbul-born author who migrated to Berlin in 1969 and has written a number of works on life in Turkish Berlin. His novella, Please, No Police!, ends chillingly with a German woman, Brigitte, sitting with a friend at a cafe when a loudspeaker interrupts: “Achtung, Achtung! Hier spricht die Polizei!” A dark blue police van rolled slowly past the cafe. On its top was a display dummy. Next to the dummy there was a fairly large phantasmic drawing of a face....‘On December 26, 1973, the person whose face you see in the drawing was found dead in Landwehr Canal, wearing the clothes on the mannequin’....The police van slowly rolled out of Adalbert Street, leaving behind the trailing, metallic sound of its loudspeaker” (Ören 1981 [1992]:128-130). The dead man, Ali Itir, was an illegal alien who had inadvertently become involved with Brigitte then ran into the winter night after she fled their romantic tryst-gone-awry. His final words are a prayer of desperation as he runs: “Oh my God, why don’t you show the way to your subject Ali in this land of misery they call Germany!” (125). Indeed, a central preoccupation of the book are the neverending meanderings through the Kreuzberg borough of Berlin—by foot, motorcycle, car and subway (U-Bahn) and fear of the police. Here is a nightmarish, forcible flânerie for Ali, who inhabits a (foreign) sensory world replete with police sirens, workers protests (with loudspeakers), barking dogs and noisy motorcycles.

Although Ören would not publish Please, No Police! until 1983, it is set in December 1973. Perhaps this is a coincidence; but death by drowning was tragically relevant in Kreuzberg in the early 1970s. At a bend in the Spree River near the
Oberbaumbrücke, several children had fallen in the water and drowned, including two Turkish children, Cengaver Katrancı (1972) and Çetin Mert (1975). Mert’s death galvanized a massive reaction—and one that, like many of the protests above, was articulated in sound and protest, in particular. Around noon on May 11, 1975, Mert, just five years old, fell into the river while playing with a friend. Within four minutes, the police and fire departments arrived: the furious, diffuse approach of sirens, and quiet flow of water. Within 15 minutes, diving crews had assembled and now stood on the banks of the river, where they would remain, waiting for clearance to dive because the West Berlin bank marked the GDR border, meaning the water was technically in East Berlin. While a fire chief worked to secure permission from the GDR (it was denied), a crowd, including Mert’s family, gathered on the bank and began also calling out to the nearby guards patrolling from the East Berlin side: water still bubbles past, crowds murmur anxiously. After an hour a GDR boat arrived and an hour after that managed to retrieve Mert’s body—which they then took back to East Berlin for four days: a family protests angrily and perhaps begins to lament the death of a child (Jurgens 2012, 2013; Ahrends, et al., n.d.; Güngör 2000).

In the following days, massive protests took place at the site of the accident, with people chanting “murderers, murderes, child murderers” and a strong showing of the West Berlin Turkish community. Hundreds gathered at Hermannplatz—the same place where protestors would start out from after the death of Celalettin Kesim in 1980—and marched to the banks of the Spree, where bilingual speeches were given and the congregation offered Islamic prayers for the boy: the uneasy mixture of mass chanting against Communism, the GDR, and the Wall along with the marked quietude of Sunni

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21 Jeffrey Jurgens has written extensively on these deaths and their aftermath (2012, 2013).
prayers for the dead (which I return to in Chapter 4). Other signs were hoisted for Milli Görüş, the Islamist group, and the entire protest was organized by the Organization for Turkish Culture and Solidarity (*Türkischer Kultur- und Solidaritätsverein*), a group affiliated with the right-wing Turkish nationalists, the Gray Wolves (Jurgens 2013).

Beyond protests, a new fence was eventually built along the western bank of the river by the West Berlin government—an unpopular move, given the politics of fences and walls at the time—to ensure that such accidents stopped. West Berlin also installed “Water Accident Reporter” (*Wasserunfallmelder*) devices, standing roughly 10-feet tall, red- and green-striped, with an alarm apparatus on top and multilingual instructions (German, Turkish, and Serbo-Croatian) on the side explaining how to report accidents (Jurgens 2012:200). They were Cold War sirens—and Sirens—on the Spree.

Beyond walls, streets, and waterways, a number of other possible sonic “flight lines” seems plausible for Berlin: channels/*Kanalen* of water and of “migrant media”; the outward-radiating waves of radio; airplane flights; queues outside clubs; transit lines, including the aforementioned U1 line (which also had a musical written for it—but again, one that focuses on the grittiness of Berlin/Kreuzberg residents, but without acknowledging the migrant history attached), or the pair of U-Bahn lines (U6, U8) that connected Wedding to the southern boroughs of Neukölln and Kreuzberg. In short, an abundance of other options exist to facilitate such an urban narration for Berlin, and presumably likewise for other cities with their own possibilities for sensory historiography and sonic *flânerie*. 
Remapping God’s Pathways

As I wrote in my Opening prologue, the principal trajectory that guides this work theoretically is the question of materiality: What are the material artifacts of sound and its production? What mediums and media generate, inhibit, facilitate, document and transmit sound, both as a sensory phenomenon on its own terms (a sonic real, for lack of a better term) and as a kind of knowledge (or what Steven Feld has called acoustemology). In the chapters that follow, I trace out materialities of sound from the body (particularly the mouth, tongue, throat and lungs); to the interface between humans (especially human hands) and musical instruments, in the case of the bağlama; to the acoustics of
architecture, both inside and outside mosques; and finally, to physical and “virtual” (but still material) networks that extend well beyond Berlin. Each of these materialities corresponds to a single religious community, including Sufis and Alevis in addition to the usual mosque-based congregations (both Sunni and Shi’a). Obviously this pairing is somewhat reductive: any of these groups would offer fascinating case studies of the voice, or of architectural acoustics, for example. And where space permits, I try to touch on these other possibilities. More broadly, I could easily imagine other compelling narratives that carry out a similar kind of mapping, but focus solely on the body (e.g., the fingertips of Alevis, the chest of Caferi Shi ‘a during their lamentation gatherings) or on architecture (e.g., the rented, highly temporary spaces of Cerrahi Sufis, the Mevlevi farmhouse in the Brandenburg countryside, arguably the major landmark in the former GDR) or on off/online networks (e.g., the tremendous changes in self-representation on the alevi.org, the website of the Anatolian Alevi Culture Center, the near invisibility of groups like the Caferi Shi’a). Again, I hope to highlight some of these overlaps and slippages but the organization I lay out here is informed primarily by ethnography (not theory), such that each material theme corresponds to the community where it seemed the best fit. In addition, each of these communities is associated with a particular “pathway” within a larger framework of Islam (as described in the Opening).

In hopes of maintaining focus on the city as the object and scale of my study, I situate each congregation in its own borough, moving from one to the next. As luck would have it, these narratives of material communities map onto a relatively linear path—but again, a “counterpath” and a metapathway—that moves clockwise from the north of the city (Wedding) along the Berlin Wall (to Kreuzberg) then to the south and
west (Neukölln-Rathaus and then Neukölln-Tempelhof). My counterpath is a contingent remapping based on current activities and congregation locations 2012-204. But these institutions (especially in the past) frequently move around the city. Otherwise, the cemevi might have stayed in Wedding, where it was through the 1990s, until the Cerrahi dervishes started up their zaviye, or gathering place, in the same neighborhood. This past fall (October 2013), the Cerrahis gave up the lease on their teahouse, a major part of my routines with them only a few months earlier. Remarkably, some things do seem to stay the same: the route I follow here could have happened just as well when the Berlin Wall was still standing. Turkish Berlin remains a staggeringly West-Berlin phenomenon. (The reasons for this inertia are not insignificant, however. “Why would we move to the east, we’d just get beaten up by skinheads,” one friend told me sardonically.) Finally, each chapter focuses primarily on a single liturgical practice: Cerrahi zikr, Alevi cem, Caferi matem, and the Sunni cenaze. Although the emphasis is on liturgy, I allow a wide berth of movement in and out of ritual space/time to tease out some of the broader contexts of urban acoustics which often flourish just beyond the thresholds of ritual sacred space.

This entire trajectory can be seen schematically here, with an accompanying map below:

**Table 1. Pathways Through Berlin**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>1. Caferi (Sufi) zaviye</th>
<th>2. Alevi cemevi</th>
<th>3. Caferi Shi’a (İmam Rıza) mosque</th>
<th>4. Sunni (Şehitlik) mosque</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City borough (in Berlin)</td>
<td>Wedding</td>
<td>Kreuzberg</td>
<td>Neukölln (Rathaus)</td>
<td>Neukölln (Tempelhof)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materiality</td>
<td>voice (tongue, throat)</td>
<td>bağlama</td>
<td>mosque interior</td>
<td>mosque exterior (courtyard)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>tarikat</td>
<td>yol</td>
<td>mezhep/shari‘a</td>
<td>visiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key ritual</td>
<td>zikr</td>
<td>cem</td>
<td>matem</td>
<td>cenaze</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I begin in the borough of Wedding in the north of Berlin with a working class group of Halveti-Cerrahi dervishes, most of whom are first-generation immigrants to Berlin who work in construction of drive cabs. While Islam has its own rich vocabulary of “pathways,” Sufism elaborates on those ideas considerably, especially with the idea of the tarikat, a term used both for the pathway toward divine enlightenment and the dervish order itself (e.g., Halveti-Cerrahi, Mevlevi, etc.). I focus on their ritual of the zikr, a weekly ceremony in which the names and characteristics of God are chanted repeatedly. Much attention has been paid to the musical repertoires that often accompany these zikr ceremonies, such as ilahi hymns or more elaborate musical compositions in the Ottoman
period. I focus instead on the deployment of the voice itself—particularly the male voice—considering the way vocal timbre is used by rank-and-file dervishes to attain a higher spiritual state and to worship God. The idea of “zikr of the heart” \((\text{kalbi})\) or of “the breath” \((\text{cehri})\) are central to the intensifying of the ritual while also elucidating important theologies of the body and sound in Sufism.

My traversal of the city continues as I then move to Kreuzberg, a borough like Wedding that flanked the Berlin Wall and became famous as the heart of “Little Istanbul” and also the punk/squatter scene in Berlin through the 1970s and ‘80s. Today it is also home to the main congregational space \((\text{cemevi})\) and community center for Alevis, a heterogeneous group of ethnic Turks and Kurds whose religious pathway, or \(yol\) (significantly, the only “pathway” term here of Turkic origin linguistically), is considered by many Sunni (and some Shiite) Muslims to be too heterodox to be Islamic. Although many Alevis argue for a secular identity, one of the key markers of acoustic difference in Alevi religious ceremony is the use of the \(\text{bağlama}\), a long-necked lute also known as “the stringed Qur’an” \((\text{telli Kur’an})\) among Alevis. Focusing on their mixed-gender ceremony, the \(\text{cem}\), I explore notions of sacred instrumentality among Alevis, arguing that the idea of a “stringed Qur’an” is more than simply a nickname. Instead, the \(\text{bağlama}\) serves as an irrefutably material object that simultaneously articulates-through-sound the importance of divine revelation to the prophet Muhammad (i.e., it affirms the importance of having a revelatory text, or Qur’an) while denying any special legitimacy to the ‘Uthmanic Qur’an used throughout the Muslim world. Furthermore, the deeply oral/aural nature of the Alevi “stringed Qur’an” and the \(\text{aşık}\) bards who play the instrument and sing the associated musical repertoire emphasize the sonic nature of the ‘Uthmanic Qur’an
itself, which has long been understood as a “text” that must be animated sonically through recitation to achieve its intended effect.

Alevi culture intersects with Berlin’s musical institutions in significant ways, as well. As my own bağlama teacher suggested, one narrative of this migration could be summed up as follows: “The Sacred Bağlama: From the Mountains of Anatolia to the Concert Halls of Berlin.” This narrative is not uncommon among Alevis: the bağlama, originally a sacred instrument, was secularized through its amplification and use in Istanbul and Ankara nightclubs during migrations from rural parts of Turkey in the 1960s and ‘70s. As the instrument was taken farther westward, its stature was recognized (if not outright redeemed) by cultural brokers like the Philharmonie and the Komische Oper, which have facilitated many performances of traditional Turkish music or hybrid works such as Taner Akyol’s recent opera, Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves (2012, Komische Oper).

While much of Alevi cultural life exists independent of these institutions—and other non-Alevi, diasporic groups also perform there—the connection between the bağlama and these icons of Berlin’s classical music scene remains salient.

Having explored Sufism and Alevism, I then turn to what most would consider to be the heart of contemporary Islam: the mosque-based practices of Sunni and Shi‘I Muslims, the two central mezhep (literally “pathways” but more generally “schools”) of Islamic theology. In two consecutive chapters, I continue to expand my material trajectory, considering the architectural acoustics of mosques, focusing on the borough of Neukölln, which not only flanked but was divided by the Berlin Wall. In the first of these two chapters, I focus on a mosque of the Caferi (Twelver) Shi‘i mezhep in Berlin and the role of mosque interiors in their weekly prayers as well as special occasions surrounding
the holy month of Muharram in which they commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at the Battle of Karbala. With regards to mosque interiors, I examine mosque-building traditions that naturally emphasized and reinforced the acoustics of religious rite, from the mihrab (prayer niche) to the ceiling to the carpeting on the floors. I suggest that the addition of amplification in mosques—almost universal now—has remapped the architectural acoustics of these mosques in significant ways. Gatherings during Muharram highlight this acoustic remapping as the imam and congregation preach, weep, recite, sing and beat their breasts to commemorate Hussein’s death. I point to an acoustics of deadness here in which the architecture of small, rented apartment buildings paradoxically intensify the poignant sounds of these commemorations for the dead. However, the stakes extend far beyond acoustic arcana, as this congregation also uses these ceremonies to voice connections to broader religious and political movements within the Shiite world, especially Hezbollah. Thus a small mosque in the back courtyard of a building in Berlin’s Neukölln borough becomes an important locus for a community of ethnic Azeri-Turks who chant slogans of Lebanese political groups as part of their commemorations of events at Karbala (now Iraq). This acoustic-political criss-crossing of the Middle East and Europe serves as another form of remapping through sound that plays a significant role in shaping Berlin’s contemporary life.

Whereas this Caferi mosque is a closed space in many ways, the Sehitlik mosque exudes a sense of openness, from its daily guided tours to its open courtyard encompassing an Ottoman-era cemetery, and from its role as a haven for Turkish truck-drivers passing through the city to religious rituals themselves which are announced openly to the public (via website; not a call to prayer). Situated next to the historic
Tempelhof airfield, this free-standing mosque is one of the most iconic religious structures in contemporary Berlin and almost certainly the best-known mosque. But here too, amplification remaps traditional architectural acoustics, though in this case, the amplification system extends beyond the mosque into a prayer room for women, the outer courtyard, a bookshop and a teahouse all connected to the mosque. I focus here on Friday prayers and the funerary rites that are typically held outside the mosque after those prayers. Of particular interest to me is the sonic life of the courtyard, particularly as it relates to the dead. This life entails funerals, as might be expected, but also includes visits to graves, which raise the question of the capacity of the dead to hear. I thus consider the funeral of my own oud teacher, Nuri Karademirli, something of a local celebrity among diasporic communities (and especially musicians), sits at the intersection of two important aspects of Şehitlik: musical performance and public engagement, on the one hand (as at their Sommerfest), and rituals for the dead, on the other. The telkin ritual of exhortation for the recently deceased plays an especially important part in this chapter.

While my general framework for understanding the acoustics of Islam has come from various Islamic notions of “pathways,” in my concluding chapter I turn to a different kind of local theorizing: media archaeology. Developed largely in Berlin by scholars like Friedrich Kittler and Siegfried Zielinski (and more recently by Wolfgang Ernst), theories of media archaeology extend writings of Michel Foucault from textuality into the realm of material media. I conclude by reflecting on Islamic angelology, particularly as a way to elucidate the stakes of media-based ethnographic documentary. In other words, I consider my research from the perspective of media archaeology, both as a way of theorizing Islamic practice and as an ethnographic method. Angels, as I was
reminded on multiple occasions, are constantly documenting our activities, which then raises questions about what the proper role of documentation ought to be in Islamic contexts. At the same time, angels are not exactly an obvious site for media archaeological digging—their explicitly immaterial nature (at least in Islam) means that even a media archaeology that would countenance the metaphysics of angels is stuck with their non-corporeality.

In a less ethereal realm, my attempts to record (through both audio and video) led to intriguing encounters throughout my fieldwork research that expanded my understanding of Islam and its acoustic practices. On several occasions, my ability to record was (or at least seemed) to be bound up with histories and expectations of surveillance and the need to distinguish between extensive documentary recording and surveillance. This challenge almost certainly pre-dates the digital but has become exacerbated by it, namely the fine line between fieldwork documentation and surveillance. As recent political revelations have made clear, surveillance is still a broad concern in Germany, even two decades removed from the Cold War. America’s role as a listener to Berlin is both a historical trope and a current reality, one that complicates field research considerably. What kind of valence does media-rich documentation of Islam have in an age in which NSA wiretaps and music-as-torture intermingle with habitual documentation via Smartphone and social network apps? What does it mean to trade video footage with an imam after jointly filming a ceremony? Should such documentary material circulate in Berlin’s sound/art/film scene, or be restricted to certain (e.g., academic and/or religious) contexts? Cold War archives show that both the East and West German governments regularly spied on Turkish mosques—most often by
recruiting Turkish immigrants themselves. That legacy of unwanted listening, of radio
towers as a means of Cold Warfare, and of the city as a medium itself dovetails strikingly
with Islamic thought on technology and ways of experiencing the world. Thus Berlin is
not just the birthplace of the idea of media archaeology, but an ideal site for it.
1.1 Pathway: The Last Tarikat in Wedding

“How are your lessons, have you learned surah \( \text{al-Fatiha} \) yet?,” asked İsmail Baba. He sat on a cushion on the floor at the front of the room, puffing gently on a cigarette after nursing a glass of tea. Along the perimeter of the room sat maybe 15 dervishes, kneeling on similar cushions, listening to our exchange. These dervishes, led by İsmail Baba, belonged to a \( \text{zaviye} \), or smaller branch (literally a corner) of the Halveti-Cerrahi tarikat, or Sufi order, which I had begun visiting regularly.\(^1\) The centerpiece of these Friday night gatherings was \( \text{zikr} \), an extended recitation and bodily performance of the names and attributes of God. But equally important for these gatherings was the deep sociability that sprung up around (and just outside of) \( \text{sohbet} \) discourses, in which İsmail Baba and his dervishes engaged in a prolonged exchange of questions and answers, dreams and responses, and general discussions about life and its challenges. As typically happens in these settings, guests attract particular conversational activity, and tonight was no exception, as İsmail Baba asked me about my fieldwork. I had in fact already memorized surah \( \text{al-Fatiha} \) some time earlier—it was such an integral part of various Muslim liturgies, and more to the point, I had been impressed to see a six-year-old boy recite it once at an earlier Sufi gathering and went home and learned it out of shame. But I paused now before answering, then sensing an opportunity, I said, “I know half of it.”

\(^1\) The name Halveti-Cerrahi (pronounced “Jerrahi”) indicates that the order is a branch (\( \text{kol} \)) of the larger Halveti (or Khalwati) order. Spencer Trimingham notes a “fissiparous” tendency in the order (1998 [1971]:80), which he broadly characterizes as follows: “The Khalwatiyya was a popular order, based on reverence for the leader with power, a reputation for strictness in training its dervishes, and at the same time its encouragement of individualism. Consequently, it was characterized by a continual process of splitting and re-splitting” (74). Unlike many orders (e.g., Kadirî, Rufâî, Mevlevî), Halvetism does not take its name from a particular saintly figure (a \( \text{pir or veli} \)), but rather from the Arabic word \( \text{khalwa} \), meaning “seclusion,” “retreat” or “isolation” (cf. Wehr 1994:301), sometimes formalized as a ritual in various Sufi orders, usually involving fasting and often making use of a cell. I generally use the shortened form of the order’s name, Cerrahi.
“Half?,” he replied quizzically.

“Yes, half. I learned it from my half-hafiz teacher,” I replied, smiling as the dervishes gathered began to laugh. Shortly before, I had begun studying kiraat, or the proper reading of the Qur’an, with Nizam, the group’s imam—and my hoca, or teacher. When I started studying with him, other members of the group began razzing him incessantly for only being a half-hafiz (yarım hafız). For my part, I was deeply impressed by his knowledge, as I struggled to master other surahs and more importantly for my teacher, to internalize the proper durations for quranic recitation. We began meeting in the dead of winter in early 2012, establishing semi-regular sessions around 5 pm when he finished work at his construction job. I would take the subway across Berlin from Neukölln (or wherever I happened to be) to Gesundbrunnen in the borough of Wedding, where he would pick me up in his work van, often with Serdar Abi or Vedat Abi. (The word “abi” meaning (older) brother, but used affectionately for other dervishes.)

Figure 1.1 Crossing Berlin-Wedding: From Gesundbrunnen to the Cerrahi Teahouse
We then navigated through the cold and snow to a small street further into Wedding.
Entering through an unmarked door with drawn blinds, we proceeded into what must have been designed as a small storefront—a small room right off the main entrance, with a bigger room set up beyond it, and a small bathroom and prayer space all the way back. They had turned this small storefront into a teahouse (çay ocağı), which became a central social space for the group most nights except Friday when they gathered in another space—the zaviye itself—for their weekly zikr rituals and sohbet discussions.

Although it was always pitch-dark by the time we met, we were usually among the first arrivals at the teahouse. Sometimes a couple of dervishes and/or friends of the zaviye were already there playing Okey, a Turkish version of tile rummy, or watching soccer. As a first order of business, tea would be served by Murat Abi, who was responsible at the time for tending shop. Nizam Hoca and I would take our place at the far table and begin our lessons. We began with a quranic Arabic primer, Kur’an Elifbâsi, based on Ahmed Husrev Efendi’s hatt calligraphy and purchased for one euro from a local mosque. I had studied some Arabic previously but with little regard for the length and particular qualities of sound of letters, beyond my (often crude) approximations. So we sat there discussing in Turkish the sounds of Arabic with occasional interjections in German for some unknown word. Nizam Hoca would have me sit with my fingers on the table, tallying out the length of each letter by successively lifting fingers, while simultaneously maintaining those proper lengths and also conjoining words appropriately. Our sessions sat in a strange space (for me) between language class and music lesson. I quickly discovered that asking for meanings of words was futile—even if he knew the meanings of words (which was not all the time, as native a Turkish speaker),
he repeatedly told me not to worry. “Learn the letters first,” he would tell me. And yet this was not simply a music lesson either—I couldn’t even pay for my tea, let alone the lessons. Nor was it an exercise in pure sound either—there were meanings here already. Although it was acceptable for me to sip tea between passages, when he wanted to smoke a cigarette, he insisted that we stop reciting out of respect for the Qur’an. On another occasion, Zülfikar Abi, one of the seniormost dervishes in the group, asked as I sat down, “Do you have your book in their?” He pointed to my bag, which I had just set on the floor. “If so, don’t set it on the floor—keep it above your waist,” (bel, also loins), he said.
For all the joking at Nizam Hoca’s expense, I was deeply impressed by his knowledge and thoughtfulness about sound, the Qur’an, and Islamic rituals—not to mention construction, his actual profession. (On one occasion, I complained about the odd placement of a wall in my apartment—he responded that he could come the next day and begin remodeling.) Like many of the dervishes in the Wedding zaviye, he hailed from the Black Sea area of Turkey, in the villages surrounding Trabzon. He had come to Berlin with his family when he was still young and he had remained, married and had his own family there. By day, he worked construction. By night, he became an imam, a dervish, and my hoca. On Fridays, after a long work-week, he was an ironman, staying awake for the seven-hour proceedings of usul, sohbet and zikr with İsmail Baba and his dervish brothers. Later that spring we would travel together on an Easter Break trip to Balıkesir, Turkey, to visit their sheikh, Özcan Efendi, and his tekke in the town of Susurluk. After flying into Istanbul late, we drove all night to the hot springs resort where we were staying, and where most of the group had already arrived. Upon our arrival at 7 am, I promptly slept; Nizam simply stayed awake. “I was excited to see everyone,” he said.

The entire order seemed to me to be in perpetual motion—both within but also outside of ritual settings. Beyond this major trip to Turkey, which gave me a sense of the topographies of contemporary Cerrahi practice, the majority of the dervishes in the Berlin zaviye (including İsmail Baba) were cab drivers. Many of them drove night shifts and would gather at the teahouse waiting for calls. The small space was transformed into a sonic miniature that distilled so much of their post-migrant lives in Berlin: the tinkle-tinkle of small spoons against tea glasses; the brittle rain of Okey tiles pouring onto the table after a game; the musical chants from soccer crowds broadcast from Trabzon or
Istanbul; and the incessant buzzing and ringing of cellphones on a table as calls came in for the cab drivers in the group. This scene continued until late in the night—I usually headed out by 11 pm to be sure I could catch public transportation. But whenever that failed, there was never a shortage of drivers to be found. As one younger dervish, Taha Abi, said to me as we drove home late one night, “I love driving through the city at night listening to qurānic recitation. It clears my mind.”

İsmail Şakar, known to his dervishes as İsmail Abi (brother) or İsmail Baba (father), “took the hand of”—or, was initiated by—Safer Dal. Safer Efendi was an avid collector of ilahis and apparently had considerable talent in the sonic arts, especially poetry and the musiki of Sufi ritual. Although his forerunner as postnişin, or head sheikh of the Cerrahi order, Muzaffer Efendi, was a prolific writer—he ran his own small (but well-known) bookstore in the Sahaflar Çarşı in Istanbul. But Safer Dal (d. 1999) also wrote at length, including a divan collection of his poetry (published in 2009), a dictionary of Sufi terminology (1998, as Safer Baba) as well as a book on music (compiled by Mustafa Özdamar, 2007b). In addition to these books, he also arranged the publication of several important collections of ilahis in the late 1980s and ‘90s (TTMF 1986, 1991, 1994). These ilahi collections play an important part in the history of the Cerrahi order, as I describe in this chapter.

The poetry of his divan is rife with imagery of pathways, but from the opening pages of the book, he clarifies what the four gateways on the path of Sufism are: “Shari’a, the words [kavl] of Muhammad; tarikat, the deeds [fi’l] of Muhammad; hakikat, the state of being [hâl] of Muhammad; marifet, the secret [sûrr] of Muhammad” (2009:7). The description of Sufism as a pathway is already implicit in the term tarîqa (tarikat in
Turkish), used to refer to various Sufi orders, but has a rich etymology beyond that. In his dictionary, Safer Efendi defines tarîk, the root of tarikat, as “a path [yol], the mystic’s [evliyâ] heart, a system, a trade [meslek]…Tarikat is the benevolent bestowal from God to his servants. The believer who seeks the mystic’s heart enters the true path [hak yola]” (1998:271). He continues, suggesting not just what the tarikat pathway is, but also what kind of sensory experience it entails:

The tarikat is the deeds of Muhammad [fiîl-i Muhammed]. The things written about the secrets of tarikats are false. But this religious knowledge is available to those through initiation by one of the teachers of this path. In the service of the path [yol] of God and the Messenger of God. Tarîk consists of performing the legitimate ritual of the Exalted Truth. Tarikat is the shortest path to reach God, through the love of the Messenger of God, which brings a person to the secret of true existence. Shari’a is listening, reading, or reciting; tarikat is seeing. (272).

In this chapter, I explore how tarikat becomes not only hearing and seeing, but also tasting, precisely in the performance of the “ritual of the Exalted Truth” (or at least one of those rituals) zikrullah, the remembrance (zikr) of God (Allah). In his divan, Safer Efendi writes of zikr:

Those who enter the path of truth
Those who say, I am a dervish
Those who carry out zikrullah—²
Do they go anywhere but to God’s Truth
[…]
Dervishes who recite the Qur’an
Those who listen when it is recited
Those who attain, as divine lovers [Muhibbî]³
Do they say any other words?

This poem highlights interwoven aspects of path and voice in ritual settings: e.g., saying “I am a dervish,” performing zikr, reciting the Qur’an, or keeping silent when nothing else is left to say. While there are many other ways to conceptualize tarikat, as seen here from Safer Dal, I embark from this starting point: tarikat as a pathway of the voice.

² Sürmek (“carry out”) also means to drive (something), persist in, or simply to last (as in duration).
³ Besides being a lover of the divine, “Muhibbî” is Safer Efendi’s pen name when writing Sufi poetry.
1.2. Tasting the Names of God: Voice and Body in the Cerrahi Zikr

A man said, “O Messenger of God, the prescriptions of Islamic shari’a have become too much for me. Tell me what thing I can hold to.” The Prophet said, “Do not cease to keep your tongue continually wet with the zikr of God.”

— hadith tradition, recorded by al-Tirmidhi

They keep zikr on their tongues, they walk the path of intimates
They fly to the Exalted realm, the Cerrahis are the flying ones.
They burn with the zikr of the heart, they quench their thirst with the wine of love
They say “hû hû” and they turn about, the Cerrahis are the revolving ones.
They perform the zikr of the breath, the esma names progress in order
They reach their aim true, the Cerrahis are the enraptured ones.

— Sheikh İbrahim Fahreddin Şevki, Envar-ı Hazreti Pir

Our zikr is night and day
Lâ ilâhe illallah
Our zikr is in every breath
Lâ ilâhe illallah

…
The name of our Lord
The taste of our mouth,
The desire of Aşki
Lâ ilâhe illallah

— Aşki (Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak), “Essence of the Four Books”

In his introduction to a 1994 collection of ilahi hymns, Ömer Tuğrul İnançer relates the following: “There is even a legend that in the time of Sultan Ahmed III, there was a well-known zakir named Kanbur Hafiz. Although he knew no more than 3,000

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1 Jami’ al-Tirmidhi 3375.
4 A zakir is literally one who performs zikr, but more specifically refers to the group of designated musicians who sing ilahis during the course of the zikr (and often play hand percussion, such as bendir drums) while the main body of dervishes recite names and attributes of God. In the Cerrahi order, these zakirs also play an important role in meyk gatherings, sacred musical rehearsals held weekly to teach (about) ilahis and to prepare for the upcoming zikr.
ilahi hymns, because of the fineness of his voice [sesinin letafeti], he was appointed as head zakir of the Nureddin Cerrahi tekke Edirnekapi [in Istanbul], which led to the following gossip around the tekkes: ‘Kanbur Hafiz became a head zakir with 3,000 ilahis. What has the world come to?!,’ they said, mockingly” (1994:7). İnançer, better known today among Cerrahi Sufis as Tuğrul Efendi, the head sheikh of the same tekke of the Cerrahi order since 1999, clarifies that this head zakir “was criticized and disparaged for only knowing 3,000 ilahis by heart [ezberinde]” (8). Although he questions the legend’s historicity, İnançer finds in it a telling reminder of “how broad and rich the repertoire of our Sufi music [Tasavvuf Müsikimiz] is” (ibid.). He also uses the story to highlight the importance of the Cerrahi Sufi order’s efforts to collect these ilahis in the wake of secularizing transformations in the Turkish Republic in the 20th century, a process which began in the 1950s by Safer Dal, Tuğrul Efendi’s predecessor as sheikh from 1985 to 1999. At the same time, this legend points to another important aspect of this musical repertoire: the quality of the voice. The story of Kanbur Hafiz suggests not only that the repertoire was vast (and would eventually be notated in writing), but that it mattered—and presumably still matters—what kind of voice articulates those sacred hymns. This material intersection of voice, inscription, and the politics of sacred sound lies at the heart of my investigation in this chapter of Cerrahi zikr as practiced in Berlin.

If 1961 is a critical year for Turkish Berlin broadly, 1925 marks a similarly decisive date for practitioners of Sufism in the nascent Turkish Republic. In November of that year, Turkey passed Kanun 677, or “The Law Concerning the Closure [sedd] of

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5 I discuss these early efforts at greater length below, but İnançer mentions them in the introduction to an earlier volume of ilahis published in 1991, writing that Safer Efendi had been researching and collecting these ilahis “for over 40 years” (kirk yil aœkin) (no page number).
tekkes, zaviyes, and Mausoleums and the Abolition of Various Titles along with Mausoleum Caretaker.” In two paragraphs, the law prohibits a broad swath of practices, taking aim at institutional tarikats as well as sheikhs, dervishes, dedes and many other key roles played by individuals with the threat of prison time (no less than three months) and fines (no less than 50 lira) for those caught in violation. While response to this law was varied, it prompted a variety of creative responses by Sufi orders to circumvent its prohibitions. One of those was the formation of the Endowment for the Research and Preservation of Turkish Sufi Music and Folklore in 1981 by Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak of the Cerrahi order, which gave the order much greater flexibility to carry out its rituals by emphasizing the musical aspects of their practice (cf. Atacan 1990:49-50). Perhaps it should come as no surprise that a religious group whose zikr liturgy consists of reciting and permutating names should use naming—and particularly the naming of sound—as a mode of political subversion. By embracing the notion of music—but doing so carefully, choosing the traditional Ottoman Turkish word, mûsîkî, rather than müzik—the Cerrahi order defied a common assumption about Islam and music: whereas music has often had heterodox, or even heretical, connotations in Islam, these Cerrahi dervishes were able to preserve their religious practices precisely by transforming it, at least rhetorically, into music. Jacques Attali (1985) has argued that (western) music has effectively subdued, or

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7 Tosun Bayrak, a Cerrahi sheikh living in New York, has emphasized this distinction in his “interpretation” (i.e., loose translation) of al-Ghazali’s Al-Maqsad al-Asna fi Sharh Asmaʾ al-Husna, which Bayrak published in 1983 as The Most Beautiful Names but then later in 2000 as The Name and the Named. (Al-Ghazali’s title might be rendered literally as “The Best Means for Explaining the Most Beautiful Names.”) This subtle shift draws from a section in al-Ghazali’s text that focuses on the distinction (or rather disjunction) between a name, the thing named, and the act of naming (2000:252-258). Bayrak’s introductory remarks (cf. 35-37), coupled with al-Ghazali’s own remarks, point to a potentially rich exploration of the kind of sonic knowledge that is (or may not be) cultivated through the intonation of zikr.
“domesticated” noise over time (to borrow Jonathan Sterne’s term\(^8\)); in an analogous and highly conscientious way, the Cerrahi tarikat has managed to domesticate religious sound—arguably a form of noise to the secular government of the Turkish Republic.

After establishing a brief sonic history of the Cerrahi tarikat more broadly, I turn literally inward, to the local (the Berlin zaviye) and the hyperlocal: the voice as a material phenomenon—including the tongue, mouth, throat, lungs, and by extension the ears, in a limited way—in Cerrahi zikr practices. This complex ritual is typically defined as a form of “remembrance,” or a recitation of the esma, or names and attributes, of God. From this starting point, I move in two directions. First, I explore ways in which zikr is a deeply multisensory activity, in which the voice is indeed a key locus, but an embodied one, buried within and driving movement of a fleshy body replete with other senses, especially taste. Second, I consider ways in which zikr is not simply a process of articulation—of making sound with the voice—but also a process of listening, especially for the sheikh or other figure leading the zikr. The sheikh does not simply listen, he (or occasionally she) listens for certain configurations of space, body, and psyche. But as with any sonic act so invested in the material presence of others, absence too emerges. Women dervishes in Berlin, who are allowed to attend these events and recite zikr, nevertheless have their voices institutionally hushed, if not entirely silenced, suggesting that the most elusive aspect of zikr may be neither uttering nor listening, but being listened-to while uttering these sacred names. In this case, the affordances of zikr for

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\(^8\) Sterne is less concerned with accounting for the entire trajectory of western culture and so argues somewhat more circumspectly: “Historically, noise had been understood as something to be eliminated, the object of abatement. But a group of approaches developed over the twentieth century that sought to domesticate noise in one way or another, either to render it useful—in environments like manufacturing, avant-garde music and sound art, dentistry, or office work—or irrelevant, as was the case in communication engineering” (2012:94-95). Sterne calls this process of sonic and social engineering “the domestication of noise.”
women are largely contingent on zaviye architecture itself, suggesting some of (the many) ways in which diasporic communities are not simply coterminous with their counterparts back “home” in Turkey. The case of these Cerrahis suggests just the opposite, in fact: diaspora is a particularly important site for negotiating what should happen at home.

The Last Tarikat and its Heart Surgeon: A Sonic History

In Sheikh Fahreddin Efendi’s official history of the Cerrahi order, he gives a fairly lengthy biography of its founder, Nureddin Mehmed, later known as Nureddin Cerrahi. The first sentence of Fahreddin Efendi’s description requires only a single word (in Turkish): İstanbullu’dur.9 Nureddin was a native of Istanbul. The history of Cerrahism cannot be readily separated from this particular urban history, even though it would spread well beyond. Fahreddin Efendi’s account opens as follows:

The Exalted Birth of our Beloved Master [Velâdet-i Seniyye-i Hazret-i Pîr], may his secret be sanctified.

He was a native of Istanbul. He came into this world on the morning of Monday, the 12th of rabi’ al-awwal of 1089 [May 4, 1678 C.E.] in a large house still standing today known as Yağcızâde Konağı where he would be raised, across the street from the honorable congregational gates of the Cerrâpaşa mosque in Istanbul. As for his genealogy, on the side of his honorable and munificent father he descends from Hazret-i Übeyde bin Cerrâh10 (d. 18/650), may God be pleased with him, one of the Ten Promised ones [aşure-i mübeşşir, 10 companions of the Prophet promised paradise], and on his beloved mother’s side, he reached Imam Hüseyin, may God be pleased with him. (43)

Again, as much as this passage highlights Nureddin Cerrahi’s saintly intangibles (i.e., his family tree), it does so while simultaneously situating his birth in a deeply material, urban setting: a particular house in a particular neighborhood across from a particular mosque.

This flexible oscillation between the material and the spiritual, especially in creating

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10 Abū ‘Ubâyda ibn al-Jarâh was one of the Companions [sahaba] of the Prophet and one of 10 Companions, or aşure-i mübeşşir, promised paradise, according to hadith oral traditions.
sacred places, are an important part of Sufi history in the Ottoman Empire and especially Istanbul, dating from the earliest (historically questionable) attempts at Muslim conquest of the city.

Nureddin’s biography is driven from there in large part by his personal pathways—often rich in sound—through (and occasionally beyond) Istanbul. Four such examples highlight these sonic motions. First, as a boy he studied qur'anic recitation (and calligraphy) with master reciter [Şeyhü’l kurrâ] Yusuf Efendi at the mekteb school in his Cerrahpaşa neighborhood and later poetry with the famed poet Nâbî Efendi (Fahreddin 43). These activities would have entailed significant training in sonic arts.

Second, after his schooling was complete, he was given a position as an Islamic judge, or kadi, with a post awaiting him in Cairo. As he prepared for travel in 1696, a massive storm delayed his departure, forcing him to stay. He visited his uncle Hacı Hüseyin Efendi in Üsküdar, across the Bosphorus eastward, who in turn took him to the Selamiye dergah, a tekke of the Halveti-Celveti tarikat. Nureddin’s evening would be transformational—through sound, in particular. Again, Fahreddin Efendi gives us an account:

When [Nureddin] entered the presence of the Great Beloved [the sheikh, ‘Ali Kostendili] and gave a selam greeting, his first utterance was: “My son Nureddin, welcome!,” which caught the attention of our Beloved Master, may his secret be sanctified, making him aware that this was a perfect teacher [mürşid-i kâmil] who even knew the secrets he kept to himself. After the namaz prayers, the holy āyîn-i şerîf ritual being performed affected his holy heart so deeply that he rose from the maksûre seating area for spectators where he was sitting and he entered into the halka circle of the sacred zikr. And he was overcome by total ecstasy [vecd-i tâm]. When he came back to this sphere, he felt in his blessed heart a tremendous love and desire to be initiated into the tarikat. (44)

Nureddin convinced the sheikh to take him as his student and he forsake his position as a kadi. Here pathways pile upon pathways, sonically and otherwise: he had traveled across Istanbul, was taken to visit the tekke (of a tarikat pathway), the utterance of the sheikh
and the sensory experience of the zikr overwhelmed him to such a degree that he quite literally re-routed his entire life, trading in a physical voyage to Egypt for the spiritual pathway of Sufism. Sound had catalyzed this moment of crisis.

Third, after seven years of schooling, he was sent out from the Selamiye tekke as a trained dervish and fully authorized teacher in 1703, able to open his own tekke and take on students himself. The muezzin of the Canfedâ Hatun mosque in Karagümrük (near Cerrahpaşa) saw a dream and was told by the Prophet to build a halvethane, literally a building of solitude. Nureddin Cerrahi and his disciples heard of this and wanted to meet him, which they would while, not insignificantly, asking for directions to the mosque (Yola 1982:40, Özdamar 1997a:40-41). Later, this site of silent retreat would grow into a louder sanctuary, leading to a feud with a neighbor, Ebu Bekir Avni (or Bekir Efendi). Bekir Efendi “complained every time he appeared in the mosque for prayer, because he was unable to sleep because of the loud reciting [wegen des lauten Rezitierens] of these dervishes and consequently would miss the morning prayer. Because of this he badmouthed Mehmed Nureddin” (Yola 1982:41-42). In telling this same story, Fahreddin Efendi describes the sound as aşıkların höykürmesi, the sound of dervishes (or lovers of God) reciting (48). Shortly thereafter, Bekir Efendi suffered a stroke and asked Nureddin to come blow on him (nefes etmek) to heal him, also requesting that if he should die (which he did shortly thereafter), Nureddin would recite the funerary prayers (which he also did). His frank forgiveness caused many there to recognize his spiritual power and became an integral story of the founding of the tekke, which would be expanded with the purchase of Bekir Efendi’s land and paid for with an unexpected gift from the Sultan, according to Cerrahi traditions (Yola 1982:42-43).
For Fahreddin Efendi, this entire event is also part of the confirmation of earlier prophecies by major Sufi figures like Ibrahim al-Dasuki about Nureddin Cerrahi’s life and the establishment of a tekke in 1703 (Fahreddin 49). This prophecy was discussed on several occasions among the Berlin Cerrahis. In particular, its connection to the opening of the asitane tekke has become important as the moment that set the Cerrahi order apart as the son tarikat, the last authorized Sufi order. The formal opening (resm-i küşâd) of the tekke, according to Fahreddin Efendi, took place on Laylat al-Mi’raj, the night commemorating Muhammad’s night journey into the heavens, which fell that year on Thursday, December 6, 1703 (27 Recep 1115 AH). Before entering, Nureddin stood and recited a hadith saying: “The Prophet (peace and blessings upon him) said: Whoever torments his neighbor, God will give his house as an inheritance (to the neighbor).” This hadith is now inscribed above the gate of the main entrance (50), serving as a kind of materially-transformed echo of a dispute in sound with the tekke’s early neighbors.

Özdamar notes that on that night the fledgling group of dervishes hosted sheikhs and dervishes from around the city (“Sheikh Nureddin opened the sanctuary [meydan] to all / It all came together resembling a narcissus! / All who disbelieve let them come and see”) and recited for the first time his vird-i kebir, or major liturgy (1997a:46). Thus was born “an academy of love in Karagümrük” led by its “heart surgeon,” gönül cerrahi, a play on the name of Cerrahi, itself given to Sheikh Nureddin because of his childhood neighborhood, Cerrahpaşa, and to distinguish him from another Sheikh (Seyyid) Nureddin (Yola 1982:39).

Gregory Blann, known as Sheikh Muhammad Jamal within the Nur Ashki Jerrahi order (an American-based offshoot of Turkish Cerrahism), describes the opening of the
tekke as having cosmic import for other reasons that contribute to the teleological claim of Cerrahism as the “last tarikat.” First, there was some speculation that the pir (founding sheikh) of the Halveti-Celveti order, Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi (or Huda’i), would be “the final pir to found a new tarikat” (2005:487). Blann explains:

[S]hortly before the opening of the Jerrahi Dergah, Hazrati Pir Huda’I appeared in a dream to Sheikh Jevri Chelebi, his present-day khalifa in Edirnekapi [another district in Istanbul], instructing him to bequeath to Pir Nureddin the noble blue sheepskin post [or throw] of the Jelveti Order from the Jelveti lodge [asitane] in Scutari [Üsküdar]. Jevri Efendi and his deputies brought the blue post on the day of the ceremony and spread it out as a throne for Pir Nureddin. (487-488)

Jevri Efendi (Cevri Çelebi) then helped seat the new Pir. This act of deference passed a literal mantle of lastness from one Halveti branch to another. Besides this symbolic act, a whole series of sacred gifts were given by the heads of other orders, some given physically, some given “through dreams and intimations,” including: a cloak (Kadiri), a banner and a flag (Rufai), a ritual axe (Bektaşi), a shawl (Jibawi), coin die (Mevlevi), a staff (Şazili), a white shirt for sema (Gülşeni), a green turban (Halveti), and a special belt (Bayrami) (Blann 2005a:488). These material gifts were accompanied by a number of spiritual gifts, including special modes and esma for performing zikr, as well as more abstract gifts (beauty, power, contentment) (ibid.). This combination of the material and the abstract, delivered through dreams and other manifestations, enabled a rich body of zikr practices (both as recitations and particular body movements) that would become integral to Cerrahism’s self-understanding as the last tarikat. Having left home and finally returned, Nureddin Cerrahi’s new tekke afforded him and his dervishes the opportunity to for all the höykürme, dervish reciting, he wanted, free from neighborly reprisal and augmented by a bounty of gifts from the whole span of Sufism.
Fourth and finally, after the tekke at Karagümrük was established, Sheikh Nureddin would begin performing *keramet* miracles (for lack of a more suitable, less Christian term in English) that, in Sufi traditions, affirm his holiness. While a number of traditions circulate about these *keramet*, two figure especially prominently in hagiographic accounts, both of which prominently involve sound and travel as an entrypoint into a supernatural realm. In the first, Sultan Ahmet III’s wife was ill and Sheikh Nureddin was summoned to assist through special breathing and recitation of Arabic letters. On the return trip, which entailed taking a boat across the Bosphorus, a storm came up which he calmed by yelling “Ya Hak!” (Oh Truth). The second miracle (for lack of a better term) is an instance of *tatavvar*, or of being in multiple places at the same time. On the day of Arife (‘Arifa) he and two halifes go to visit the grave of a deceased sheikh. (I discuss such visits to the grave in Chapter 4.) Suddenly, he and his halifes are transported to the *hajj* to Mecca, where they recite *tesbihat* and zikr with those making the pilgrimage, then they return, all in the course of the same day. This same *tatavvar* takes place several years in a row, until the Şehyülislam (Sheikhu’l-Islam, the highest ranking Islamic cleric in the Ottoman Empire) sends a messenger to make them stop. But the messenger is then carried up with them to Mecca, where they all call out together—the climax of the experience—with those on pilgrimage, “*labbayk Allâhümme labbayk!*” (Özdamar 1997a:47-49, Yola 1992:68-69). This prayer, the *talbiya*, means “I respond to your call, oh God, I respond to your call,” and is a special utterance confirming one’s participation in the *hajj* pilgrimage—yet another sonic marker of passage in Islam.
This sonic genealogy points to some of the contours of sound, place and pathway that played such an important role for Nureddin Cerrahi, from his childhood education to his travels to Üsküdar and his first zikr, then continuing to the founding of the tekke at Karagümrük and sonic conflict it entailed initially, and on to the keramet narratives that affirm his spiritual legacy, in both of which he is a sounding traveler, whether on the hajj pilgrimage or simply in transit to and from the Ottoman palace. In the two centuries that followed Nureddin Cerrahi, such interactions with Ottoman sultans increased along with the profile of the tarikat, which began to spread into southeastern Europe and Anatolia. After the so-called Auspicious Event of 1826, in which thousands of Janissaries were killed and Bektashism was forced underground, Cerrahis were even beneficiaries of redistribution of religious property by the Ottoman government. But in the 20th century, with the rise of the Turkish Republic, that sonic trajectory in and through the city (and well beyond into the Ottoman Empire) shifted dramatically. In 1925, Turkish legislation (Kanun 677) called for the closure of all Sufi property. The century that followed would prove difficult for the Cerrahis.

**Sufi Music as Subversive Islam**

The history of 20th- and early-21st-century Cerrahism (with emphasis on trajectories leading to Berlin) could be summarized chronologically: in 1925 (almost) all tekkes were closed, in 1966 Fahreddin Efendi died and Muzaffer Ozak became the head

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11 The precise status of the Karagümrük tekke during this period is contested. According to accounts I heard repeatedly (including from Ismail Abi and Tosun Baba), Fahreddin Efendi challenged the government officials who came to seal the tekke closed and rent out its spaces, telling them that they would have to remove him by force to take control of the tekke. (Tosun Baba described the confrontation more emphatically, saying that Fahreddin Efendi gave the new tenant “an Ottoman slap” that sent him reeling across the room, interview May 24, 2014.)
sheikh of the tarikat; in the 1970s, Muzaffer Efendi began to travel internationally, encouraging the spread of Cerrahism into Europe and the Americas; in 1978, he visited Berlin and then again in 1983, at the invitation of Abdullah Halis Efendi, a German-born convert to Islam who would become a Cerrahi sheikh; in 1981, Muzaffer Efendi established the aforementioned Vakıf, or Endowment, enabling a more public voice (literally in the form of singer/reciters like Ahmet Özhan and Savni Sami Özer);\(^\text{12}\) in 1985, Muzaffer Ozak Efendi died and Safer Dal became the head sheikh at the Karagümrük asitane; in 1987, İsmail Baba was initiated as a dervish at the hand of Safer Efendi; in 1994, İsmail Baba’s brother Mustafa Özcan Efendi received icazet—permission and instruction—from Safer Efendi to open a tekke in the town of Susurluk in the Anatolian province of Balıkesir; in 1999, Safer Efendi died and Tuğrul İnanır Efendi, the former head zakir of the Karagümrük tekke, succeeded him; that same year, Özcan Efendi instructed İsmail Baba to open a zaviye in Berlin-Wedding; and in 2011, I began fieldwork in Berlin.

My first trip to the Berlin zaviye was made possible in no small part by Martin Heidegger, oddly enough. A few days before my first visit to the Berlin Cerrahi zaviye—before I even knew that such a group existed—I ventured to a reading group working through Heidegger’s 1950 essay, “Das Ding” (The Thing). Turned off by his politics, which somehow struck me as doubly potent in Berlin, I nevertheless was intrigued by his approach to a metaphysics of materiality, not to mention the (sometimes unstated) effect it has had on many of the theorists I was interested in (Derrida, Kittler, Gumbrecht, Dolar, Bennett)—how does the material world unfold, what kinds of affordances do

things have, and how does the presence of things relate to the human body? Das Ding dingt, he writes aphoristically: “Things thing.” I found myself thinking in sonic terms: (how) does sound thing? And by remove, how does Islam thing-through-sound? Or in other words, how does Islam sound—that is, how does Islam produce sound (not how does a listener perceive it) and thus produce difference? The study group proved moderately interesting on these counts—but in a Heideggerian twist, the thinging-of-things there, the material encounter that had the deepest impact was not abstract conversation. Instead, I recognized an acquaintance, Samet, whom I had met briefly a year earlier at a Sufi tekke in Kosovo. He had just moved to Berlin as well—explicitly to learn German and study Heidegger. He in turn introduced me to a network of dervish-friends in Berlin, including a small entourage of friends from Istanbul who were similarly interested in connections between Heidegger and Sufi thought. Tagging along with Samet and his friends on a cold January night in 2012, I made my first trip to the borough of Wedding, the first of many trips across Berlin to the Cerrahi zaviye in the borough of Wedding for a Friday night zikr in January 2012.

The unassuming, artfully-graffitied entryway—one of many Hinterhof-thresholds I would pass through during my research on Berlin Muslims—was marked with a simple green-and-yellow placard, small enough that an uninformed flâneur might well walk right past it (if Berlin flâneurs even venture into such neighborhoods). Like so many aspects of the Cerrahi order, the sign may appear cryptic to first-time visitors but in fact tells much of the history of the order: Merdi, e.V. Türk Tasavvuf Musikisini yaşamta derneği. Or in

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13 The grand narrative of Gastarbeiter migration to Berlin (and Germany) is one of rural workers moving to the big city during the Cold War. But at least since the massive political exile following the 1980 coup and continuing now to the present, young scholars, engineers, musicians and artists have regularly flocked from the bigger city, Istanbul, to the more manageable “big city,” or Großstadt, Berlin.
German, *Verein zur Förderung und Ausübung der Mystischen und Orientalischen Musik.* Both roughly (but not identically) translate to: The Association for the Preservation (or in German, the Promotion and Practice) of Turkish Sufi (or in German, of Mystical and Oriental) music. The name slightly differs from the Turkish umbrella organization, suggesting sameness and difference in the way they name themselves—and their sonic practices. As I would later learn—sometimes emphasized quite dramatically by dervishes in Istanbul who viewed it as somehow schismatic—this *zaviye* was not directly connected to the *asitane* in Karagümrük, the central tekke of the order. Rather, as noted above, its home tekke was in Susurluk, itself authorized by Safer Efendi years earlier. The addition of the term *Merdi,* freedom, also suggestively augmented the institutional name of the Vakıf/Endowment: in Germany, the order in fact was able to practice their religion openly like any other Muslim congregation.

A small green-and-yellow placard announcing “music”: this was the first thing. I would encounter many other sounding things that evening. Tea glasses. The flick-flick of lighters and the crinkle of cigarette-carton plastic wrap. *Bendir* drums, and especially the caressing rub of the drumhead before playing. The sometimes-unison, sometimes-contrapuntal rhythm of knees dropping to the floor during *namaz* prostrations. The stomping of feet during the *devran* portion of the zikr, thudding down on the same wooden floor of the top floor of a residential building. Voices—to which I will return.

But the most obvious musical thing I noticed that night—and discussed with

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14 In my conversations at Karagümrük, many were very judicious in their comments about Özcan Efendi. One dervish even made explicit the principle of *adab* that a dervish should not speak ill of another sheikh. But more than one also encouraged me (rather emphatically) to travel to Frankfurt, where another *zaviye* is located (with closer connections to the *asitane*) to experience Cerrahism properly.
participants—were the flimsy plastic folders of ilahi transcriptions from which the zakirs, or designated musicians, sang during the zikr.\textsuperscript{15}

As in almost every other Sufi context, my explanation that I was studying music and sound (müzik ve ses) immediately led conversation in sohbets and elsewhere to ilahis, for better or worse.\textsuperscript{16} In this case, however, discussion of ilahis began pointing almost immediately to the complex history of Cerrahi dervishes collecting them. In the spirit of Heidegger’s thingliness (das Dingliche), two books of ilahi hymns the zakirs in Berlin shed particular light on this history. Soft plastic covers house around 100 different sheets of ilahis that appear to have been photocopied several times over and assembled in these two folders. Some are transcriptions by hand, some have been mechanically printed. A few sheets include only text. These documents are unsurprisingly on ISO A4 paper, the standard size for international business use (but almost 2 cm longer than standard American paper). These sheets show the material history of music in the order for the past three decades, but they also intimate a longer history dating back to the closure of tekkes in 1925. In short, in 1925, these bundles of paper—had they existed, had there been any point for the ilahis on them to have been notated back then—would have simply

\textsuperscript{15} Sonic terminology here breaks down rather quickly. For example, I use the word “sing” here for the action performed by zakirs during zikr. They sing ilahis. But despite the designation by the Vakıf of these ilahis being music (müşki), the texts are not sung (söylemek) but rather recited or intoned (okumak), the same verb used for reciting poetry, the call to prayer, reciting the Qur’an—and also reading in a generic sense (e.g., a book or newspaper). In the interest of clarity to English-speaking readers, I use “sing” here but do so with the caveat that the term is fraught in Islamic contexts generally, and thus all the more so for Cerrahi institutions designated as sites of music-making. Cf. Kumaş 2013.

\textsuperscript{16} One of the first people to recognize other kinds of ses (both “sound” and “voice” in Turkish) might interest me was the aforementioned Samet. He suggested early on in my research, for example, that I go to prayers at Mevlana mosque in Kreuzberg and listen to the people reciting the Qur’an afterward as they spread themselves around the mosque musalla and read aloud. The mosque sits right on a busy street, facing an elevated U-Bahn subway line (U1), creating a peculiarly Berlin soundspace. But for most of my interlocutors—even among my academic advisors in Berlin—my interest in sound prior to (or at least in equal measure with) music was somewhat baffling.
been ilahis. But as the stamp at the bottom of (nearly) every sheet reminds its readers (and performers), this material is now music. Furthermore, as the legendary prattle about Kanbur Hafiz reminds us, the idea of notating ilahis at all, rather than simply memorizing them, indicates a significant shift in the sonic knowledge of dervishes.

From that first visit to the Berlin zaviye I had been greatly interested in these collections of ilahis. They seemed a relatively straightforward way into the complex sonic world I was encountering. They were notated, sung regularly (on Fridays, though not every ilahi would be sung in a given week), and already bound together as a kind of micro-repertoire. After my very first zikr, I approached Deniz Abi, the leader of the zakirs, or musicians (understood broadly) who sing these ilahi and often drum with them, to see if I could browse through one of the books. He agreed and we began an ongoing conversation about how these songs were chosen during performance, how well the zakirs knew them, whether they understood any of the theory behind the makam modes or usul rhythmic cycles that were generally indicated. The following week I asked if I could sit with the zakirs, which provoked clear anxiety. Deniz Abi explained that I could but that I would need to sit all the way to one side so they could be close enough to the music to read—the words. None of them really “read notes,” he explained. I was happy enough to sit in the proximity of the zakirs, so I sat to their side—too far away to read the musical notation or the words on the page. I did begin to see (and hear) the muted discussion (and rather active hand gestures) used to communicate about which ilahis would follow. 17 Although there are general guidelines about what types of ilahis fit what

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17 In other settings where Cerrahis have a regular meşk, some of these repertoire questions are determined in advance. Tosun Baba told me that in the past, sheikhs and zakirs would have been able to determine what makam to sing in based on the time of day and the spirit of the zikr, but that today, he and his
part of the ceremony, it was clear that beyond (or before) those guidelines was a basic
communitarian ethos that marked the zakir performances in contrast to the more rigidly
hierarchical zikr itself, which was led by a sheikh with assigned seating positions for
certain dervishes depending on their responsibility, seniority, and so on.

Over the next few weeks, I finally coaxed and cajoled the zakirs into letting me
stand in the middle of their ranks so I could read the song texts and begin to make the
zikr more participatory and less observational. I even held one of the ilahi books for part
of the time, long enough to understand that the books were arranged by makam. (I would
later count: the most widespread were the 13 ilahis in segâh makam, with 12 ilahis in
uşşak makam, and on down the line.) As far as texts were concerned, Yunus Emre was
far and away the most represented poet, though much more contemporary figures
(Fahreddin Efendi, Muzaffer Efendi) also appeared. But despite these cursory
observations, I had trouble navigating the organizational scheme quickly enough or
knowing what the likely ilahis might be at any given moment, so another zakir (very)
quickly relieved me of my duties as bookholder. What struck me most about that
particular zikr, however, was physically (if not conceptually) detached from the page.
Standing in the middle of the zakirs, I found myself in a stereophonic wash of phasing
frequencies, as the dervishes on either side of me subtly (or sometimes abruptly) shifted
the pitches they were singing. It was clear that my presence was adding a disruptive
element, intensifying these tuning difficulties, but also that it was of less concern than
dervishes determine in advance which makam they will sing in and the order of ilahis to be sung
(conversation, May 24, 2014).

18 I should also note that the zakirs in Berlin repeatedly told me to talk with Sinan Baba and the zakirs
in Susurluk/Bursa (or Istanbul), saying things like “We’re not trained” or “They’re professionals
there” or “They’re real zakirs.” As with my own “half-hafiz” teacher, I found these comments overly
self-disparaging. The sonic experience of sitting near (or in the middle of) these Berlin zakirs was
other musical elements: tempo, relative pitch (e.g., of an entire ilahi relative to the rest of the dervishes who were chanting zikr), and the nebulous realm between volume and energy. I asked Deniz Abi about it afterward (as best as I could—I was not entirely prepared linguistically to talk about the finer points of intonation, let alone phase shifting and sound spatialization). He explained that the most important thing was the force of the singing and the timing: the zakirs, even before they begin drumming, are setting the tempo of the entire group performance of zikr, in which İsmail Baba would often begin clapping his hands or more often slap his thigh to mark out the tempo for the zakirs.

But the ilahi hymnals remained elusive for a couple more weeks until a friend of the zaviye came one night and asked İsmail Baba if he could borrow the books for the week. He explained that he and another social worker/friend were preparing an after-school youth music program in the borough of Kreuzberg for children whose families came from Turkey. İsmail Baba readily agreed, so I chimed in too and we shared the books for the week, giving me ample time to sit with these notated ilahis.

**Sonic Technologies of the Heart**

To look at these sheets of music notation is to see a post-Xerox palimpsest. Paper here becomes not only a technology of processing and transmitting knowledge (cf. Kafka 2012, Gitelman 2014) but also a container for a whole variety of other sound-inscription technologies that, as a composite, begin to convey sonic history. On almost every sheet, at least four such technologies appear: handwriting, print (often including printed musical

moving in a deeply physical way. This affective sensation seemed tied to the sheer output of sound and energy during the zikr in a way that seemed largely independent of systems of intonation (which already presuppose certain sonic normativities).
notation), ink-stamping, and photocopying (if visible only through its traces). The stamp itself is perhaps the simplest place to begin. Almost every copy has been stamped with an ovular emblem, “The Endowment [Vakıf] for the Research and Preservation of Turkish Sufi Music and Folklore.” Such a stamp signals many things: officialdom, institutional sanction, perhaps a dissimulating bureaucratization. These documents are innocuous—they have been duly institutionalized and rendered harmless by official channels. They have been vakıfized, literally made to stop and stand still. And yet something radical is at play in terms of sound: they have also been alchemized, transformed from ilahis, literally those things suitable to or in the character of the godly, and turned instead into “music and folklore.” All with a single stamp. Again, it should come as no surprise that a community that had spent centuries thinking about, reciting, remembering and dwelling upon names—the naming of God, the naming of God’s attributes—would recognize the potential power in renaming their own sonic materials.

Another trace of the sound-inscription process can be seen in the signature that accompanies many of these ilahis to indicate who transcribed them. The most common is the iconic autograph of Cüneyd Kosal, a renowned kanun performer, composer, ethnomusicologist and archivist—and also a longtime zakir at the asitane in Karagümrük, Istanbul who edited several of the Vakıf’s ilahi collections (1991, 1994). He was part of

19 The Vakıf’s mission statement elucidates this transformation as follows: “An endowment was founded with the name Türk Tasavvuf Musukisi [sic] ve Folklorunu Araştırma ve Yaşatma Vakfı, which will be engaged in: documenting Sufi music and folklore in various regions in our country in all their details; transcribing Sufi music and releasing albums; research and study of Sufi folklore; gathering costumes and musical instruments; studying Sufi Music and Folklore and disseminating research and studies which will be done on this topic; arranging scholarly meetings, rituals, and exhibitions with the aim of preserving and presenting Turkish Sufi Music and Folklore; documenting Turkish Sufi Literary Terminology; presenting Sufi Literature, Music and Folklore both in and outside the country” (written in 1981, in Atacan 1990:49). Much like Kanun 677, the bureaucratese of this text belies the fairly dramatic way in which sound is being leveraged socially and politically, while ostensibly being made an (innocuous) artifact of the past.

20 For more on Kosal’s life, cf. Cüvelek 2010.
a larger cadre of talented musicians affiliated with the Karagümrük tekke, including Ahmet Özhan (vocals), Sami Savni Özer (vocals), Çiğdem Tanrıkor (oud), Sadun Aksüt (tambura) and others. Even with such top-tier musicians, however, the transmission of repertoire was not always straightforward; one dervish recounted how Tuğrul İnançer, then a zakir, taught ilahıs to Ahmet Özhan, now the head zakir, by raising his hand up and down to indicate pitch. These musicians, especially Kosal, built on a musical foundation laid by Safer Efendi, in particular, as well as Muzaffer Efendi. As İnançer writes in the 1991 introduction cited above: “These ilahıs are the ilahıs that our great teacher, the honorable [Sayın] Safer Dal, was researching and documenting for over 40 years in Istanbul and various parts of our country, from esteemed hafızs, mevlidhans, zakirs, head zakirs, and other masters who know ilahıs, many of whom have since passed away.” He continues, singling out the efforts of Kosal—similarly borne out by the pages of the ilahi collection itself—as follows: “Our esteemed kanun artist and music researcher, the honorable Cüneyd Kosal, transcribed these works, which had been recited [okunus] on audio tape and recorded with their stylistic details, in contemporary [i.e., western] music notation” (ibid.). Several other dervishes mentioned the large wire and tape recording devices that Safer Efendi used to lug around the Anatolian countryside in the 1950s.21 For Sami Savni Özer, Safer Efendi’s musical legacy was inextricably tied to his spiritual existence: “When such a spiritual giant [manevi büyük bir sultan] is

21 In a conversation, Gregory Blann (Sheikh Muhammad Jamal) recounted, “Safer Efendi was quite a musicologist and apparently he traipsed all over Turkey in the 1950s with a big recording device—I don’t know what it was, a wire recorder maybe—and he was going to villages recording ilahıs” (May 30, 2014). Veysel Dalsaldı, another dervish at Karagümrük and a recording musician, recounted that in the wake of the closure of Turkish tekkes, most Sufis considered that the end of their activities, but Safer Efendi would not be swayed: “He was the type of person who took a huge reel-to-reel tape recorder to make recordings and would go to the end of the earth for an ilahi. He simply wanted the music of tekkes to spread in Turkey and the world, and for people to love it” (2014).
standing behind you, beautiful works of art emerge. He prepared the foundation of my entire recorded repertoire” (2011:230-231).

Several of the ilahis in the Berlin collection were documented from the repertoire of women. Most prominent among these is Cemile Bayrak Bacı, the wife of Tosun Baba, based in New York. Her repertoire as represented in the Berlin collection includes “Uyurken seyrimde kalkdım ağlayu” (text by Yunus Emre; segâh makam), “Cân ü dilden fâni kildin âkibet” (text by Hz. İbrahim Hakki, though his name is cut off; hüseyni makam), and “Tevhid etsin dilimiz” (text by Fahreddin Efendi; musical composition by “Muhibbi Cerrahi,” or Sefer Efendi; also hüseyni makam). These three ilahis were all gathered during the week of Thanksgiving 1983 (with dates ranging from November 19 to November 25). Kosal’s note on all of them is telling: “From the transcription [notadan] Cemile Bayrak Bacı wrote down in America.” The date is given with Kosal’s signature below. On the two ilahis in hüseyni makam, another note appears at the bottom in what appears to be different handwriting: “Passed along by the Beloved Aşki [Muzaffer Efendi]” and “Passed along by its composer [bestekârı] Sefer Baba.” Tellingly, Safer Dal was still “baba” then—not yet sheikh (i.e., “efendi”)—while Muzaffer Efendi is named with an honorific form of his pen name. These documents highlight the repeated trips Muzaffer Ozak Efendi was making abroad at this time,

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22 Özer joined the Vakıf (and so presumably the tarikat) in 1985 (Arıdoru 2011:227).

23 “Tevhid etsin dilimiz” also offers an interesting take on “our tongues,” a topic I explore below. In addition, by the time these texts are being formally inscribed, recorded versions also begin to appear by members of the Karagümrük community, such as Sami Savni Özer’s 1997 recording of “Cân ü dilden fâni kildin âkibet” (on Ey Allah’ın III, 1997b) which has a slight but significant difference in melody from that of Cemile Bacı.

24 As a typographical note, both Safer Dal’s and Cüneyd Kosal’s name appear with different spellings in different sources (Safer and Sefer, Cüneyd and Cüneyt). In the former case, I have used the spelling used more frequently in published sources; with Kosal, I take as authoritative his signature on these transcriptions.
especially to the United States. They also highlight ways that this pathway of instruction and institutionalization was not the proverbial one-way street. Cemile Baci (and the New York-based congregation) was not simply receiving, they were also sending. But the path of this particular *ilahi* does not end at Karagümrük either. The Berlin dervishes photocopied the *ilahis* in their binders from Susurluk, which were presumably photocopies themselves from Karagümrük. The traces of multiple copyings are readily visible: handwriting (especially) begins to fade, borders get cut off (e.g., İbrahim Hakkı’s name. In the case of “Cân ü dilden fâni kîldîn âkipet,” the suffix “-dan” has been cut off from the word “nota.” The meaning of Kosal’s note, read in a vacuum, then shifts from “From the transcription…” to “[This is] the transcription…” Only in the context of Cemile Baci’s other *ilahis* does the note become clear.

In other notes from Kosal, we see barely-visible media histories and nascent social networks within Istanbul Sufidom. For example, in an *ilahi* beginning “Ömrün bitirmiş vîrane miyem,” Kosal writes, “I wrote this again for the whole text [*tam güfte*]. Text: Ziynet-ül Kulûb [sic.], Shf 459-460. Like it was recited [*okunduğu gibi*] in the Vakıf for the first time on January 6, 1984. November 1, 1991. Cüneyd Kosal.” From this note alone, we learn of a premiere recitation (i.e., singing) on a Friday in early 1984.25 Kosal was either present or able to consult a recording of that recitation (or both) in order to compare versions. He had already written the text down but opted to do it again to include all three verses of the *ilahi*. The text is from a poem, evocatively titled “Neyim?”

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25 Here the rhythm of the Sufi week at Karagümrük becomes relevant: *zikr* is held on Thursday evenings (often called Friday evening in accordance with the traditional Islamic calendar) until late in the night, with Friday congregational prayers following mid-day the next day. Sohbet gatherings on Saturday night are common too, with a regular *meşk* rehearsal on Mondays. The dervishes at Susurluk and Berlin follow slightly different schedules (in Susurluk/Bursa, *meşk* on Wednesday, *zikr* on Saturday; in Berlin, no regular *meşk* and *zikr* on Friday).
(What am I?), published in Muzaffer Efendi’s book, *Ziynet ül-Kulâb*. As an *ilahi*, no title is given besides the makam (*hicaz*), showing the kind of sound-word tensions that mark any vocal tradition. Lurking in the background is the entire project of defining Turkish music, a major project in Republican Turkey (cf. Stokes 1990) that insisted on bifurcating classical art traditions from local/orally transmitted folk musics, using systematic notations that, again, made them more widely available but also domesticated potentially problematic elements in them.\(^{26}\) Despite the obviously strained relationship Cerrahis have with the secularizing forces of the Turkish Republic, its broader project of systematization of music—albeit with focus on other repertoires—pervades this *ilahi* project to the point that the existential question of Muzaffer Efendi’s title vanishes, replaced only with *Hicaz ilahi*. Perhaps such tradeoffs are inevitable or not even worrisome, given the widespread circulation of the published text. But this particular piece of paper from the Berlin *zaviye* (by way of Susurluk by way of Istanbul/Karagümrück by the hand of Cüneyd Kosal) suggests that in transforming these *ilahis* into “music,” other more poetic possibilities have perhaps been foreclosed. It also offers a reminder, much like the forgoing anecdotes of Safer Efendi traveling around to record *ilahis*, that the process of fixation and documentation often took years to complete.

Other *ilahis* show some of the Sufi networks that existed in the late 1980s. The Berlin collection includes several *ilahis* that were transcribed from cassettes given to the Vakıf by other Sufi groups, including some in Istanbul. Two have notes indicating that they are taken from cassettes recorded by Raik Efendi, presumably referring to the Rufai

\(^{26}\) One more senior dervish suggested that this musical tension under the Turkish Republic was the direct prompt for Safer Efendi’s *ilahi* gathering project. The formal promulgation of western music in schools meant that *ilahis* were in danger of becoming extinct (personal correspondence, June 2, 2014).
sheikh, dated to late October 1989. Another comes from farther away (appropriately
beginning with the phrase “Şeyhimin illeri uzaktır yolları,” the paths of my sheikh are in
faraway lands) and includes the note: “From a cassette with reciting by the Üsküp Nakşî
Sheikh Yusuf Efendi and his congregation.” Üsküp, or Skopje, Macedonia, has long been
home to a vibrant Sufi community as well, and this ilahi suggests a rather circuitous route
through various media (cassette, paper—repeatedly reproduced) and geographies
(Skopje, Istanbul, Susurluk, Berlin), yet one that seems perfectly reasonable given not
only Ottoman history but also the well-maintained practices of sheikhs and dervishes
visiting one another. Although I never met (the late) Yusuf Efendi, I have met several
sheikhs and babas in the former Yugoslavia (especially Macedonia Kosovo) who
regularly travel to (or have lived for extended periods in) Turkey to connect with a larger
Sufi networks. Like Turkey, Yugoslavia had banned Sufism officially after World War II
but allowed it to continue in certain places. These circulating cassettes are reminders that
although state borders sometimes matter greatly (i.e., the labor agreement between
Germany and Turkey—as a state, not with any particular ethnic group or region), but
other times they obscure shared histories that cut across very different paths.

The material traits of these ilahis are not immutable nor are they exclusively the
domain of the zakir musicians. At Monday night meşk gatherings at Karagümruk, the
weekly rehearsals of spiritual music and discourse about zikr and other ritual
performance, these ilahis would be projected digitally on a screen. In the front corner of
the room closest to the screen, a group of 8-10 instrumentalists would sit and effectively
lead the performance, under the direction of the sheikh, Tuğrul Efendi. The rest of the
roughly 100 assembled dervishes would then sing ilahis, creating an opportunity for non-
zakirs to participate in a sonic component of zikr that they otherwise miss (since they chant the esma during zikr). The projected image readily allows for communal participation and learning, suggesting an attitude of technological pragmatism I have observed in many tekkes. In both Karagümüş and Susurluk, for example, all ritual gatherings—zikr, meşk rehearsals, sohbet discourses—are filmed regularly. This facilitates a real-time transmission to women gathered upstairs as well as an archival copy. In the case of Karagümüş, these recordings are rather involved, using footage from a number of cameras simultaneously, allowing for fixed shots from multiple angles, a real difficulty when filming in a crowded room with actively moving bodies. In a less formalized way, unauthorized circulation takes place all over the Internet as well, with sites like www.muzafferozak.com posting massive archives of audio, video, photographs and documents from the tarikat’s history. In the Conclusion of this dissertation (and in later chapters in less detail), I return to the question of media technologies and documentary impulses (of mine, of congregations I worked with, and of certain angels in Islamic theology). For now suffice it to say that paper here is a critical sound technology bound up in a larger audiovisual technoculture of Sufi worship that makes important use of these technologies. The tradeoff of any such “cultural technique,” to borrow Bernhard Siegert’s term (2008), is that they in turn shape their the behavior of their “users.” The screen becomes the definitive focal point in the room for many—though many also know these ilahis by heart. Meşk at Karagümüş is marked by a complex spatial distribution, with zakirs in one corner, dervishes filling up the room, and in a room behind, semazens, or “whirling” dervishes turning sema. With a screen emphasizing definitively where “front” is, the room is oriented through its media, for better or worse.
More broadly, meşk ceremonies offer another point of dis/connection between Berliner Cerrahism and its counterparts in Turkish cities like Istanbul (at the Karagümruk tekke) or Bursa (at the zaviye connected to the Susurluk). On several occasions, dervishes in Berlin invited me to bring my oud and come to the teahouse on a Wednesday night to have meşk. But regular meşk was generally not a regular practice there yet; only on special occasions (i.e., having a guest musician). And indeed, they do occasionally have guest zakirs, at least for zikr. But as several dervishes there remarked when I asked about meşk, citing the traditional proverb, “When there is no love [aşk], there can be no meşk.” And as I learned on a number of occasions in sohbets, zikrs, and informal conversations with İsmail Baba and others in Berlin, there are always plenty of opportunities to learn and to practice.

Apologia: Cerrahi Music Theory

The Cerrahis’ embrace of music, mûsîkî, has not been without its critics, though it appears to have satisfied the state—for proof, look no further than the publication of their 1991 ilahi collection (TTMF 1991), under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, the same institution charged with ensuring the integrity of the tekke ban (cf. Kara 1999:362-363). But to some devout Muslims it has raised questions of the propriety of music. Fulya Atacan notes that this debate in a Turkish context can be documented back at least to the 17th century writings of the aforementioned Celveti pir and poet/composer, Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi, writing in defense of musical sema.27 The question remained.

27 For more on Hüdayi generally, cf. Tezeren 1984 (two volumes) and Yılmaz 182. Yılmaz (1984) also produced a modernized version of Hüdayi’s “Treatise on Sema” (Sema Risalesi), an important text for understanding a broader Ottoman context for sound, listening and Sufism.
contentious in the 20th century. Gregory Blann notes that when Muzaffer Efendi began traveling and performing zikr in public in the late 1970s and early ‘80s, he was repeatedly asked about the legitimacy of music in Islam. Citing two such instances, Blann notes Muzaffer Efendi’s response during a session on April 1, 1980, in which he said:

There are two types of music: shaitani [devilish] music and rahmani [merciful; godly] music. When anyone remembers and calls upon Allah with the use of music, that music is rahmani. Conversely, music that is insinuating and stimulates one’s fleshly desires is shaitani. It is not only music which can be distinguished into two such categories; there are many acts in life which seem similar, yet are not the same, such as adultery and married love. Both acts are physically the same, but one is a sin and the other a blessing. (in Blann 2005:227)

This notion of a devil’s music is a trope that emerges in critiques of Alevism as well (cf. Chapter 2). But on a less polemical level, here is the recognition of bodily affect, both for good and bad, to the point that music is compared to sexuality. Significantly (given my discussion above), Muzaffer Efendi does not back away from the term “music,” even when outside of Turkey.

A few days earlier, on March 30, 1980, Muzaffer Efendi similarly used a language of physicality that bound together music with the path of Sufism and the sense of taste, a recurring motif in Cerrahi teaching:

Music is very much connected with our path. When the Rasulullah entered Medina, the whole city came out with drums like we use in our dhikr, and chanted hymns to receive him. In the ‘alam-i arwah (universe of souls), when our Creator asked, “Alastu bi-Rabbikum?” (Am I not your Lord?)” all souls answered, “Yes.” That is why, in our essence, we all share this sweet taste which our souls have experienced beyond time. The music, then, evokes a memory, a faint echo reminiscent of the voice of Allah pronouncing those words which all souls heard and to which they respond. So when a musician sings, chants or plays an instrument, his soul is inspired by nostalgia for the beauty of that celestial sentence which Allah uttered in the soul’s eternal realm….When one reaches to the third level—to the human soul—then one will have a taste of the sound of Allah and it will affect their art, whether it is music or some other form of artistic expression….In the universe of souls, every soul melted with the beauty of Allah. Allah’s beauty is such that whoever has eyes to see, disappears with love and the taste of divine beauty….In Islam, we take beauty wherever we see it. Some Islamic leaders may be against playing drums and chanting, but as for us, we will go on beating our drums, chanting and calling out to Allah. (in Blann 2005a:227-229)
For Muzaffer Efendi, the primordial utterance of the soul creates—and leaves—a taste in the mouth. In here-and-now practice, he muses on the possibility of “hav[ing] a taste of the sound of Allah,” “melt[ing] with the beauty of Allah,” and “disappear[ing] with love and the taste of divine beauty.” This synaesthetic language of sonic tasting can be understood symbolically, but within the context of zikr, it also could be taken literally, given the constant engagement of the voice (including the tongue, especially) in sacred recitation.

Safer Efendi reiterates a similar set of themes in his teachings: “Islam loves a beautiful voice, everyone loves it. You can see that God wills it in this way when you listen to the recitation of a few ayāt from the Qur’an. The ezan has its makam. Music is food for our souls [ruhların gıdasıdır]” (in Atacan 1990:115). Safer Efendi’s theorizing of music extended more deeply than Muzaffer Efendi’s, as seen in the book İslâmbol Geleneğinde Sivil Merasimler ve Doğumdan Ölümü Müsîkî (Civic Ritual in the Traditions of “Islambol” and Music from Birth to Death, Özdamar 1997b), published under the name of Mustafa Özdamar, who compiled the text. The book opens with the following observation: “Music [musîkî], which is an art as old as the universe, is one of the most beloved, most delicious bounties [en lezîz nimetlerden] which God, the Greatest of Creators, Ahsenü’l Hâlikîn, bestows and offers to his creations. The history of music,

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28 The term “Îslâmbol” is a nickname for Istanbul meaning literally “full of Islam.” Cf. İnalci 1990.

29 This arrangement is hinted at on the title page of the book, where the first name below the title is Safer Efendi’s: “Project plan, primary materials and direction [by] Member of the Board of Trustees of the TÜRKISH SUFI MUSIC ENDOWMENT, Sefer Dal.” A list of familiar names then appear next: “Research and investigation of musical transcriptions, Cüneyd Kosal”; “Music typesetting, Metin Alkanlı” (whom Tuğrul İnançer mentions in his 1991 introduction); “Correction, Vey sel Dalsaldı and M. Hakan Alvan” (Dalsaldı is mentioned above). Finally at the bottom of the page, Mustafa Özdamar’s name appears, credited with “Text” (metin). Tosun Baba affirmed that the book is essentially Safer Efendi’s thinking (conversation, May 25, 2014).
which we might call the harmonious consonance of different degrees of sound [ses mertebeleri]—I suppose and believe it to be so—will reach stages yet to come of a wholeness in the human spirit and body” (1997b:9). He proceeds with an esoteric reading of the Arabic word kun (Turkish: kevn) and its letters kâf and nûn (cf. Ibn Arabi on mi’raj in Bayrak 2004), the utterance of which brought the universe—“from the atom to the world-globe”—into existence (10). The orbits and rotations of planets are a form of sema, the “whirling” or turning of dervishes: “Semâ is the state of hearing the command ‘Be’ at the core of the universe and coming into harmony with it….My sensation of my pleasure or my pleasure of sensation tell me these things! My heart passes on these tales” (ibid.).

He then proposes an extended metaphor in which the seven tones (frets, perde) of music (do, re, mi, etc.) represent seven levels of egotism, which he associates with sound: for example, the first tone or degree, do, which “produces thick and full sounds,” corresponds to emmâre, a state of compulsion (ibid.). He returns to ritual, pointing out how “the kun harmony of the devran circle [in zikr] which rotates in a harmonious, contrary motion” (ibid.). Echoing Muzaffer Efendi’s comments on tasting the echo of God’s first uttered address [hitâp] to humankind (“Am I not your Lord?,” Elestü/Alastu…), he continues, citing earlier writers like the 15th-century Sufi Eşrefoğlu Rumi, who encouraged his followers to listen carefully for the divine and thus become part of the Contemplative (literally, quiet) People, Müzekkin Nüfûs: “The station [makam] of the inspired soul includes such people as know the pleasure of the epiphanies [ilhamlarin zevki] that come from God, and for whom all the labors of life are for God. When they hear a sound or listen to a couplet of poetry, they immediately hear and taste
[duyup tadarlar] God’s first uttered address, the Elestii” (11). These teachings blend a Pythagorean-like notion of “music of the spheres” with a deeply embodied sense of sound-as-taste. Although the rest of the book by Safer Efendi and Özdamar fulfills its promise of enumerating the ways music (especially ilahis) could and should be used throughout the course of one’s life, its opening premise points emphatically to the practice of zikr, a ritual repeated weekly within these Cerrahi communities.

Timbres of the Heart

“Your legs are probably hurting now. And you’ll start to feel yourself get dizzy. Don’t worry, just let the name reach further down in your throat.” I was kneeling—or rather sitting on my feet—arm’s length away from İsmail Baba, the leader of the Berlin Cerrahi zaviye. In response to my incessant questioning about various sonic aspects of the zikr since my first visit to the Berlin zaviye, İsmail Baba had offered to “practice” the recitations with me outside the context of the zikr ceremony. We knelt in the sohbet odası, a room reserved for the ritual conversations (sohbet) that preceded and followed Friday night zikrs in Berlin. Around us, another 12-15 dervishes sat silently and watched, while a few others stood outside smoking, waiting for the beginning of the zikr. Although our practice focused on just two names, la ilahe illallah and hay, the key issue was the mode of recitation, especially the timbre used to color each name.

According to Cerrahi practice (which largely accords with other tarikats in Turkey and the former Ottoman Empire), a given name may be recited for different durations, at different tempos and with various pitches, during which time a select group of dervishes may be singing ilahi hymns simultaneously. But the most intriguing aspect of the
ceremony for me—and the issue I repeatedly asked İsmail Baba about—was the variety of timbres used by those dervishes reciting. How were these timbres produced vocally? What was their function within the zikr ritual? What did they signify compared to less emphatic modes of reciting? Did they point to some larger significance of sound in Islam, or were they simply an esoteric practice limited to initiated dervishes? The zikr ceremonies he led always begin with long, slow recitation more akin to chanting, with clear pitches often sustained over long durations, as well as extended ritual injunctions unique to the order. As the dervishes warm up (quite literally), a select group of names and sacred phrases are then recited repeatedly, beginning with the phrase “la ilahe illallah” (there is no god but Allah), the first half of the shahada or declaration of faith.

Before long, İsmail Baba would change the recitation, often keeping the same name but changing the timbre of the voice radically.

This type of recitation, called by some orders zikr of the heart (kalbi zikr), is much noisier than the chants that precede it. As İsmail Baba and others explained to me, the zikr begins at the tip of the tongue, with what might be thought of as verbal recitations—basically extensions of regular speech. In particular, the phrase “la ilahe illallah” requires almost no movement of the mouth besides the tip of the tongue against the teeth to articulate (i.e., stop the sound of) vowels from one another with the letter “l.” From the tip of the tongue, the zikr then proceeds slowly back into the mouth and beyond. İsmail Baba’s literal brother and spiritual elder, Sheikh Mustafa Özcan (better known as Özcan Efendi), described it as “tasting the name of God.” This description is commonly found in a variety of Islamic texts about zikr, ranging from prophetic hadith traditions to the poetry of contemporary sheikhs. In the quotations in the epigraph above,
I noted a few such examples: the Prophet encouraging believers (particularly those who felt shari’a to be insufficient for their spiritual needs), “Do not cease to keep your tongue continually wet with the remembrance of God [zikrullah]” (al-Tirmidhi 3375). The tongue and its physical state—its wetness—become sites for holiness. In one of the poems Fahreddin Efendi included in his Envar-ı Hazreti Pir (the source for much of the history described above), he writes:

They keep zikr on their tongues, they walk the path of intimates [dost yolu]  
They fly to the Exalted realm [Lâhût], the Cerrahis are the flying ones.  
They burn with the zikr of the heart, they quench their thirst with the wine of love  
They say “hû hû” and they turn about, the Cerrahis are the revolving ones.  
They perform the zikr of the breath, the esma names progress in order.  
They reach their aim true, the Cerrahis are the enraptured ones.  

Here a tongue-centric notion of zikr becomes bound up with a flurry of other sensations: sound, taste and thirst (quenched in the traditional Sufi manner), movement (along a path, flying, revolving), and breathing, a “practice of everyday life” that is central to zikr but also binds together taste, smell and the voice in intriguing ways. Muzaffer Ozak Efendi adds to the thoughts of his own mürşid (teacher) with the following verse:

Our zikr is night and day  
Lâ ilâhe illallah  
Our zikr is in every breath  
Lâ ilâhe illallah

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30 With many (perhaps all) of these poems, the language is sufficiently rich that a translation, even with considerable annotation, would fail to do justice to the text. For that reason, I include the original here:

Zikri ahörler diline yürürlər dost yoluna  
Uçarlar lâhût iline tayrândır [sic.] Cerrâhîler  
Zikr-i kalbi ile yanarlar aşk meyinden kanarlar  
Hû hû deyip dönərler devranıdır Cerrâhîler  
Zikr-i cehriederler tertible esmâ sürerler  
Tızce maksûda ererler viedânıdır Cerrâhîler
The name of our Lord [Mevlâmız]
The taste of our mouth,
The desire of Aşki
Lâ ilâhe illallah

Once again, breath, mouth, and taste are cited as critical components of zikr. But here these become even more expressive, as this central phrase of zikr, la ilâhe illallah, simultaneously signifies-through-sound “The name of our Lord / The taste of our mouth / The desire of Aşki.” Aşki, the pen-name of Muzaffer Ozak Efendi, signals this blurring of intense affect (aşk also means love) and the poetics of zikr.

From the tongue, the physical focus of the recitation and the esma they accompany then “progress in order” to the back of the mouth and into the throat, the primary site for the more vocalic recitations with their sustained sense of pitch—in other words, a kind of Western-choral singing voice. From there, however, the critical locus shifts even deeper into the throat, with the base of the tongue pushing against the pharynx, at which point the voice becomes quite noisy or “guttural,” literally meaning “throaty.” Clear pitches recede to the acoustic background, becoming harder to distinguish, while the raspy grains of the throat come to the fore. At this point, the zikr can become voiceless (sessiz), and participants will then close their mouth, creating a guttural hum articulated in the rhythm of a given name (e.g., “la ilâhe illallah,” “hay hay hay,” “Allah ya Daim,” etc.). Zikr of the heart represents the culmination of this vocal progression from the tongue, through the mouth and throat, to the heart, at least conceptually. Obviously the actually sound vocally but its rhythmic pulse can be felt—and at key moments of the devran circle (below), dervishes place their hands on one another’s backs, communally feeling a heartbeat. Symbolically, Özcan Efendi explained, the zikr should then overtake the entire body, as the dervish enters a sublime state in
which the zikr can then radiates back outward from the entire body. But the internalization of sound, from the tip of the tongue inward, sets this rapture in motion.

Setting aside this theology of the voice for a moment, I found myself struggling to articulate these names properly in my recitation tutorial. As I tried to approximate what I heard, my throat quickly dried out and soon began to ache vaguely. I could hardly help myself from coughing. Although my experience in musical performance comes largely from instrumental music, I have performed as a singer in a wide enough variety of contexts that I thought myself capable of sustaining a variety of modes of vocalizing. And I had previously participated in zikrs, reciting in what I thought was a decent approximation of the “zikr of the heart.” But exposed as I was here, it became clear that my approximations had been just that—approximations. Given the vocal strain of the lesson, I, along with Ismail Baba, quickly realized I needed to take a break. So we sat for a moment and he again explained that the state of ecstasy we were aiming for could only come when I stopped focusing on the pain in my legs and throat. “Forget those things, let your mind be free. Try closing your eyes.” Even more disconcerting than the pain was the light-headedness I felt, which he responded to by telling me to be sure to exhale completely with each breath. Since the recitations require a particular syllable to be pronounced with both inhalation and exhalation, the entire volume of air entering (and exiting) the body needed to pass through the mouth and throat. We once again began and I tried to gain the composure and mindfulness to continue and keep pace. This time we were able to stay together somewhat better, at least for a short while.

He again stopped me and we talked again about the experience. My dizziness and the pain in my legs and throat were less noticeable. I also had the clear sense that our
recitation had cohered much more closely, a topic I have heard dervishes and sheikhs speak of often: How well had dervishes been able to replicate the name the sheikh had chosen, in terms of rhythm and timbre especially? (The key idea here is taklit, imitation or following.) How unified was the sound of the dervishes as a whole? Which names were more difficult for them to recite correctly and which were easier? This striving for performative unison, or unity, reflects one of the central tenets of Islam and especially Sufi Islam across a whole variety of orders and geographies—*tawhid*. This unity is often expressed in terms of the oneness of the divine, sometimes leveraged in contradistinction to the Trinitarian theologies of Christianity, which are considered to be effectively polytheistic. This oneness is repeatedly emphasized in the zikr recitation: there is no other god apart from Allah. Or more emphatically, there is nothing apart from God—nothing else exists. But this unity is sometimes also used as a descriptor for human religiosity, whether as a state of divine communion (a believer’s oneness with Allah) or of social cohesion (oneness with others, especially co-worshipers). Although not a practicing Muslim, I found that the sonic experience of this tutorial offered some insight into what *tawhid* might mean when articulated in the context of a zikr: something in between a well-executed musical unison and what Pauline Oliveros might call “deep listening,” a heightened awareness of how my voice related to and complemented the voice of İsmail Baba.

The high point of our lesson was yet to come: as we embarked upon a third round of recitation, once again with eyes closed, a new element was added. Presumably on İsmail Baba’s cue, all the other dervishes joined in with our recitation. Their physical presence, which I had otherwise mostly forgotten due to my vocal laboring, was suddenly
articulated in a very powerful way. After recovering from my initial surprise and slight embarrassment (were these extra voices added in support of mine or to show me how to properly recite?), I found myself relishing the opportunity to listen. And indeed, this experience made clear that, despite the name “zikr” with its presumed emphasis on participants’ modes of vocalization, the zikr ceremony is just as importantly a very particular way of listening. Not unlike the experience of listening to a multichannel piece of electronic music, listening in this case oscillated between some sense of discrete sound sources—sometimes I felt I could pick out at least seven or eight individual voices—and a sense of a larger, unified ensemble surrounding me. This realization is in some ways extremely obvious: after all, just like in this “lesson,” dervishes are always listening to the sheikh for cues about how and what to recite. The entire ceremony could be understood as an extremely prolonged form of call-and-response sounding.

**The Synaesthetics of Remembrance**

Indeed, the zikr ceremony entails a deeply synaesthetic mode of sensory perception and response. The Cerrahi zikr is perhaps better understood as part of a full evening of sensory engagement. The dervishes in Wedding, like their counterparts at Özcan Efendi’s tekke in Susurluk, Turkey, or the order’s main tekke in Istanbul, Turkey, gather for much more than just the zikr. A typical evening starts several hours earlier, as those who are able join for an usul ceremony, in which dervishes recite a similar series of names but in a much more restrained manner: the names are chanted very quickly, with little song-like prolongation of pitch, not to mention the roughly timbred zikr of the heart. (İsmail Baba, like the sheikhs in Susurluk or Istanbul, does not attend the usul, instead

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leaving it supervised by one of his dervish assistants.) In bigger tekkes, after the usul comes a dinner, prepared in the tekke’s by women affiliates of the order (often spouses of dervishes) and served by a small handful of dervishes. Although tekkes have a fairly rigid hierarchy, with the sheikh usually designating a number of dervishes (traditionally 12) to official positions within the order, many of these positions entail attending to the needs of other dervishes and guests. These *hizmetçi* dervishes—literally those in the service of others—oversee the distribution of this simple but multicourse meal with a round of tea to follow. After the meal, dervishes help clean up and then are free to chat informally with one another or are gathered into a room for a more formal conversation guided by the sheikh. In the zaviye in Wedding, the meal is dispensed with because of limits of space and group size, but conversations occupy the next several hours, interspersed with tea and small plates of food (usually fruit, bite-size sweets, and/or nuts) being brought to those gathered. Hierarchy persists within food and tea distribution, as İsmail Baba (like his sheikh counterparts) is served first and others refrain from eating until he has begun. He is also the only who smokes in that setting, while all others step outside to do so. (Unlike some sheikhs I have encountered, he typically lights his own cigarettes, a task often performed by dervishes sitting near the sheikh as an act of respect.)

The ensuing conversation, known as *muhabet* or *sohbet*, functions as a combination of social time, spiritual education, discussion of current events, and frequently, of humorous banter. Sometimes the sheikh or vekil poses questions or steers the conversation, sometimes he opens it up to questions from dervishes. The conversations are generally steered by and through the sheikh, so that dervishes talk
relatively little among themselves during this time, but they are free to leave the gathering (especially in Wedding) to smoke and converse more freely.

After several hours of this conversation, during which time dervishes continue to arrive, the group of dervishes pray the ritual namaz prayer as a group. Among the roles assigned to certain dervishes is that of the imam, who leads the prayer ceremony as an imam would in a Sunni mosque. Immediately after the namaz, the zikr begins—a pattern adhered to not only in Wedding, but also in the Turkish tekkes. The group divides into two basic groups according to acoustic responsibilities: the zakir dervishes, or designated musicians responsible for singing ilahi hymns, and the congregation of dervishes, who gather around the sheikh or vekil and recite names of Allah. Every order and even every sheikh within an order leads the zikr in slightly different ways. Certain names of Allah are considered to be reserved for (or used principally by) certain orders, and some groups have limited permission in how much of the zikr they can perform. As a zaviye, the dervishes in Wedding are under the direction of İsmail Baba, but he only has as much flexibility in leading the zikr as his sheikh, Özel Efendi, gives him. For example, for several years the Wedding zaviye was limited to performing a sitting zikr until permission was granted by Özel Efendi to do a standing zikr. In talking with some dervishes in Istanbul, I found they expressed vigorous disbelief that Özel Efendi should have the necessary authority to do so, underscoring the seriousness of such an issue. Similarly, certain “names,” or esma, are considered to be limited to certain orders. These names are much more than just names, however. They include attendant timbral articulations and body positions that are used to accompany them. So for example, during an evening gathering in Istanbul, Sheikh Tuğrul Efendi taught the dervishes present how
to perform the *darb-i esma*, which involved a fairly elaborate set of movements between two dervishes kneeling on the ground facing one another. As described above, Cerrahis lay claim to a very diverse set of these *esma*, or divine names, on the grounds that the heads of each order appeared in a dream to their founder, Nureddin Cerrahi, and taught him these *esma*. Such apparitions aside, *esma*, like many (if not all) ritual components of the zikr are understood to be practices that must be taught and learned, a kind of oral transmission and religious pedagogy that is critical to the relationship between the sheikh and dervish, who more frequently call themselves instead *mürşid* and *mürid*, meaning teacher and pupil.

Thus the zikr ceremony itself is a polyphonic vocal performance in remembrance of Allah. The ceremony begins with everyone seated, the zakir musicians in a row against a wall while everyone else sitting in a circle (known as a *devran*) around the sheikh. The ceremony opens with certain greetings, or *salawat*, to the prophet Muhammad and those religious teachers who comprise the tarikat’s spiritual lineage. (Every major order can trace its *silsile*, or chain of authority, back to the prophet Muhammad, and all but the Nakşibendi order do so through Hazreti Ali.) Even before these greetings are complete, the two groups begin to differentiate in their recitations, as some of the zakirs begin to sing a slightly different text an octave higher than the rest of the group. Meanwhile, one of the hizmetçi dervishes brings in a censer of sweet incense and places it in the center of the devran. Once the greetings and tarikat-specific recitations are complete, the ceremony moves on to the recitation of the various *esma* by the main congregation and singing of

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31 The role of dreams within Sufism and Cerrahi in general warrants considerable more attention. An intriguing historical example can be seen in Cemal Kafadar’s work on first-person historical accounts, including the publication of a journal of a dervish and, more to the point, a collection of accounts of dreams from Asiye Hatun, a woman Sufi in the 17th-century Ottoman Empire, which she recorded in order to share with her sheikh (Kafadar 1989, 2009).
*ilahis* and drumming by the zakirs. After some period of time—or rather a number of recitations of given *esmas*, counted by the sheikh on *tesbiyet*, or prayer beads—the sheikh intensifies the timbres of the recited *esmas*. At a point when a given *esma* has run its course and an *ilahi* has come to an end, he introduces another *esma*, reciting it once alone, after which the other dervishes join in.

The next major transition is marked by the congregation of dervishes standing while remaining in a circle formation. (First, the dervishes scurry to roll up the thing rugs on the floor and especially the collection of 12 sheepskin *post*, or throws, that are laid on top of the rugs.) Once standing the dervishes all hold hands in a circle (the *devran* formation), while İsmail Baba places his hands palms-down on the upward-facing palms of his two assistants who flank him on either side. The entire *devran* turns together in a clock-wise motion, a hallmark of those tarikats (like the Cerrahis) which grew out of the Halveti “mother order” (*ana tarikat*). With time, İsmail Baba moves into the center of the circle to lead and listen to the *esma*, which become more intense—including their accompanying body movements—as dervishes eventually put their arms around each others’ backs and begin an increasingly intense set of *esma*. The culmination of this portion of the *zikr* comes as the dervishes stomp their feet in unison with the vocalized name—now almost being yelled by some—until İsmail Baba takes the hand of a dervish, disconnecting the whole chain of dervishes, who spiral around in an ever-tightening circle. At this point most put their hands on the backs of those further inside the spiral for several moments until the *esma* has run its course. Several dervishes have pointed to this spiral configuration as being one of the climaxes of the ceremony. One dervish described this moment as follows: “It’s a moment of true ecstasy, when we are all one. In those
moments, when you have your hand on the back of dervishes next to you, or in front of you, you can feel their heart beating through their body. This is the unity (tevhid) that comes from a zikr.”

The dervishes from the devran then line up in two facing rows (known as kiyam, or simply a standing configuration). Here they begin a new set of esma, with emphasis on the name hay, meaning “life,” or more aptly, “The Life,” a divine descriptor. Here participants alternately sway side-to-side and bounce up-and-down as part of the appropriate body movements associated with each esma. The zakirs continue drumming and singing, choosing songs that seem appropriate to the tempo and energy level of the recited esmas at that moment. Occasionally İsmail Baba, who otherwise walks back and forth in between the two facing lines listening and directing, will clap his hands loudly to help lock in the tempo, or sometimes even sing with the zakirs to hold the whole group together. After this set of esma recitations has boiled to an equally ecstatic state as the earlier devran—not infrequently punctuated by screams of “Ya Allah” or whatever other esma is being recited—the group performs a gülbenk prayer. Similar to the dua prayer at the end of regular communal prayers (namaz/salah) in Islam, the gülbenk is a spontaneous benediction on those gathered, the order itself, perhaps those who are ill or who are lacking materially. One person—most often İsmail Baba, but sometimes other dervishes—acts as the voice for the whole group, which recites aloud the phrase “Allah, Allah” in support for the prayer. With a brief greeting exchanged between İsmail Baba and the congregation of dervishes, the ceremony closes with the sacred word “Hu,” another esma of special importance to many dervish tarikats.
Although the zikr ceremony varies from tarikat to tarikat, and from tekke to tekke (or zaviye) within a given tarikat, this basic outline—greetings and the recitation of the tarikat’s lineage; sitting zikr followed by standing zikr with increasing intensity; and a concluding gülbenc and other greeting(s)—holds for a wide swath of zikrs from Berlin to Istanbul (and in between in places like Bosnia or Kosovo). But even more than this structural similarity, the bodily engagement remains fundamental throughout this same geography. A constant interaction through sound between the sheikh, the reciting dervishes, and the zakir musicians creates a rich sonic environment for listening and voicing in a variety of ways. The frequent holding of hands and wrapping arms around one another, the ecstatic circling together in an ever-tighter spiral, and even the stomping on the ground creates a highly tactile environment as well, in which worship is sweaty and communal. This palpable intimacy—feeling the heartbeat of the next dervish in line, or holding hands as the ceremony (and the bodies of those involved) warms up—adds another sensory layer. Taste and smell play similarly important roles, as food, tea, and cigarette smoke serve as spiritual preparation for the damp sweetness to come through incense and eventually sweat during the zikr proper. In other tarikats, rosewater perfume is distributed just before or after the zikr, adding yet another smell to a ceremony already saturated with sensory triggers. On more than one occasion in the conversations after the zikr, İsmail Baba has pointed out that the sweat of a godly person participating in the zikr does not smell. To prove his point after one zikr, he even asked a dervish to bring in someone’s sweat-soaked shirt as evidence. (Most of the dervishes in Wedding bring another shirt to change into after the ceremony finishes.) He rubbed the shirt in his own face and then offered it to me to confirm as well. (The shirt did not smell bad.) Similar
theological importance is placed on the single drop of sweat that allegedly fell from Muhammad during his nighttime ascent through the heavens during Mi‘raj.

Sight too plays a role in the ceremony, but largely through its absence. Most dervishes have their eyes closed (at least partially) for most or all of the ceremony. Even when standing and moving fairly rapidly in the devran circle, many dervishes rely on sound for their spatial bearings more than sight. Indeed, the frequent turning of the head from side to side creates a kind of localized Doppler effect, clarifying how close or far another person is at any given moment. As İsmail Baba once said, “In Islam, it is sometimes necessary to see with one’s ears.” Furthermore, several dervishes have suggested that even with their eyes closed, they have some sensation of sight. One went so far as to say that different esma should and do produce different colors when recited properly and with one’s eyes closed. In the Wedding zaviye, the most overt visual activity seems to happen, ironically enough, among the zakir musicians, who must communicate with one another about which ilahis to sing and in what order. In other orders, the head musician, or zakirbaş, will generally just start an ilahi and other zakirs will follow from memory. But in Wedding, the process is more democratic, as the zakirs flip through two thin ilahi hymnals, using subtle facial expressions and quick hand gestures to affirm or challenge a decision. Occasionally even with this visual communication, transitions between ilahis are a bit tentative, including not just disagreements about repertoire, but sometimes about pitch too. Even so, the momentum of the ceremony and the careful listening (and response) by İsmail Baba typically head off any major breakdowns. Instead, small adjustments are repeatedly made to maintain the sonic coherence of these multiple, active parts.
This lengthy description of the ceremony and of the varieties of sensation that typify it suggests that the zikr is first and foremost an embodied experience. Despite the commonplace description of zikr as the recitation of the names of Allah or as a kind of “remembrance,” such remembrance is bound up in bodily experience that engages the senses in a rich and multifarious way. Yet these *esma* and the process of calling them to remembrance do produce important meanings for participants in a way that is intimately bound up with these material, bodily practices. This was suggested in the aforementioned description by Özcan Efendi of the passage of the *esma* in the zikr from the tip of the tongue deep into the body, corresponding to the intensification of the zikr. This intensification broadly follows a path from a fairly lengthy set of recitations at the beginning (the *salawat* greetings and the first *esma*, *la ilahe illallah*) to *esma* that are considerably shorter (variations on the word *hay* or *hu*, for example). The ceremony as a whole fashions a series of descriptions of Allah, and as a result, a series of propositions about the divine that intensify along with the physical actions.

But this intertwining of physicality and meaning is not limited to the large-scale arc of the esmas. As I described earlier, each *esma* is in fact much more than a name, but rather an entire way of articulating that name and moving the body accordingly. One dervish in Berlin repeatedly warned me not to practice *esma* on my own without proper supervision. These warnings initially struck me as somewhat humorous (not that I had any intention of practicing them). “It’s dangerous to do these things by yourself,” he warned, “because you they have particular effects and must be recited in the proper way.” Furthermore, many of the esmas are indicative not only of names or attributes of Allah, but of particularly physical processes. Two of the most commonplace *esma* across a
whole swath of tarikats are hay and hu. Literally hay means “Life” and hu simply means “He,” a shortened form of the full Arabic pronoun, huwa. But they both are also bound up with meanings about the breath in Islam generally: hay was the sound of Allah’s enlivening breath to Adam, hu is also the sound of nefes, or a spiritual notion for breathing more generally, as well as the surrullah, or secret of Allah, suggestive of a kind of whispering. In addition, these esma have special names within dervish tarikats. Indeed, hu becomes a part of the architectural and visual identity of many tekkes and zaviyes, being one of the most commonly displayed pieces of calligraphy. One dervish in Turkey pointed out that hu and even more specifically the Arabic letter ā (ū or w) by itself carry physical meaning because they also represent the posture of a bowing dervish. Not surprisingly, Cerrahi thought—like that of most tarikats—has a rich theology of hidden meanings, as well. In some instances, those hidden meanings are purely ideational—they are simply ideas associated with other ideas. But in many cases such as the physical meaning of letters in the calligraphy of an esma, the “secret” meaning is tied to the physical, outward practices of the zikr ritual and the tarikat more generally. Thus these esma go well beyond the semantic content of “names,” being imbued not only with theological associations, but also with rich expressions of physicality.

In addition to these meaning-making aspects through the esmas, another way participants create understanding of the zikr ceremony as a whole is to ascribe meaning to its various parts as a kind of cosmic narrative being acted out by the dervish participants. Such a reading is borne out, as seen above, by the sacred texts found in ilahis, but is also made more explicit in the teachings of the tarikat itself. According to such a reading, as elaborated by İsmail Baba, the early devran circle represents the universe (kāinat), a kind
of massive system of energy and movement. This system then collapses on itself (the tightening spiral formation, known as the Bedevi Topu, or the furling of the Bedevi order), only to explode back out in creative energy, light and order (the arranged rows of dervishes facing one another). According to the tarikat’s theology, such was the creation of the universe and the ordering of the world, with the central moment being the introduction of divine light (*nûr or nûrullah*) to bring order to those creations. But this cosmically environmental theology of the zikr is not limited to the esotery of creation. İsmail Baba similarly speaks of hearing day-to-day sounds—the chugging of a train, the engine of a car—and instead of noise, hearing environmental articulations of the *esma* used in the zikr: a noisy, throaty “*la ilahe illallah*” or some other name of Allah. In his book on Cerrahis, Mustafa Özdamar highlights similar themes:

> Zikr is a serenade to the one true love [*tek ve mutlak sevgilye*]—the beauty among beauties, the eternal among the eternal, everywhere and in everything. In the theater of the unknowable mystery of the universe and the *devran* circle, everything that turns round and wanders about calls to memory [*anar*, recollects] all of this with its tongue—as body and as word [*hal ve kal diliyle*]. Like people’s breathing in and out, the functioning of their heart, their cognitive activities, so too with zikr: there is no difference between audible, open zikr and secret zikr—the essence of life for humans, things, nature and the cosmos alike….Life functions [i.e., breath, beating of heart, etc.]—as though they were the pistons and crankshafts of a car’s engine—are zikr, whether secret or audible. Zikr is life. (1997a:207).

Once again the tongue becomes a critical nexus—the intersection of body and world (or cosmos), the site and also the medium of remembrance.\(^{32}\) This eco-theologizing may be idiosyncratic in its blend of astrophysics, urban/sound studies, and religious teaching, but it underscores the deep worldliness of the ceremony and, by inversion, the possibility of imbuing the mundane with sacredness through zikr. That is, the act of ascribing such

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\(^{32}\) Nicholas Harkness’s work on a “phonosonic nexus” (2012:12ff.) explores just such a vocal nexus in Korean Christian settings, which share many common aims with Cerrahi practice, despite their geographical and cultural differences.
meanings points to the kind of Heideggerian in-the-worldness that dervishes experience as part of the ceremony, but also as part of the tarikat path, which quite literally leads them through the world in particular ways.

In a less obvious way, İsmail Baba’s and Özdamar’s comments suggest another function of the tongue, mouth and voice: as a kind of archive. In her masterful study of archives—the normal kind in large, drafty state institutions that house mountains of paperwork—Arlette Farge (1989 [2013]) writes of the goût, the “taste” or allure, of the archive. She tells story after story of how the archive nearly captures voices: documents that “have retained a voice, an intonation, a rhythm” (61), “quiet” and “talkative” documents (69, 73), “captured speech” (54), “the rustling of voices of the population” as logged in police reports (104), and so on. But ultimately, “The silence in the archives is more brutal than any schoolyard racket” (54): it is an aspiration to voice, to taste, to other senses that elude traditional archives. Even with audiovisual recording capacities developed in the past century-and-a-half, the archive is a cheap—if voluminous and often fascinating—imitation. The tongue was always already an archive.

With these sensibilities of a tasteable voice, as articulated by Cerrahi thought, the materiality of the voice can go beyond simply being an observation of in-betweenness, as is so often remarked upon today. For example, in writing about a Lacan-inspired “object voice,” Dolar writes, “What language and the body have in common is the voice, but the voice is part neither of language nor of the body” (2006:73). He goes to great (and intriguing) lengths to show this in-between state of neither-this-nor-that. But what exactly does this material voice do besides be? That is, what changes when we listen to the voice as material? Among other possible effects, the voice itself must change. Audible, and
especially aspirated, zikr is intensely demanding on the voice. During the brief breaks and repositionings that happen during the course of the zikr (e.g., the shift from a devran circle to standing kıyam in facing lines), one of the most predictable sounds is the prolonged coughing as the dervishes’ voices comes to rest. That coughing is a physical manifestation of the intensity of vocal production, indexing the training of the voice the zikr entails. The practice is reminiscent in its intensity and repetition of the physical demands placed on the bodily voice by opera training or other traditional vocal practices like Korean pansori, where the voice is built up over years as singers recite next to waterfalls, attempting to outsing them, sometimes (in extreme cases) to the point of spitting up blood (Pihl 1994:104-105, Willoughby 2008:79-80). But in these traditions the archive left behind after such entrainment (spitting blood for Pansori, or the tradition of castrati in European opera, cf. Poizat 1992:113ff.) can mean literal scarring and bodily mutilation in exchange for this performative vocal power. But for Cerrahi dervishes, entrainment—nowhere near as physically disfiguring—aims not for performance but rather ethical training. The archive it produces by means of the voice comprises a tongue of hal and kal (body and speech) and of a broader sense of adab, or ethical comportment.

**Zikr as Holy Listening**

In the foregoing discussion, I have largely chosen not to distinguish between sensory perception and action. In other words, the zikr is a richly multisensory experience but sometimes the participants are generating the stuff of sensation—zakirs sing, dervishes recite and take up particular body positions—and other times they are mostly perceiving it, as with smelling the censers or feeling the heartbeat of another. Some
activities, like holding hands or linking arms, are reciprocal acts of touch. This sense of zikr-as-reciprocity is built into the earliest theological expressions on the topic, as expressed in the voice of Allah in the Qur’an: “Keep me in remembrance [by means of zikr, fa-adhkurūnī]; and I will keep you in remembrance [adhkurkum]” (2:152). In other words, the ritual functions as a mutual promise, theologically.

The central act of uttering Allah’s esma is similarly an exercise not only in sounding but in listening too, like most any act of sound production, whether singing, speaking or playing in an instrumental ensemble. But the zikr entrains certain kinds of listening—in particular listening to space and to communal affect. Although all participants in the ceremony are able to listen in these ways and are expected to learn and cultivate better listening habits, these acts of listening are modeled by the sheikh or vekil leading the zikr. The claim that the sheikh must be an especially sensitive listener may seem strange at first glance. During the sohbet conversations before and after the zikr, the sheikh is largely responsible for speaking. Indeed, several dervishes and other attendees have commented on İsmail Baba’s ability in particular, as he readily “speaks about anything with no fear, no hesitation,” as one dervish described. Similarly in the zikr, with all its emphasis on utterance and vocal production, the sheikh or vekil chooses which esma should be recited and leads the dervishes in doing so. At the end of the ceremony, more often than not he then gives a closing gulbenk prayer for the congregation, at least in the Berlin zaviye. So what role does listening play precisely?

In the private lesson İsmail Baba gave me (described above), the most striking moment came at the end, when the entire group of dervishes around me also began reciting. Perhaps I was more mindful because of my position in the room relative to them,
but I was able to hear specific voices much more clearly than during the zikr itself. The
distance across the circumference of the devran circle or the facing lines of dervishes is
simply too great to allow for much precision in hearing. And yet the positioning İsmail
Baba takes up demonstrates precisely such consideration: standing in the middle of the
circle, or pacing up and down between the two rows of dervishes. In these moments, the
room is enlivened with its complex diffusion of sound: zakirs against the wall singing and
drumming; dervishes in a circle, sometimes moving with macro-level gestures (walking
in a large circle arm-in-arm), micro-level gestures (rocking back and forth or turning the
head from side to side), or both; and of course the sheikh’s voice itself, which can adjust
tempo, pitch, or change esmas as desired. Space is articulated through the deployment of
certain bodily practices—the (often demanding) use of the voice, the physical movements
through space, the different configurations of groups of dervishes who are organized
according to their sonic role in the ceremony.

Like the sheikh leading the ceremony, dervishes must also listen to/for space with
a clear mindfulness. Since so many have their eyes closed through much of the ceremony,
sound becomes an important (if not the primary) medium for perceiving space. Two
examples of breakdowns in the performance of the zikr help illustrate what this hearing
may mean. One common problem that sometimes emerged with larger groups of
dervishes during the devran is that of personal spacing. As the whole congregation moves
in a circle (or in multiple, concentric circles when numbers are greater, such as in the
Susurluk tekke), dervishes would occasionally end up getting squeezed up against the
wall or the zakirs (who maintain fixed positions throughout). On a few occasions when
listening seemed to breakdown in especially dramatic ways, the zakirs were literally
bumped into or crowded to the point where drumming became almost impossible. In other tarikats, I have seen more extreme breakdowns, even to the point of causing a heated confrontation after the event between participants discussing who was at fault. In some small gatherings, sheikhs have on occasion stopped the zikr altogether to explain—sometimes more chastisingly than others—what has gone wrong or how a certain esma should be recited and performed.

A second, more subtle breakdown frequently occurs as one dervish becomes out of step with others. In particular, the Cerrahi devran includes a step in which the whole body shift leftward/clockwise with a step, while the head turns to the right, all while articulating an esma. The result is a kind of human phase cancellation, as the acoustic momentum of the group is audibly disrupted, at least on a very local level. When synchronized properly, the whole group moves their heads at the same time in the same direction (roughly), meaning that no two dervishes are speaking into each other’s faces simultaneously, but rather to the side/back of the head of their neighboring participant. But of course this step is easily thrown off (especially with newcomers) and dervishes often have to point out to these novices which leg to step with, which direction to turn, etc. In any case, a critical mechanism for self-regulation and proprioception is sound—hearing when neighboring participants are turning in a particular direction, hearing them step (especially during the sections with an accentuated stomp), and of course hearing the momentum of the circle as a whole relative to the fixed-position zakirs all facilitate listening to space as a whole. And while only the leader of the ceremony has the opportunity to listen from the very center, the shifting positions give a sense of individual place-within-space that nevertheless contributes greatly to the sensation of the ceremony.
Listening to Absences

One final aspect of listening in the ceremony is that of absence: what is left unheard? Perhaps the most glaring absence on most occasions is that of women’s voices. Every tarikat handles the issue of mixing gender in different ways. Cerrahi practices in Turkey are different than those in Berlin. In Istanbul and Susurluk—both sites with proper tekkes built to fit certain religious needs—women are able to attend all major gatherings but never sit in the same place as men. They sit in partially-obscured areas separated by partitions and overlooking the sanctuary space. As one dervish explained, “In [the tekke], women can participate in the zikr, but they sit separately up above. And when they recite the esma, they have to do it more quietly so that we don’t hear them….They can see and follow [Sheikh] Özcan Efendi, but we don’t see or hear them.”

Strikingly, the problem is a sensory problem, not a theological one. The problem is one of hearing and seeing women, not of their actual presence. Özcan Efendi made a similar point, asking rhetorically, “How could women be present when men are reaching ecstatic states?” When a male dervish pointed out that he had seen online examples of a woman leading a mixed-gender zikr, the sheikh wrote it off as being an unauthorized practice. (In some tarikats with greater presence of Germans, such as the Mevlevi-Kubrevi dervishes in Trebbus and Berlin, led by Abdullah Halis Efendi and his wife/scheicha, Nuriye Hanım, or the Naqshbandi dervishes of the Sufi-Zentrum in Berlin-Neukölln, the practice is not unheard of.) In the Wedding zaviye, where several women (most of whose husbands are dervishes) are initiated dervishes themselves, women were generally not allowed at the zikr or the surrounding events on Friday evenings. But on the first Friday
of each month, women were encouraged to attend, join in a co-ed sohbet conversation (or sometimes because of numbers, men and women would split, with İsmail Baba visiting with both), and sit in during the namaz and zikr. They would sit against the wall and could participate at low volumes, but they were not permitted to stand for the latter parts of the zikr. On the one hand, many sensory barriers (distance, physical partitions) were thus removed. On the other hand, women’s voices became sites of particular preclusion from ceremonies, both because they were encouraged not to recite loud enough to be audible to the men, and more subtly (but perhaps more interesting in considering the implications of the voice), because the actual timbres used for the esma were impossible to produce at a low volume. As I learned from my recitation session with İsmail Baba, proper recitation of these names demands a fairly intensive flow of air through the throat, creating an inherent loudness threshold for voices.

Once yearly, the group takes a trip from Berlin to Susurluk to visit their sheikh, Özcan Efendi. Here whole families travel together, yet even so much of the social time is still divided along gender lines, with men sitting together in the evenings and playing billiards or other games while drinking tea, while women spend time elsewhere, remaining again largely out of sight and beyond earshot. Every woman I spoke with, however, expressed a sense of comfort with the arrangement. One woman, a Bosnian-Catholic immigrant to Berlin as a child and convert to Islam, spoke about how much more comfortable she felt in those settings, with some space separating male and female spheres. A male German convert to Islam suggested similarly that although this distinction was made between genders in religious space, it did not represent any kind of inequality of power or opportunity. “If anything,” he mused, “women have tremendous
power in society within households.” This absence of women from the sensory sphere of men is a common trope in discussions of Islam. In this case, although Sufism may be perceived broadly as being theologically more liberal than mainstream Sunnism (e.g., in Turkey), the sensory practices and understanding of the body-in-ritual in Cerrahism comes across as being of a piece with its Sunni brothers (and less-visible sisters).

What emerges is a picture of close physical intimacy, as described above, but an intimacy that is largely homosocial. Women and men rarely interact in public or ritual spaces, instead leaving men sitting with arms draped around one another’s shoulders during sohbet conversations, or greeting each other with a kiss on both cheeks, or spending an entire weekend night together. Some Fridays, after the zikr and continued sohbet at the zaviye, the Berlin Cerrahis will head over to their small teahouse (çay ocağı) where they will spend the rest of the night (c. 3-6 am) drinking more tea, eating snacks, talking, playing chess or backgammon, etc. As a built-in expectation—a combination of religious obligation and a broader cultural pattern—male dervishes reassure me that their wives have no problems with the long night out. Indeed, the late night becomes a special ritual of its own. When the group goes for its yearly visit to Susurluk, they stop by a local restaurant for soup after proceedings at the tekke have finished. One explanation for this is the very idea of muhabbet itself, a term used almost interchangeably with sohbet to describe their conversations. “Muhabbet is love [aşk]. It’s a conversation but it’s much more than that. It’s a way of communing with our dervish brothers.” This sacred, intimate conversation offers yet another example of how embodied sound becomes the medium for transmitting meaning and sentiment.
Where Things End

Besides the taste of zikr proper, other tastes abound: of the mouth itself after an hour of reciting; of tea; of fruit and other sweets shared on small communal plates during late night sohbet. And of cigarettes, for many. Apart from their renown as music experts, Cerrahi dervishes are also well known their smoking habits and their humor—and sometimes their humor about smoking. One dervish told me that other Sufi orders call them “the Marlboro tarikat.” (To this day I’m not sure if the comment was a joke—he laughed, but it was said as a statement. In any case, I have heard enough stories—some fairly substantive—about Cerrahi dervishes smoking to assert with confidence that the culture and sensation of smoking matters significantly in contemporary Cerrahism.)

During sohbet conversations in Berlin, for example, almost every dervish will step out at least once for an extended smoke break.

But smoking has pedagogical value as well, I learned. “Does anyone have any questions?,” Ismail Baba asked late on a Friday night in February 2012. Of course I did. But I waited to see if others would ask their questions, then waited some more just for good measure. (I always felt like I had too many questions and often found myself dissimulating at the end of a long night when I personally would be asked, “Peter, do you have any questions?” At 2 or 3 am, my answer was of necessity “no,” even if it wasn’t true.) After a sizeable lull in the conversation—earlier in the sohbet, one evening—I raised my hand. “Abi,” I said, raising my hand slightly, “Could I ask a question”? He nodded and I went ahead: We’ve talked in recent weeks about how şeriat (shari’a),

33 Most of the dervishes call him “Ismail Abi,” as do I generally. But other people affiliated with the group (i.e., women, other visitors) call him “Baba,” a term used widely with more senior dervishes in a variety of settings. The distinction is one of family and ages: abi is an older brother, baba is father.
tarikat are gates on a path, I said. Where does that path lead us to and what does it lead us through? (I suspect my question rambled on longer than that.) I was curious about the world of non-path, of everything that surrounds the path, while also thinking about some less metaphorical concepts of paths. Although I have no exact figures, I suspect half of the dervishes in the group drive cabs for a living. On a number of occasions, unprompted by me, sohbet would turn to the question of how to lead one’s daily life and still fulfill religious obligations like praying namaz five times while working a shift driving. İsmail Baba suggested pulling into a parking garage for 10 minutes, backing into a parking spot and popping the trunk for privacy, then rolling out a prayer rug from the trunk and praying. On one occasion around that same time, my brother was in town visiting and I brought him along. İsmail Baba had asked him specifically if, as a guest, he had any questions. My brother, a talented bassist who understood that my interest in the group had something to do with music, immediately asked İsmail Baba what kind of music he listened to. I think the personal nature of the question surprised everyone there (myself included) at least a little but İsmail Baba didn’t miss a beat. “Everywhere I go,” he said, “I hear the sound of zîkr.” He then imitated the sound of trains and other machinery as though it were pronouncing esma from the zîkr. In posing my question about the path’s destination, I hoped for some kind of similar insight from real-life urban pathways.

İsmail Baba paused for a moment after I asked my question, exhaling heavily and saying (halfway under his breath, in his deep baritone voice), “la ilahe illallah,” as he so often would do just before answering a question. His hands wandered over to the box of Marlboro cigarettes on the table in front of him. He held it up in his hand, upright, and told me to imagine the box was a building. He then described a city with many pathways
leading to a single destination. From the vantage point of each path approaching, the building looks slightly different—as he explained this, he shifted the angle of the box subtly to either side. Some see the entire building, some just see a narrow side of the building. But the aim of their paths is the same. He then shared the same hadith I quote in the Opening: “I am the city of knowledge,” the Prophet said, “and ‘Ali is the gate.” As simple an analogy as that might have been, it set into motion the theoretical apparatus of this whole dissertation: pathways to God, enunciated in a way that was only possible in the Marlboro tarikat.
2.1. Pathway: The Yol in Little Istanbul (Kreuzberg)

The Cerrahi zaviye discussed in the previous chapter is tucked around the corner from Nettelbeckplatz, itself situated at one exit of the Wedding S-Bahn station. Nettelbeckplatz was redesigned in the 1980s, with a fountain and sculpture by Ludmila Seefried-Matejkova placed in the center of the plaza. The sculpture renders a surrealistic, mythological musical performance in bronze: three dancers atop a volcano with a singer, all accompanied by a satyr seated at the volcano’s base, apparently playing a pianola. Encircled by restaurants offering Turkish and Croatian food, as well as the expected smattering of casinos, the plaza remains quite lively through the day—especially on Tuesdays and Fridays as an outdoor market takes over the space—and also well into the night, with a steady flow of foot traffic, stopping for food or walking to the train, as well as several more static bodies, sleeping on benches on the plaza through the night.

Several streets dead-end at Nettelbeckplatz, including Lindower Straße, the former site of the Anadolu Alevileri Kültür Merkezi (the Cultural Center of Anatolian Alevis) from 1993 to 1999. Now converted into Maksim Saal, a special events hall catering to the immigrant community from Turkey for weddings and other gatherings, the building sits just a few feet from the plaza proper. Continuing farther down Lindower Straße, one finds a very different Islamic and musical world. The street, described as a “mirror image” of Wedding more generally (Elfert 2012), includes a number of nightclubs (especially featuring Polish and Russian music), as well as two different mosques: the Eyüp Sultan mosque (opened in 1994) and the Beyazid mosque (opened in 2005). The Eyüp Sultan mosque belongs to the Berlin Alperen Ocakları, an association of
mosques known for its nationalist-Islamist leanings. Each spring for the past four years they have held a children’s festival with a strong focus on Ottoman heritage, including performances by the Berlin Mehter Ensemble, which reenacts janissary military music, complete with brightly colored costumes, chain mail and massive fake mustaches.¹

These current residents of Lindowerstrasse could not differ more from Alevis in their political orientations. Indeed, the Cultural Center of Anatolian Alevis, the major institutional home for Alevis in the city, had earlier taken the name German-Turkish Workers Union (Arbeiter Bund), when it was founded in 1979 and located in Neukölln on Kottbusser Damm, right on the border with Kreuzberg. Founded as an umbrella labor organization, it would transform over time into a cultural center with strong religious

¹ This mehter group has loose ties with the Şehitlik mosque, cf. Chapter 4.
leanings. Its physical movement from Neukölln to Wedding preceded a final move to its current location in Kreuzberg, a neighborhood known (reluctantly) as “Little Istanbul,” halfway between the famed Oranienplatz, ground zero for May Day riots and other protest actions, and Michaelkirchplatz. Were the Berlin Wall still standing, the new Alevi center, or cemevi—literally a house for cem ceremonies—would sit cater-cornered to it.

Figure 2.2. The Berlin Cemevi, as seen from the former site of the Berlin Wall

The building itself formerly housed a New Apostolic Church congregation. A 1999 article highlighted this transition with an article entitled, “In place of a church organ, the saz sounds” (Statt der Kirchenorgel erklingt die Saz). The article explains the saz’s role in the community as follows:
Here the Dede [or religious head of an Alevi community] will seek to mediate between believers who have had a falling out with each other, to pray with them, to carry out the ritual “semah-dance” (den rituellen “Semah-Tanz” zu vollführen) and to play on the “saz,” the long-necked lute (Langhalslute). “For a long time Alevis were not allowed to speak in their language and they were only able to transmit (weitergeben) their music and songs,” said Halit Büyükgöl, one of the board members of the Organization. So the lute (Laute) plays a major role in Alevi culture. (Berliner Zeitung 1999)

On the subject of what it might mean to move into a church, the article continues: “Didn’t they have reservations [Bedenken] about moving into a former church, muses Halit Büyükgöl. On the contrary: ‘We Alevis don’t segregate based on religion, race or gender.’ That their new residence is a church is proof (ibid.).” Büyükgöl’s remarks highlight many of the important issues in conceiving of the city’s topography through the prism of Alevism. Although the title of the article is somewhat facile, it highlights the wealth of sonic practices in Alevism—including those that have been repressed because of lack of safe space, especially language (referring presumably to Zaza and Kurmanji Kurdish) but also implicitly rituals that extend beyond “music and songs.”

Writing of her own fieldwork dating back to the 1980s, Ruth Mandel recounts how the new center, or cemevi, functioned as a cultural space and a building:

On Waldemarstrasse, near the former border with East Berlin, several groups of Alevi collectively rented a church. At the center, on any given day, a dozen or so un- or underemployed men of different ages sit around, drinking tea, watching television, or reading newspapers. A small shop selling Alevi souvenirs operates informally. One can purchase plastic plates with the likeness of the Prophet Ali or Hacı Bektaş Veli. T-shirts with Alevi symbols, metal and plastic medallions, pins, taped music, and a variety of books about Alevilik complete the inventory. In sharp contrast to the age-old Alevi habit of dissimulation, this center is striking in its openness. Outside it is clearly marked, visible to all passers-by…. [I]n the 1980s, Berlin's Alevis from throughout Anatolia came together to worship collectively in rented warehouses, their ceremonies a diasporic agglutination of diverse religious and social strands of Alevi practices. In this new Alevi Center, the briefly collective strands have disaggregated: Sivas Alevis celebrate their own cem, as do Tunceli Alevis, each community reproducing its own style. (2008:263)

This portrait is intriguing on multiple levels, not least because much has changed—Mandel’s account serves as a snapshot of a particular moment. During my visits, men still
sat around and drank tea and chatted, but apart from a small, semi-permanent table of books for sale, commerce was limited. The center had been streamlined for its activities, religious and otherwise, which were extensive, especially on weekends. Thus in lieu of small shops, a new kitchen was built during 2011-2012 remodeling, allowing the community to cook ritual meals (lokma), distributed at the end of cem ceremonies, on-site, rather than cooking at home or in the courtyard. In 2012 and 2013, cem was once again “a diasporic agglutination” with massive crowds packed into the main hall.

Both the Berliner Zeitung account and Mandel mention semah, a communal ritual in which a group of men and women dance in a circular motion while accompanied by music played on the bağlama and sung. As Mandel notes, the building itself signals such physical engagements externally and publicly: as one approaches the cemevi from the north or west, the first visible marker of the building is its stylized image of a man and a woman performing semah, a practice that is often criticized by Sunni Muslims, in particular. But Alevism’s connection to Sunni theologies is complex, as religious Alevis—like the Cerrahis in the previous chapter—speak of a theological path, or yol, comprising four gates (dört kapı) and 40 stations (makam), of which the first gate is şeriat (shari’a) and the second tarikat (tariqa). In other words, their yol path has, from its outset, much in common with Sunni practice, at least conceptually. More substantively, religious Alevis in Berlin would frequently highlight their deep connection to the Ehl-i Beyt, the family of the Prophet and his descendants through Fatima and ‘Ali. They even have a genre of sacred poetry, the düvaz-imam (or just düvaz), which enumerates the names and lives of the 12 Imams (Gölpınar 1992:45ff.) As such, they share much in common with Shi‘i Muslims as well, though in my experience the two communities had
little if any institutional contact in Berlin. In addition, they have close affinities with
Sufism, and are often called (or even call themselves) Bektaşis, adherents of the Bektaşi
Sufi order. Their *semah* ritual is sometimes said to be related to the Mevlevi Sufi *sema*
(e.g. Bozkurt 1990:15), a notion that points to the affinities (both perceived and real) that
they share, even if the etymology is suspect.² But the briefest of glances at the facade of
the Berlin *cemevi*, with its depiction of a man and woman performing *semah*—dancing
together to the sound of an invisible *zakir* musician playing *bağlama* and singing—makes
clear that this *yol* skirts around the margins of “orthodox Islam,” however one defines it.

Yet many Alevis I spoke with would prefer this distance. And indeed, the *yol* of
Alevism can be understood in ways that downplay or even eliminate Islam. First of all,
unlike the rest of the “pathway” terms here, it originates from Turkish, not Arabic. This
linguistic element alone raises the question: does it matter what, or rather *how*, a pathway
is called? The naming of a thing, as seen in the previous chapter, seems to entail a
particular power: explicitly, that power can be understood as mystical properties of
utterance that are integral to so many religious rituals; but implicitly, the power to use
certain words in certain cultural settings is a manifestation of what can or cannot be said.

Foucault calls this possibility of making certain statements “enunciaibility”—the system
of rules that precondition what we even consider thinking to say (1972:129-131). By
being not-Arabic, the linguistic Turkishness of *yol* articulates something that challenges
Islam, at least subtly. Yet as Turkish, it is not Zaza or Kurmanji Kurdish or German,
though all these languages were welcomed (especially Zaza) at the *cemevi*, it again

² Martin Stokes (1990), writing in the same year, seems to assume the same in his discussion of *sema*. In
both cases, the conflation highlights the connection between listening and movement, which is surely true.
Bozkurt offers an intriguing reading of the entire *semah* as a form of *oyun*, which means both “game” and
“folk dance,” in which he argues for a playful theorizing of *semah*, drawing on Plato, Huizinga, and also
his own insights into *semah* (1990:7-14).
forecloses certain possibilities of speaking. But it opens others—particularly in connecting back historically with a specifically Turkish, or Turkic, notion of yol.

In his genealogy of the poetics of the term, Engin Sezer (2003) traces the earliest usages of the word in Turkic languages to the 8th century Orkhon inscriptions, where the word is used to mean “time” or “occurrence,”: “I went to battle six times [yoli]” (2003:89). The next instance he finds is a Uyghur Buddhist text that gives yol a religious sense but with a very different teleology: “Let us arrive at the path of deliverance” (ibi d). Here, the path is not the course to a distant arrival but the point of arrival itself. A few centuries later, an Islamic influenced notion of a path leading to paradise can be found as well, usage which still holds today in many places. For example, Bruce Privratsky has pointed out the use of terms like Quday joli, the path of God, and taza jol, the pure way, to designate Islam in Kazakhstan. Taza jol, he writes, is “an emotive and experiential way of expressing” the idea of traversing this path (2001:74). Furthermore, while the Qur’an highlights the straightness of the path (sirāt al-mustaqīm), “all roads, after all, are straight on the Kazak steppe; so for the Kazaks, it is not straightness but cleanness that appeals to the affections” (ibid.).

Sezer then turns to Turkish poetry, concluding with an extended metaphorical example from a poem by Yunus Emre (d. 1320 CE), in which the poem’s speaker is looking for a yoldaş, someone to accompany him on a path—though here it is a mystical “path of annihilation” (yoklık yolu) (90-91). In a religious context, the term yoldaş implies musahiplik, an Alevi practice in which two men exchange ceremonial vows as

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3 I take up this issue of iteration and repetition as a characteristic of pathways in Chapter 3.

4 Erkan Saka (2008) summarizes Sezer’s argument with regards to poetry, showing the metaphorical use of yol to mean “life” or “civilization” as well.
partners on the yol.\textsuperscript{5} When addressing this topic in sohbet discussions (especially with younger Alevis), the dedes of the Berlin cemevi almost always restated this term as yol kardeşlik or, as Yunus suggests, yoldaşlık.

Outside of religious contexts, yoldaşlık still means co-navigating a path, but the path is a very different one: it is social revolution. Long marginalized in Turkish (and Ottoman) society, Alevis have a long history of gravitating toward leftist organizations. A 1995 newspaper article carried the headline, “Was ‘Ali a socialist way back then?,” with a subtitle, “The Alevis revere ‘Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad. They are in favor of the separation of the state and religion, their women don’t cover themselves and their rituals are unusual” (in Kehl-Bodrogi 2002:44). Below that, a large photograph of a woman performing semah was printed.

More to the point, a former leftist activist and Alevi said, “The great majority of the members of these left and revolutionary organizations came from Alevi families but we did not ask for that. Being fervent Marxists, religion was completely irrelevant for us” (in Sökefeld 2004:138). Perhaps the most important of those “revolutionary organizations” was Devrimci Yol, the Revolutionary Path, a network of leftist groups that coalesced in the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{6} For these Alevis, the yol of Alevism is not a religion but a culture and a way of living, as explained by one ex-Marxist, German-Turkish Alevi:

At the core of Alevism there is nothing like religiousness. The essence of Alevism is also the essence of socialism. Because in socialism there is comradeship [yoldaşlık], in Alevism there is musahiplik. In socialism there is people’s justice [halk mahkemesi], in Alevism, in cem, there is people’s justice too. Many things are shared by Alevism and socialism. We took to Alevism in order to defend its social aspects: we do not want the religious aspect of Alevism. (in Sökefeld 2008a:96).


This same person explained his attitude toward *semah*, arguably the most sacred part of
*cem*, arguably the most sacred ritual in Alevism, as follows: “I am dancing *semah*
because I dance well. Our fanatic *dedes* say that *semah* must not be danced outside of
*cem*... But I say we always dance at our weddings... [M]y son and my daughter have
learned how to dance *semah* at weddings!” (in Sökefeld 2004:142).

Splitting the difference between these two sides (i.e., Alevism as religion or as
culture) a more measured stance can be seen in the Alevi journal, *Yol*, which began
publication in August 1999. Like many of the publications cited here, *Yol* can be seen as
part of a cultural revival or “renaissance” in the 1990s, though the rise of Alevi music as
a broader cultural phenomenon (generally detached from Alevi religious practice) among
leftists in the 1960s and ‘70s suggests that reports of its demise were perhaps exaggerated
(cf. Neyzi 2003:117f.). In any case, with the opening words of the first issue, the
managing editor, Ali Yıldırım, acknowledges the overall outpouring of Alevi activity in
the 1990s as its own manifestation of *yol*, opening with the Alevi proverb: “*Yol bir sürek
binbir!*” There is one path (*yol*) but 1,001 ways along that path. The introduction
continues: “We bring you the first issue of *Yol*. Yes, a new journal. Because as we enter
the 21st century, the argument is made that despite a history going back hundreds of
years, the teachings of Anatolian Alevi teachings, which convey universal values with

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7 Other key developments in the 1960s and ‘70s presaged this revival, like the institution of the Hacı Bektaş
commemoration in 1964 (and continuing annually since) (Massicard 2003), the 1966 founding of the
Turkey Unity Party (Sökefeld 2008a:52), and the development of Alevi institutions outside of Germany.
The 1980 coup in Turkey certainly sent shockwaves through Alevi communities—and spurred on further
migration to Western Europe—but important continuities can be seen as well.

8 Like all proverbs, this one is difficult to translate—especially with regards to the word *sürek*. Some other
English-language renderings include: “The path is one, the rites are one thousand and one” (Dressler
2013:18); “the pathway of Alevis is the same but walking through that pathways differs widely in the
tradition” (Kaya 2013:152); “there is one path but many ways” (Erol 2008:151).
respect to humankind, nature, and society, are already well enough known and have been explored and evaluated in a scholarly way” (1999:1). Yıldırım goes on to suggest—quite emphatically—that despite the outpouring of publications, that much work remains to be done: “We open our pages to all diverse ways of thinking about the distinctive realm of Anatolian Alevism. Our only criterion is to be scholarly. There is one path but 1,001 ways along that path. This principle calls for seeing diversity as bounty. We encourage debate and many new pieces. That is our creed, we stand by it. There is a need—it’s clear. Many more books, many more journals, many more publications. We are walking on the YOL.”

The yol is multiple, discursive, and constantly unfolding. It is in-process. It can be (and has been) articulated through writing, dance and political protest.

And of course sound and music.

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9 The introduction actually ends with one final exclamation that is almost untranslatable: Bozatlıhızır yardımıcımız olsun! Literally it means, “May Khidr on his ashen horse be our aid.” Khidr is a legendary (and probably immortal) holyman mentioned in passing in the Qur’an. According to Alevi tradition, he rides his horse around the mountains and in times of trouble or great need, as well as when uttering a vow or oath, one should call out to Khidr with this expression (cf. Kilavuz n.d.). That this verbal injunction would be used to inaugurate a new issue of the written word suggests a world of “heard texts,” to borrow from Brinkley Messick, that undergirds or remains authoritative to writing, even in the very act of heralding the potential of writing in a new journal (Messick 1993:91; cf. also Silverstein 2011:141ff.).
2.1. The Stringed Qur’an: The Alevi **Bağlama** as Material Margin of Islam

*Here is a talking Qur’an*  
*Also a Qur’an of the path of uprightness*  
*Holding a stringed Qur’an*  
*We walk in the footsteps of Truth.*

— Aşık Cevri (Nejat Birdoğan), “The Stringed Qur’an”¹

*The Alevi path is a holy path. This path requires setting aside obsessions about ourselves as individuals. Using the **bağlama**, a holy instrument, as a tool of commerce cannot be forgiven.*

— Alevi dede from Sivas, Turkey²

*A saz is not like a CD player or an iPod, where everything works at the touch of a button.*

— Mansur Bildik, **bağlama** virtuoso, Vienna³

On a warm June morning, I set out across Berlin for my weekly lesson on the **bağlama**, or **saz**, a long-necked lute found throughout Turkey and beyond. I was studying with Adil Arslan, an immensely talented musician and significant (if somewhat controversial) figure in the institutional music scene of the diasporic communities of Berlin. Rather than go over my lesson material, however, I convinced him to review the questions I had prepared for an interview later that day. I would be meeting later that day

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¹ Birdoğan 1988:79.
² Quoted in Duygulu 1997:17. The quotation is in response to a question about *deyişme*, or poetry competitions between **aşık** poets who typically play **bağlama**. The word **alet** is a common word for any musical instrument, whereas **saz** is often interchangeable with **bağlama** and clearly suggests a more revered kind of instrument. I translate “iş” as “commercial events” since the context of *deyişme* competitions is elided in Duygulu’s translation. The entire quotation reads: “Alevi yolu kutsal bir yoldur. Bu yola senlik-benlik sokmak düşkünülgü gerekir. Hele kutsal bir saz olan bağlamann bi işe alet edilmesi hiç bağlanacak bir durum değildir.”
³ Cf. Bildik and Fuchs 2008. The complete quotation is: “Once an adult Turk came to me because he wanted to learn to play the saz (or **bağlama**), but he did not have enough patience. A saz is not like a CD player or an iPod, where everything works at the touch of a button. When he wanted to practice at home and the instrument was out of tune, he flew into such a rage that he broke the saz. He destroyed two instruments. I told him, a person who destroys a saz is a murderer in my opinion; he who does it twice is a double murderer.”
with Hasan Doğan, the religious head of the Berlin Alevi Community (*Alevitische Gemeinde zu Berlin, Berlin Alevi Toplumu*) and head dede, or spiritual elder (a notion I return to later). In bringing my questions to Arslan, I hoped both to fine-tune the more formal linguistic register of interview questions and also to help him better understand the issues that were driving my research, which he always showed interest in despite its ever-shifting emphases. He steered our conversation into a kind of meta-ethnography, encouraging me to leave out certain questions (“you can find these answers in books”) while others he emphasized must be asked. Unsurprisingly he was especially interested in questions related to the *bağlama* performance, latching onto one such question in particular—what other names are given to the *bağlama* by Alevis? I had in parentheses that I wanted to discuss terms like “the stringed Qur’an” (*telli* Kuran), a name I had occasionally heard for the instrument. Arslan stressed this in particular: “Be sure to ask him why the *bağlama* is called ‘the stringed Qur’an’! This is very important.” Only a week later, another *bağlama* teacher in Berlin, Halit Çelik, whom I contacted at the suggestion of Hasan Dede after our interview, gave further context for this term, contrasting it with an antithetical characterization of the instrument by some Sunni Muslims as “the devil’s instrument” (*şeytan aleti*, or *icadi*).

I will return later to the specifics of these various conversations but these brief excerpts, coupled with the epigraphs above, drawn from a transnational discourse about

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4 *Alet* means “instrument,” while *icat* is an “invention” or “fabrication.” The idea of a devil’s (musical) instrument shows up in a variety of contexts, including many of the foundational collections of *hadith* oral traditions about the prophet Muhammad (e.g., *Sahih Bukhari* 2:15:70-72, 103; 5:58:268; *Sahih Muslim* 4:1942, 24:5277-5279; *Abu Dawud* 34:4218; *Al-Tirmidhi* 2212). The term most often used here is *mizmār* (pl. *mizmārat*) *al-shaytān*, “the devil’s instrument.” However, many of these entail accounts in which the protagonist is Abu Bakr—the successor to Muhammad as the first of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs in Sunni Islam. As such, these narratives would presumably not hold much sway for Alevis or Shi’a for whom Muhammad’s successors were Ali and the imams who followed.
the bağlama (from Turkey and the Alevi diaspora), highlight the stakes of a broader investigation: what is the bağlama and what role does it play in contemporary Alevi practice? How does the bağlama as a physical object in the world relate to Islam? And how might it elucidate the relationship of Alevism more generally to Islam? While I make no pretense of answering the complex question of the relationship between Islam and Alevism, I do not shy away from it either. However, as an ethnographic starting point, I take seriously the claim of the bağlama to be a “stringed Qur’an,” not merely as a means of deflecting criticism that Alevis are Muslims too (though many are more than content not to be considered Muslim). Rather, this claim highlights the sonic richness of Alevi liturgical and social practice and the irreducibly material place of the bağlama in that practice. More than just an instrument used to accomplish some other end, the Alevi bağlama is a powerful example of what Jane Bennett calls “vibrant matter,” a configuration of stuff that enables, constrains, and responds-in-kind to human action. As Mansur Bildik points out above, it is not an iPod; it has its own particular physical affordances and limitations. Moreover, its materiality not only becomes agentic, it takes on a sacred aspect precisely in its here-and-now physicality, as evidenced in its capacity for acoustic “epiphany,” both in a sense of aesthetic intensity (following Hans Gumbrecht) but also for religious revelation, not unlike the Qur’an. And like the Qur’an, it has a deep connection to the sonic articulation of a particular path, here expressed as the Turkish word yol, a key topos for Alevism, in contrast with the qurānic sirat al-musaqim and related notions I explore throughout this dissertation. In sum, the claim that the bağlama is a “stringed Qur’an” then helps clarify what, or rather how, the Qur’an means within Sunni Islamic practice—as a similarly physical and irreducible object that
is intimately bound up with practices of sound, the human body, and agency more broadly along a pathway to God. I suggest that the physical bağlama then becomes a material margin of Islam, one that challenges a traditional Qur’an-centered religious practice but nevertheless is part of the same terrestrial world with similar physical functions, a stringed Other that simultaneously resonates with and in distinction to Islam.

**Radical Organology: What is an instrument?**

Despite their commonplace appearance in music-making (or perhaps precisely because of it), musical instruments have become less frequent objects of study in recent decades among musicologists and anthropologists. The past decade has seen something of a reversal, with several compelling works on the bağlama specifically, including Béatrice Hendrich’s work on the weeping saz as a medium of memory (2005), Bayram Durbilmez’s exploration of the instrument in the traditions of/about aşık poets (2010), and Eliot Bates recent reappraisal of organology (musical instrument studies) informed by ethnomusicology and science and technology studies, and particularly Actor-Network Theory (2012). In hopes of contributing to and deepening this reconsideration of instruments and instrumentality, I too focus on the bağlama, but more specifically its role as a “stringed Qur’an” for Berliner Alevis. Its centrality is immediately clear upon entering the cemevi, or congregational house, of the Berlin Alevi Community (Toplum/Gemeinde) in the district of Kreuzberg. At the front of the main hall (meydan)

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5 Recent work on musical instruments by Emily Dolan (*Osiris* issue 2013, forthcoming work), Joseph Auner (forthcoming), Dierdre Loughridge (2011), Myles Jackson (2006), Trevor Pinch and Frank Trocco (2002), and Paul Thebèrge (1997) likewise draw on approaches from history of science and/or science and technology studies in ways that may offer useful new directions for music studies. Although perhaps less widespread now than in earlier (more positivistic) days, critical studies of musical instruments and their cultural meanings continue to play an important, if sometimes limited, role in ethnomusicology (e.g., Dawe 2007, Qureshi 2000, Rice 1994, Stokes 1992, Markoff 1986, Berliner 1978, Baily 1977).
hang three pictures: in the center, Hazreti Ali, the nephew of the prophet Muhammad, pictured with his holy sword, Zülfikâr, and a lion; to one side, Haci Bektaş Veli, the patron saint of the Bektaşi Sufi order, shown caressing a lion and a gazelle; and to the other side, Pir Sultan Abdal, a 15th century poet, is depicted standing upright with a bağlama lute brandished over his head with two hands. In the cemevi’s dergah, or sanctuary, a similar configuration of pictures can be seen, though here Pir Sultan Abdal’s bağlama is not merely an instrument but a source of life, as a plant is depicted growing out the end of it. The role of poetry and especially the bağlama in Alevi ritual life can hardly be overemphasized, as made clear in these images of Hacı Bektaş and Pir Sultan, both of whom were poets whose texts still figure prominently in Alevi ceremony.

In my first private lessons with Arslan, I was struck by the physicality of things. He began by talking through the materials used in the instrument’s construction, how he found the instrument-maker he buys student bağlamas from, and how the tuning and fret system on the instrument works. We then spent much of my earliest lessons working solely on body positioning: posture, how the instrument should sit in relation to my body, and especially hand position—including left-hand fingering and right-hand plucking technique. Having studied primarily wind instruments in my own musical training, I was continually surprised (in oud lessons as well) to have teachers reach over and touch my hands to shift them over frets or to help curl them. Even issues of personal hygiene came into discussion relative to my hands: keeping fingernails short was an important—and explicit—part of my early bodily disciplining to allow me to press frets downward so that the finger would press down perpendicularly, rather than parallel to the string. I point to fingernails not because they should not be considered part of this conversation but
precisely to highlight the kind of bodily entrainment that musical instruments can entail. Without much exaggeration, I can say that the bağlama itself—more so than my teacher—required that I attend to my left-hand fingernails, to my posture, even to different shoes and pants I might wear that made it easier or harder to keep the instrument in proper playing position.

These were not the only manifestations of the inescapable physicality of the instrument. I remember well the physical pains I felt for the early weeks of playing, as my body conformed to the instrument. Beyond the mental fatigue of learning new tuning systems and techniques, I felt physical pain in my left fingertips and even more surprisingly a pain on the inside of my right arm, just below the elbow, where the arm curls around to the front of the instrument. Indeed, Arslan’s most frequent criticism early on was that my right arm functioned improperly: I placed it in the wrong place for maximal stability and leverage while plucking, I failed to keep it in a consistent position, and I was using my elbow too much in lieu of my wrist. (He ascribed this to my oud playing, which I had begun in the United States prior to fieldwork and which, after a short hiatus, I took up again in Berlin, as I discuss in Chapter 4. However, this explanation probably says much more about discourse surrounding Turkish music than it does about my own depth of experience.) Regardless of the source of my ergonomic problems, the entanglement of my body and the body of the instrument was critical in the earliest periods of entrainment.

I am not the first to explore such issues of learning an instrument (cf. Rice 1994, Berliner 1978), but I would like to stop here and simply reflect on its materiality, rather than tell a story of mastery (Rice’s “bagpipe fingers”) or of meaning (Berliner’s
anecdotes of learning meanings of keys)—at least for a moment. Hans Gumbrecht, to whose idea of *epiphany* I will return, describes one aspect of presence as “occupying and blocking spaces with bodies” (2005:83). Almost prefiguring the protest terminology of the recent economic crisis, he associates this occupying of space or blocking as an act of power (114); in the realm of musical instruments, such power might be understood as the placement of objects (including people) in tension with one another, impeding and resisting the inertia of the other. But sound does not emerge from eliminating this blocking/occupying, but rather by engaging with it. For example, I want to cause the *bağlama* to resonate, to make a sound. To do so, I pluck a string—the transfer of energy from my hand through the narrow plectrum sets the string vibrating back and forth. Yet if I leave my plectrum in place, it will dampen the string and sound will cease. The physical displacement needed to create sound is a temporary and shifting one, in which blocking/blocked objects interact briefly but then must resume their previous roles. In other words, the string at rest (so to speak) blocks my hand (and its plasticky prosthesis, the plectrum). When I pluck the string with the plectrum, I must move my plectrum-hand back to the position of “being blocked” by the string until I am ready to block it again. The *bağlama* is an example of *vibrant matter*, as Jane Bennett puts it, exemplifying the “active powers issuing from non-subjects” (2010:ix).

Eliot Bates has written elegantly on the *saz*, pointing to the ways it simultaneously structures human activity around it and also defies the reductive categorizations of organology (2012). One particular aspect of *bağlama* playing highlights this rich tension between structure and anti-structure: *çarpma*, or the practice of striking the instrument with a finger (typically the middle finger) of the strumming hand. During the course of
playing in a wide variety of styles—from folk türkü songs to religious Alevi pieces—a bağlama player will strike the body of the instrument. This movement is impressive even in the most simple of physical terms, as the hand moves in two planes at once, moving the plectrum vertically (i.e., up and down) to pluck strings, while the finger then swings in perpendicular to that motion (i.e., on a more or less level plane) to strike the body of the instrument squarely. Having been trained as a wind instrumentalist (primarily a saxophonist and clarinetist), I had experience with such transverse hand movements in a limited way, as with the side keys played with the inside of the hand/index finger on saxophone or clarinet. String players of western music obviously learn two very different kinds of playing with the right hand, either as arco or pizzicato (or both at the same time in some “contemporary” music). But the bağlama uses such tranversal movements for two entirely different ways of generating sound with the instrument, the first (plucking) using the instrument as a chordophone, sounding by causing a string to vibrate, and the second (striking) using the instrument as an idiophone, sounding by the vibration of the body of the instrument itself. Bates, in pointing to the incommensurability of western organological taxonomies to the actual practice of bağlama-making (and its change over time), constitutes an important “slippage” (2012:379), and I would add this slippage to his discussion of the ways the sounding bowl is constructed.

In reflecting on the work of Sachs-Hornbostel—the dominant western paradigm for classification of musical instruments, and perhaps not insignificantly a product of Berlin too—I find that another objection, or at least conundrum, arises. Does the çarpma-striking gesture make the bağlama an idiophone—or could it be understood as a kind of drum, a membranophone? The etymological answer is no: a membranophone is literally
something that sounds (-phone) by way of a vibrating skin (membrane). Limiting the category of membranophone to literal, organic pieces of animal flesh seems a bit naïve, given technological advances in creating synthetic membranes—including for musical instruments, as in plastic (polyester) drumheads. Given my materialist (and in later chapters, ecological) approach here, I am deeply sympathetic to an ontology of musical instruments rooted at the nexus of sounding mechanism and physical substance. But more significant than the biological meanings of a membrane is a question of function and interface. In this example, the vibrating soundboard of the bağlama can be understood as having a function almost identical to the skin-based head of a drum: the finger/hand displaces the physical space occupied by the instrument, setting it in motion briefly, giving the characteristically sharp attack of drums and of the striking of the bağlama. Going further, what if musical instruments were understood within broader frameworks of instruments and technologies? The notion of interface becomes particularly apt in thinking about the possible futures of musical instrument classification, given the rise of discourse about interfaces broadly but also the digitalization of musical instruments. Interface calls for an unwavering focus on the precise locus of human-technological engagement—precisely the space of contestation over physical occupation of soundmaking space. What are the constellations of power and agency at these sites and how do these occupations change over time, both during a given performance and also over a larger historical time? In my own experience taking lessons with Adil Arslan, I was regularly surprised by his unflagging interest in my hands and fingertips. He would comment on how trimmed my nails were, on the angles at which my left fingers hit the

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6 Similar practices have developed for many western instruments in 20th- and 21st-century “extended” techniques, but here the technique is a longstanding traditional one (or at least taught that way).
strings, the independence of my right finger (for çarpma gestures) from my plucking motions, and so on. During lessons he would frequently reach over and simply reposition my hands on the instrument to ensure proper placement of fingers—that is, of proper interface between my body and the instrument.

With this sort of understanding of objects and interfaces and physical constraints, the term instrument seem ill-suited to describe the bağlama, as it suggests a means-to-an-end, rather than some kind of object with its own existence in the world, acting and reacting to (or resonating with) those people and things around it. However, the Alevi bağlama not only takes on this deeply material presence—a position I ascribe here to Hans Gumbrecht, but one that could just as well come from scholars of “New Materialism,” media archaeology, the sensory turn, and affect theory—but also entails a different kind of materialism. Returning to the image of Pir Sultan Abdal, with his revolutionary bağlama hoisted over his head, I would suggest that the materiality of the Alevi bağlama is also material in a Marxian sense—concerned with a historical awareness of social inequality and the possibility for a radically different world. I mention this not to derail my discussion into politics or into the realm of interpretation (yet), but to highlight another strand of Alevism which is agnostic or even atheistic—“Alevism without Ali” (Ali’siz Alevilik) as proclaimed in the provocative title of Faik Bulut’s 1997 book. These two material strands constitute a kind of radical organology, or understanding of the bağlama as a musical instrument, one embedded deeply in both a physical, bodily world and also in a world set up along uneven social contours. This political materiality highlights resonates strongly with the Marxism of the more
revolutionary political paths—the Devrimci Yol and similar groups—that played such a formative role in Alevism’s rise in the 1980s.

Returning to the epigraph from this chapter, the idea of a materially-charged, religious path is also bound up with sound and the bağlama. In the stanza from Aşık Cevri, he articulates three different notions of Qur’an7: a talking Qur’an (dilli Kur’an); a Qur’an bound up with a path of uprightness (erkanlı yollu Kur’an), where the idea of erkan is a rich notion of adhering to the ethical code of initiation as a musahip or yoldaş; and finally, a stringed Qur’an, the bağlama. These various Qur’ans lay out a sonic pathway, a kind of qur’anscape of tongues, paths and strings leading in the path to God, as Truth:

Cevri, here is a talking Qur’an, Also a Qur’an of the path of uprightness. Holding a stringed Qur’an, We walk in the footsteps of Truth…

Cevri, bunda dilli Kur’an, Hem erkanlı yollu Kur’an. Elimizde telli Kur’an, Yürürüz Hakk’ın izinden…

(Birdoğlu 1988:79)

Indeed, in this particular formulation, even God takes on a rather material quality, as one who leaves footsteps (iz), if understood literally, or at least figuratively, as one who can be followed after.

A Topography of Berlin Bağlama

As a way of mapping the city, one could plot out the tracks or traces of the bağlama through the abundance of music shops and schools devoted to it: Adil Arslan has his German-Turkish Conservatory in Schöneberg; Halit Çelik has the Berlin Saz Evi

7 The provocative richness of this text might be better emphasized by rendering these phrases as common rather than proper nouns: “a talking qur’an,” “a qur’an of the path of uprightness,” and “a stringed qur’an.” In this sense, qur’an as a “recitation” offers other semantic registers. But regardless of capitalization, the text highlights the multiplicity of sound and pathway that make Cevri’s poetry so applicable.
(House of Saz) in Alt-Moabit; Taner Akyol, a composer of contemporary music (including a new piece, *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves* that premiered at the Komische Oper during my stay), has his atöyle (atelier) in Kreuzberg, after previously having taught at the cemevi; Nevzat Akpınar currently teaches at the cemevi and also tours actively with his groups; and Kasım Yıldız has his own music school in Wedding, which he attends to after his day job at Siemens—just to name a few. Of course, not all performers are teachers and one might say that two of the most significant bağlama players in Berlin (past or present) were not available for lessons: the late Neşet Ertaş and Ozan Şahturna. Their stories are both bound up with Berlin and the physical body, as well as Turkish politics of the tumultuous late 1970s/early ’80s.

Neşet Ertaş, who formerly lived in the city 1979-1984, came to Germany for medical treatment when he started suffering from a strange paralysis of his hand. He used to teach lessons to some students, as Kasım Yıldız explained to me (discussed below). He also ran a music store in an abandoned subway station at Bülowstrasse in Schöneberg. As Abdulkadir İnaltekin recounts, “I met Neşet Ertaş in 1980 in Berlin’s Turkish Bazaar, which resembled Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar [*Kapalı Carşı*]. He had a modest shop in the Bazaar where he sold *saz* instruments and cassettes. He was also teaching lessons at a German music academy. Shortly after we became acquainted a closeness developed between us and we would have long, intimate conversations [uzun sohbetler]....While he recounted memories of his life, I would listen eagerly but I would also feel saddened [hüzünlenirdim]. He would tell stories of how he had played so many weddings in our area [near Ankara].... The highpoint of our conversations came when he said to me,
‘Maybe I also performed at your circumcision celebration’” (İnaltekin 2012). The Turkish Bazaar was one of those particularly poignant sites where the sounds (and silences) of Cold War Berlin was deeply intertwined with Turkish Berlin. The U2 subway line, which ran through both West and East Berlin, was stopped halfway through its route because of the building of the Berlin Wall. Unlike “ghost stations” in the East, where subway lines connected the West to the West, the train was simply stopped here—or made to go silent, stillgelegt. An antique train was used to connect Nollendorfplatz and Bülowstrasse (two adjacent stops), increasing access to the elevated train station at Bülowstrasse. As Depeli Gülsüm has written, the entire Bazaar became a center for a fledgling immigrant entertainment and wedding industry, with “musicians, music and video film stores, restaurants, casinos and even belly dancers” (Depeli 2009:237), and even a Turkish brass band at its opening (Woyte 1997). As a musician more generally, Neşet Ertaş was renowned for his unique capacity to induce weeping with his music, as Eliot Bates discusses: “One performer’s saz seemingly makes audiences cry more often than others—the saz of Neşet Ertaş” (Bates 2012:376). Not only does Ertaş and/or his saz cause others to weep, he also allows for the possibility that the instrument itself weeps, as he articulates in his türkü song, “Cry, My Saz”: “Did you too profit from this separation? / Cry, my saz, it is a time for crying....Wherever I look, strangers [garipler] cry / Cry, my saz, it is a time for crying” (Ertaş in Özcan 2001:152). Here he augments the trope of crying with that of estrangement, of being garip, a stranger, an idea he reflected on throughout his career to the point of adopting the word as his poet’s name, using it (instead of his real name), for example, whenever he included his name in the final stanza

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8 Gazete Hamburg, October 6, 2012.
of his compositions. Among its many meanings, it refers to the state of being in *gurbet*—alienated by virtue of being far from home, a trope that figures prominently in the music of Turkish Berlin over the past half century.

Another major *bağlama* player, poet/composer, and *aşık* is Aşık Şahturna, who came to Germany for medical treatment for her eyes and was then stripped of her Turkish citizenship after the 1980 coup and has remained in Berlin since. A sampling of her website, which is loaded with material about her career as an artist and activist, gives a sampling of how she understands the poetic lineage of Pir Sultan Abdal. Among other poems posted there is one entitled “Following Pir Sultan Isn’t Just Playing Saz!” (*Pir Sultan’ılk Sadece Saz ile Değil!*). At the top is letterhead, with the name Ozan Şahturna printed in bold blue lettering on a music staff printed in red with a blue treble clef sign. Along the right margin, Şafak Cassette and Publishing is printed, along with her address in Berlin near Rathaus Neukölln and her phone number. The address has also been whited out, with an additional fax number appended to the bottom. The page, scanned and now available from her website, reads like a time capsule of different communication media: handwriting, print, telephone, fax, all in the context of a poem composed by and performed by a blind bard. Other clues of a greater complexity lie in the name Şafak: as the website reveals, this is the name of one of her two daughters. While other *aşıks* and *bağlama* players speak of their children openly (especially Neşet Ertaş) in interviews, few have made them such a significant part of their public image. The text of her poem opens with a reference to *saz* and *söz*, instrumental music and the poetic voice, wrapped into striking allusions to Pir Sultan Abdal and Mazlum Doğan, a leader of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) who committed suicide by self-immolation in a prison cell on
Nevruz, March 21, 1982. This act has since been interpreted as an act of defiance to the Turkish government for the 1980 coup and resulting imprisonments.

The fortress of beautiful Anatolian culture
Following Pir Sultan isn’t just playing saz
Mazlum’s voice comes deep from the heart
It’s not just the söz of the madding crowds

Güzel Anadolu Kültür kalesi
Pir Sultan’ık yalnız saz ilen değil
Ta yürekten gelir Mazlum’un sesi
Kuru kalabalık söz ilen değil

She explores the meanings of perception and sensation relative to her path, presumably of following Pir Sultan: “The world of the blind cannot choose this path / Seeing isn’t just having a pair of eyes” (Seçemez bu yolu dünyası körlü / Görmek sade bir çift göz ilen değil.) After citing Imam Hüseyin and Pir Sultan as examples of resisting power, she continues on to Alevi teachings that, although not using the term “the stringed Qur’an,” share common themes with several deyiş poems I consider below:

The Truth is in people, and people walk in Truth
Mansur incites with the secret: “I am the Truth”
Love radiates in our Alevi selves
It’s not just the coal that burns on the hearth

Hak İnsanda, İnsan Hak’ta yaşıyor
Enel Hak sırrında Mansur coşuyor
Aşk alevi Özümüzdede ışıyor
Yanmak ocaktaki kız ilen değil

Her enumeration of heroes speaking truth to power concludes with Moses, those who fought against Sultan Selim, and the poet Ahmed Arif—as well as herself by implication, as she follows poetic tradition and includes her name at the close of the poem. Her passage on Mansur and Alevi traditions of truth (or Truth, i.e., God) being located within people’s hearts becomes an important point of departure for understanding a Qur’an that is located not on the pages of a book but in the hearts and voices of those who know and recite it. More broadly, her emphatic political commitments inform her understanding of

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9 This line inverts a well known stanza of poetry by Aşık Daimi (in his “Kainatın aynasyım”): “People are in the Truth, the Truth in people / Whatever you seek is in people / There is great wisdom in people / As I am a person too.” This text itself draws on Hacı Bektaş Veli’s famous statement, “Whatever you seek, seek in yourself” (Her ne ararsan, kendinde ara.) As a typographical note, I follow the capitalization of the Turkish text, though at times (e.g., “Aşk alevi Özümüzdede”) it is not entirely clear whether it is intended or what it should mean, if so, so the English translation here tends toward more standard usage.
what it means to follow Pir Sultan and affirm a poetic understanding of a radical organology of the *saz*.

**The House of Cem**

Not long after I began studying with Arslan, I also attended my first *cem*, held at the Berlin *cemevi* for the Hızır fast. I knew I didn’t know what I would be seeing, so I asked Arslan if he would have interest in accompanying me. He declined the invitation and seemed generally unenthusiastic about going to a *cem*, despite his fairly animated recollections of attending them in Dersim as a child. Kenan, the *bağlama* player I had first met at the *cemevi*, was also unavailable, so I decided to simply go alone. As I approached the entrance, I could see many others filing into the main doorway. I will explore the connections between sound and architecture in greater depth in my next chapter, but as with so many of these topics of materiality that I focus on—the voice, musical instruments, architecture (both inside and outside) and the digital—other sites/congregations offer other important insights. For example, as I entered the *cemevi*, which was packed with people, the “aural architecture” (to borrow Barry Blesser and Linda Salter’s phrase) left a distinct impression on me. The ceremony had not yet started and consequently the whole space was thick with conversation—mostly in Turkish and Zaza (Kurdish), but also in German and other languages. I ended up sitting next to a woman talking on her phone in French—she was born in Turkey, grew up in France, and was now visiting family in Berlin. The spatial configuration of the *cemevi* seemed to encourage conversation, as people entered into a foyer and almost without fail would begin greeting someone standing in that area. I pressed on and was given a noisy but
useful plastic bag to put my shoes in as I passed into the open congregational space of the cemevi, where the high ceilings and bare walls create a highly reverberant space. In the past year, a glass door has been built to separate these two spaces, creating at least a minimal barrier for sound without impeding vision, thus minimizing the disruption of having people gathered in the foyer during an event. But at the time, these spaces connected without any kind of wall, creating a dense sonic atmosphere throughout, with the jostling of bodies (and their voices) negotiating seating toward the back and the soundcheck for the coming cem at the front of the hall.

The building itself was formerly a church belonging to the New Apostolic Church, as mentioned above in the preceding Pathway section. Such a transformation of a church in Berlin (and elsewhere in Germany) has happened on other occasions since 1999, but the Alevi purchase of the Waldemarstrasse building is, to my knowledge, the first instance of such a transformation, including two other New Apostolic Church buildings that were sold to mosques: the Neukölln mosque, Dar as-Salam, located on Flughafenstrasse, just around the corner from the İmam Rıza Islamic Center (Chapter 3) and down the street from Şehitlik mosque (Chapter 4), and the Al-Torath mosque in Berlin’s Tempelhof district.10 The practice scandalizes (or scandalized) some Christians,

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10 For more on these two mosques and the New Apostolic Church, cf. Eißler 2012 and Keller 2007. Interestingly, Keller points first and foremost to the change of sound that a mosque entails, much like the 1999 Berliner Zeitung article cited at the beginning of this chapter (“In place of a church organ, the saz sounds”). In this case, the organ remains the last vestige of material Christianity: “At Flughafenstrasse 43 in Neukölln, only the organ pipes serve as a reminder that Christian worship services took place here.” The Neukölln mosque became an unintentional part of the city’s public soundscape in August 2011 and 2012 when demonstrators from the right-wing group, Pro-Deutschland, protested in front of the mosque. A counter-protest was organized by the mosque and leftist groups in the city. One participant in the counter-rally recounted some of their strategies of “chanting down the fascists” and augmenting their voices with recorded music (including hip-hop), whistles, and banging pots and pans. Some mosque leaders actually requested that no counterprotests be held, so as not to validate the actions of Pro-Deutschland, but local officials in Neukölln insisted nonetheless. Pro-Deutschland, though outnumbered, likewise sought their own sensory provocations by bringing placards featuring controversial cartoon depictions of Muhammad from the controversial 2005 Jyllands-Posten (Denmark) publication (cf. Keller 2012).
who see the sale of the church to Muslims as a defamation, as well as some Muslims, who consider a mosque solely a building that was built for that purpose (Meßmer 2007, Keller 2007). The issue is in some ways more complex still for Alevis, for whom the entire concept of a cemevi, as a formalized building for religious worship, is a relatively new development (cf. Sökefeld 2008). Indeed, one could argue that conceptualizing Alevism as a religion at all is a relatively new phenomenon (cf. Bodrogi 2006, Sökefeld 2004), but their poor fit within standard ontologies of Islam, and Islam’s poor fit (according to Talal Asad and others e.g., Asad 1986) under the rubric of “religion” might rather be construed as affirming the need to resist any singular ontology of Islam.

Whether Islam is a “discursive tradition” as Asad suggests, or a rhizome of interconnected, practice-based, material pathways, as my experiences in Berlin suggest—or something else altogether—is less important, I would argue, than the literally concrete fact of Alevi repossession of a Christian church. That the practice has continued with institutions with impeccable “Islamic” credentials only reinforces the reality that these definitions are fungible and contingent, able (and likely) to be swapped out with new ones on a regular basis.

Returning to the history of the building on Waldemarstrasse, I would note again that materiality is always already constraining human actors. Whether we opt to privilege interpretive or “realist” understandings of the world, the physical world delimits our possible actions—it does not afford us all possible interactions. And so it goes with the repossession of this church, a theme that runs through Turkish and Islamic history for centuries, albeit often in much less amiable, monetarily compensated terms: as Cemal Kafadar suggested to me, sometimes successive owners of a building (e.g., Hagia Sophia)
do not possess the building, the building possess them. A 1987 article in Der Spiegel called “The uncanny place of Berlin” (Der unheimliche Ort Berlin) on “death and life in a Kreuzberg neighborhood (Wohnquartier),” namely Kottbusser Tor, gives some indication of this process, pointing to the dramatic changes that have happened in the past quarter century, but also some of the intransigence of the neighborhood. A section of the article on the street where the cemevi now sits begins with the tongue-in-cheek observation: “Waldemarstrasse has created for itself three distinct categories of residents: normal people (Normale), abnormal people (Nichtnormale) and Turks” (Scherer 1987:110). The normal people are Germans, the abnormal people are squatters and anarchists, and the Turks are any combination of immigrants from Turkey. But Turks are the vast majority, despite being neither “normal” nor “abnormal”:

75% of Waldemarstrasse’s residents are Turkish. There are about one hundred extended families who, mostly related to one another, come (stammen) from the eastern Anatolian village of Kelkit. The closest major city (Großstadt) is Erzurum. Many have three or four forced moves for redevelopment (sanierungsbedingte Umquartierungen) behind them, until they moved to the lowest end of the housing market on Waldemarstrasse. What made the street so cheap was its planned demolition for a highway through an undivided Berlin....Turks could live in the abandoned buildings indefinitely. In this way, they are among the earliest residents on a street whose existence on a city map appeared only as a shadow. (111-112)

The author clarifies the place of Turks as the “the backbone of renters who don’t cause problems” apart from filling their living spaces beyond capacity (115). Nestled into this same nook of the city, wedged against the infamous Wall, was the New Apostolic Church that would become home to the Alevi community in 1999:

Between Leuschnerdamm and Adalbertstrasse—or in local slang, “Ada”—sits a part Waldemarstrasse, which is its own world. The western cornerstone of this short urban-

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11 The history of Ottoman conquests are not unique in this kind of conversion of religious buildings for religious uses by a the faith of the conquerors, which can be seen in the case of Islam arguably from the Ka’aba, but at least Jerusalem’s al-Aqsa mosque, to the frontiers of Al-Andalus in southern Spain, where the process has moved in both directions, with Christians repossessing mosques like the famed site in Córdoba, known as both Mezquita (mosque) and after the Spanish Reconquista, as Catedral (Cathedral)
abyss is formed on Leuschnerdamm by the Old Berliner Tavern “Henne” (the Hen) and across from it, the New Apostolic Church, which in 1957 moved into a postwar Neubau building—an eyesore of practicality—emphasized most recently with a small patch of grass with ground spreading conifers like a cemetery. On Wednesdays and Sundays before services, the freshly shaved, pale-as-ghosts apostles stand at the entrance greeting the faithful with handshakes then pulling the door close behind the last one. For outside was the wilderness of Wildemarstrasse, where the devil [der Leibhaftige] was recruiting his minions, causing them to throw stones, and directing their hand against the white plaster of the church with the spray-painted message, “Cops beat us – Jesus stays silent.” Before the congregation begins to sing sluggishly [schleppend] or the preacher begins to speak with dull serenity, people with unfamiliar faces are slipped a piece of paper informing them that notetaking, photography and the use of tape recorders is prohibited. But what kind of hostile interests could there be here? Do they mean the sick, who are called by their name, the organ that is played haltingly, or the fidgeting apostles, who sing on while maintaining order? (108)

This impressionistic portrait of the Waldemarstrasse church comes across as a document of the past: the old-but-Neubau church and its congregants, the wilderness of the streets, tape recorders, Jesus and his (20th-century) apostles—all in the shadow of the Wall. And yet, in so many ways, the building appears to be the possessor here. The hulking concrete edifice has since been tempered with the purchase of a building connected to the back courtyard (in 2005), now painted salmon-colored with gold lettering, “Ya Hak! Ya Muhammad! Ya Ali!"12 But it still shapes the flow of people and space. Sound, whether from organs and preaching apostles or bağlamas and exhortatory dedes, resonates and fills the space. Recording technology remains a critical point of cultural negotiation, as congregants are increasingly carrying smartphones and other handheld recording devices. (Rather than a slip of paper handed around, the dede running a cem simply asks congregants at the beginning—but invariably now, since ringtones became so disruptive in recent years—to silence their phones.) And while many vestiges of the Cold War are gone and Kreuzberg is now effectively in the center of the city, the cemevi continues a

12 This invocation (or just as frequently substituting “Ya Allah” for “Ya Hak,” which literally means “Oh Truthful One!”) is used in a variety of ceremonies like cem and sohbet.
tradition of providing spiritual sanctuary from the streets, even if gentrification has
restrained both the so-called devil’s minions and the police in the area.

**Muhabbet and Cem: Sound and (Over)Resonance**

The cemevi serves as much more than a religious sanctuary: it also offers regular
(including Alevi belief, Zaza language, and lessons for baglama performance and semah
dancing), speaker events, community gatherings and discussions, meetings of the various
administrative councils, office space, and a kitchen that becomes a central nexus for
many activities at the cemevi, whether in preparation of tea on a daily basis, meals on
special occasions (including after fasts), ashura soup on the 12th day of Muharram, or
lokma food offerings (typically including fruit, meat, and rice with ayran yogurt to drink)
distributed to all attendees after every cem gathering. In addition to the main building, the
cemevi also purchased a building in 2003 connected at the back of the courtyard which,
perhaps most importantly, offers a separate dergah space for smaller muhabbet
gatherings, funeral preparations, and smaller meetings. The life of a single cemevi like
this entails such a wide variety of activities that it could easily constitute an entire
dissertation by itself. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the Berlin cemevi is not
the sole Alevi institution in the city. Kehl-Bodrogi recounts a history of some of these
institutions, with different focuses, ranging from a more Bektashi/Sufi-inflected practice
to social space (for youth or older men) to institutions like the Dersim Cultural
Association, which focuses particularly on the needs of Zaza Alevis, taking its name from
the former name of Tunceli province, an important center for Zaza Alevism in Turkey
and the site of one of the most violent katliami massacres in 1937-1938 that Alevis

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commemorate regularly. I follow my ears, so to speak, to explore the particularities of the Berlin cemevi and do so with an acknowledgment of the abundance of activities—and especially their political valences—that play such an important role in the broader life of the Alevi communities of Berlin. Sound, especially when resonating from the bağlama, showed a consistent capacity to exceed certain thresholds (technological, emotion, psychological), to over-resonate the spaces it took place in. This (over)resonance proved to be a powerful structuring agent of social interaction and ways of being within the cemevi, as became clear repeatedly in muhabbet and cem rituals.

During my regular fieldwork, I had difficulty getting a straight answer about whether muhabbet was a regular part of life at the cemevi, but it seemed not to be apart from special holy days. I first attended a muhabbet at noon on Nevruz/Newroz, March 21, 2012. I had made plans with a friend from the Cerrahi zaviye in Wedding to travel together to Kosovo for the event, which is celebrated more widely there, with a week of celebratory zikr gatherings, replete with ecstatic traditions of self-mortification, including skewering one’s cheeks and walking on the blades of a sword. Although there are many Bektashis in Kosovo and Albania, their ceremonies remain rather subdued (and are not open to the general public), which might have tipped me off that events in Berlin would be less spectacular, in the literal sense. However, the day was an important one with regards to the building itself, which had been under renovation for several months and was to be re-opened as part of the Nevruz festivities. In an article written for

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DersimNews.com after the re-opening, Erdal Çağlar, the vice-president of the Berlin Alevi Community wrote the following, in which he ties together Nevruz, the natural environment and the cemevi building itself:

March 21st is both the day on which warmth [cemre] comes to the face of the earth, scattering blessings on nature and the earth, causing seeds to start sprouting buds, and bringing all living things back to life; it is also the day when the King of the Believers [Şah-i Merdan] Ali, was born. In this sense, Newroz was also not only a messenger of spring but also of celebration. Our cemevi’s opening on such a day was very meaningful for us. It was decided that our cemevi, which was purchased as a church in 1999 and bore the brunt of all our activities until today, should undergo a general restoration....It took almost six months and in that time we expanded our kitchen, built our library, refurbished our offices, partially refurbished the roof, redesigned our entrance area, refinished our the flooring of our main hall [ana salonumuz] while installing a central heating system, and installed a sliding glass unit that can divide our hall in two. (Çağlar n.d.)

That evening, they held a re-opening ceremony with food, speeches, a few musical numbers (including three türkü songs by Aşık Veysel, sung by Petra Stawowczyk, who was involved in some of the interviews discussed below, with accompaniment by two Alevi friends from the cemevi music classes). Hasan Doğan, the dede who at the time headed up the Religious Council of the cemevi, offered a welcome and recited a gülbenk invocation as an act of consecrating the space for the crowd of over 700 guests.

Earlier that day, the dedes had assembled with a small group—maybe 40 people—for a muhabbet ceremony in the dergah ceremonial space in the back house.

When I first entered, Hasan Doğan sprang to his feet and met me at the door to welcome me and give me a primer to entering the sacred space, including the obligatory gesture of prostrating on the ground (secde) and kissing it three times while saying “Ya Allah! Ya Muhammad! Ya Ali!” As when a zakir picks up the bağlama to play in a cem or other ceremony and kisses the instrument, or when participants hear the name of one of the Seven Great Ozans and in response kiss their hand and touch their head three times, this gesture is known as niyaz, a bodily expression of reverence and devotional commitment.
The *muhabbet* session included a series of prescribed steps, including several of the *hizmet* services performed at the beginning of the *cem*, such as ceremonially sweeping the floor near the *dedes* and lighting three candles. A designated *zakir* was also present to play *bağlama* and sing *deyiş* poems. The ceremony largely entailed a sacred form of speaking, but one with an explicit emphasis on community-formation: *muhabbet* comes from an Arabic root meaning “love,” and the word *sohbet*, commonly used in a variety of Islamic settings (and beyond) for similar, religiously-inflected conversations in intimate gatherings, likewise comes from an Arabic root meaning “companionship.” I once asked Hasan Göçer, a *dede* and current head of the Religious Council of the *cemevi*, whether *sohbet* constituted an *ibadet*, or formalized religious ritual, to which he replied as though shocked that I would ask, “Of course, of course! It’s a sacred [kutsal] gathering just like our *cem* is.” Etymologically then, these sessions are a form of building community through ritual—and those rituals are sonically rich, including ways of speaking, reciting/singing, asking questions, and (ideally) listening attentively. After the Nevruz *muhabbet*, food was brought in for everyone, though that was not unusual in my experiences with *muhabbet* at the Berlin *cemevi*.

At the time I was told that they had not been having regular *muhabbet* gatherings because of the renovation activities, but as far as I could tell, efforts to hold them regularly were generally not successful except in the month of Muharrem.\(^\text{14}\) During the first 12 days of Muharrem leading up to the day of Ashura—and it is emphatically 12 days, one for each imam, rather than the 10 days in the Shi’a world—orthodox Alevis in

\(^{14}\) After Muharrem 2012, during the first 12 days of which *muhabbets* took place every day, the *dedes* announced that there would be regular gatherings every Thursday at 4 pm but these seemed not to get any momentum and were shortly discontinued.
Berlin would fast, gathering about an hour before sunset for *muhabbet* prior to a communal fast-breaking dinner, known as *açma* (opening) rather than *iftar* (the general Arabo-Islamic term). Because of calendrical differences, the dates of Muharrem constantly shift relative to the seasons and sun, meaning that during my fieldwork, the days of Muharrem—falling in late autumn—were always rather short, especially being as far north as Berlin. One friend joked, “By the time I wake up and get out the door, I have already completed my fast.” The flipside of this is the extremely long days of fasting in Ramadan, which fell in the summer months during my research, though Alevi do not generally observe Ramadan or fast then.

Thus at about 4 pm during the first days of Muharrem, a number of people would gather in the *dergah* space for *muhabbet*. As with so many events in Berlin, there was an excess of *dedes* available to participate, but they generally rotated through responsibilities for the gathering, with Seyit Ali Çiçek, Hasan Doğan and Hasan Göçer taking particularly central roles. After the ritual opening (sweeping, lighting candles, and a *deyiş*), they would read short texts about whichever of the 12 Imams corresponded to that day (beginning with Ali and concluding with Mehdi), then open the floor for questions. Topics that were raised ranged from “Are we Muslim?” to detailed inquiries about particulars about one of the 12 Imams, as well as more here-and-now concerns, from the tragic events in Sivas in 1993 to the taunting they experience at the hands of Sunni acquaintances. The exchanges were lively, with questions initially directed to the *dedes* at the front of the room but with ample opportunities for disagreement from the group gathered. (One attendee would tell me later that this form of decentralized question and answer—“where everyone can express an opinion without just deferring to an
authoritative voice”—is one of the most important aspects of Alevism.) Generally during
the course of the discussion, a deyis would be played and recited, and the sessions would
always close with a duvaz-imam (or duaz-i imam), or a liturgical poem that names each of
the 12 Imams; a gülbenc invocation in which the entire congregation prostrates (secde)
and responds to the dede at key points with “Allah Allah”; then two of the hizmet services
are performed, with the sweeping (süpürge) first, followed by the blowing out of candles
(söndürme).

Beyond these generalities, I would like to give concrete details of the end of one
particular muhabbet that struck me as quite standard but also an example of the kind of
affective resonance that the bağlama could prompt, as well as the kinds of disciplining
that were sometimes used to entrain participants and counteract any (perceived) sonic
excesses. On November 26, the 12th day of Ashura and last day of muhabbet before the
Ashura cem, the group gathered in the dergah space as usual at 4 pm. After some
confusion, it was agreed that I would film this particular muhabbet (which I discuss at
greater length in the Conclusion), and as such I have a complete record of the session.
After a lecture on Imam Mehdi, Hasan Doğan, the presiding dede, began to play the
bağlama and recite a duvaz-imam, “Medet Allah” by Kul Himmet, one of the Seven
Great Ozans, with a musical setting popularized by Aşık Mahzuni Șerif. Sitting beneath a
large painting of the 12 Imams—all looking more or less like classic images of Imam
‘Ali, with a deep green head dress and a thick but neat black beard, except for the
faceless Mehdi—with another painting of Pir Sultan Abdal, brandishing his bağlama over
his head, just to the side, Hasan Dede started in with the familiar piece, played frequently
at events at the Berlin cemevi. It begins, “Aid us, God, Oh Muhammad, Oh Ali!,” then
proceeds with a litany of religious figures, including Yusuf, or Joseph in the Hebrew Bible; Hacı Bektaş Veli, the patron saint (veli) of Bektaşism; Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad and wife of Imam ‘Ali; and the prophet Muhammad; followed by a rehearsal of the 12 Imams. The final two stanzas give a sense of the bittersweetness that marks so much Alevi poetry and ritual:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haydar, Haydar, Haydar, save us, oh Ali!</td>
<td>There is death in the 12 Imams’ dergah, (Lion of God, my voice is there)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydar, Haydar, Haydar, yetiş ya Ali!</td>
<td>Onik’ İmam Dergah’ında ölüm var (Haydar ünüm var)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydar, Haydar, Haydar, yetiş ya Ali!</td>
<td>Gece gündüz sohbetim var, demim var</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydar, Haydar, Haydar, yetiş ya Ali!</td>
<td>Cok günahım varsa, neden gamım var</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydar, Haydar, Haydar, yetiş ya Ali!</td>
<td>Ali gibi Şah-ı Merdan’a düştüm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydar, Haydar, Haydar, yetiş ya Ali!</td>
<td>Haydar, Haydar, Haydar, yetiş ya Ali!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the dede and congregation, many of whom sang recited along quietly, reached the line “In intoxicating muhabbet,” an older man who had sat in the corner quietly until then was suddenly overcome. Like most others in the room, he had been sitting with his hands on his knees while sitting on a cushion on the floor. Suddenly he clasped his hands together and began shaking his head back and forth. His whole body then began shaking and he called out, invoking the 12 Imams and Hızır (or Khidr in Arabic), then began crying out a high pitch sounding like “Lu-lu-lu-lu,” but perhaps just the result of his head shaking back and forth so rapidly. Although I had not seen or heard such a thing at the cemevi before, I had seen dervishes overcome during zikrs and begin also crying out as the

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15 Haydar is an invocation to ‘Ali, literally meaning “lion” (in Arabic), an image often associated with him, as in the massive image at the front of the cemevi’s main hall, where a lion sits in front of him, with Ali’s famed split-bladed sword, Zulfikar, as well.

16 Depending on who is asked, dem may refer to an alcoholic drink (wine or raki), or it may be another word for deyiş and/or muhabbet.
ceremony built in intensity. So it was not necessarily surprising—but what did surprise me was the non-reaction of the congregation gathered there in the dergah. No one seemed to notice or be concerned and after a few moments, the man regained composure and was able to join the group for the gülbénk prayer that to close the ceremony. For a brief moment, just as he regained control over himself—but after the congregation had prostrated on the floor—the man next to him looked up (from prostration) and reached an arm around him as the congregation proceeded with the gülbénk. If I may venture a meta-interpretation here, it seems that in moments like these, the material sensuality of ritual—its bodily affect, the way sound works on the body of this congregant—exceeds interpretive capacity. Adil Arslan would often use the phrase transa girmek to describe the ritual dance of semah; his phrase literally means “to enter into a trans,” apparently an adaption of the German (and English) word, trance. As a generally areligious Alevi, Arslan is not the most authoritative interpreter of these rituals, but I find his linguistic choice intriguing, suggesting specifically that Alevi ritual might induce a state of trance, but also more generally that ritual does not reduce to language easily, if at all. This man’s actions confirm that ritual as a whole—including not only language (söz), but also instrumental sound (saz), the sonority of recitation, and even the subtle kinesthetics of posture and body comportment—extend well beyond the realm of communication, both in the ceremony itself and in any heremeneutic attempt after the fact, academic or otherwise. Or perhaps better stated, these rituals redefine communication as particularly including those affective and embodied meanings that cannot be articulated through language alone.
Yet such powerful responses to sound and ritual are complex, neither simply naturalistic responses nor necessarily encouraged. For example, at the cem that followed the next day—which was deeply moving for many people, if based solely on how many were weeping, especially during the mersiye lament—an odd piece of ritual excess also emerged at the same moment in question with the recitation of the düvaz-imam, this time Dademoğlu’s “Help, Oh my God, Help!” (Medet Ey Allah’ım, Medet!). At the end, the congregation similarly prostrated themselves for a gülbenk recitation. Or at least most of the congregation. A young boy a few feet from one of the video cameras recording the event was, as young boys do, looking around and eventually flashing a peace sign at the camera. A moment later, a few other children poked their head up and also started looking around—grinning at each other. Such behavior is hardly surprising, yet it contrasts strikingly to the ecstasy of their older peer the afternoon before in the muhabbet gathering. On the other hand, such ecstatic rapture is relatively uncommon and, as one acquaintance described, is something that ought to be avoided, according to the two guiding ethical notions of adab (or edep) and erkan, both of which relate to the (generally unwritten) rules of comportment in these ritual spaces. One phrase used frequently in sohbet explanations of what these might mean—and more generally, how one might live ethically—was the injunction “be master of one’s hands, tongue and loins” (eline diline beline sahip ol). In a short article posted on the Berlin cemevi’s website, İsmail Kaplan, the Education Representative (Bildungsbeauftragter) of the Alevi Federation of Germany (AABF), gives a similar explanation of disciplining the physical body to enable to spiritual but draws on a technological analogy. In speaking of the values system (Wertesystem) of Alevism, he writes:
In order to clarify this system [of values], the oil lamp can be taken as an example. The oil lamp as an apparatus [als Nutzware] can be observed and perceived externally (external order [äußerliche Ordnung]). Without its light, the meaning [Bedeutung] of a lamp cannot be understood. But it is not enough to perceive the light as the important function; rather we must physically comprehend the functionality of the oil lamp. We must be able to understand that the light comes into existence [entsteht] through the burning of the oil. But the oil cannot burn without the wick. In order to attain this knowledge [Kenntnis], we use our eyes, our previous knowledge [Vorwissen], and our understanding (perception) [Verstand (Erkenntnis)]....A comparable and still more complex process of thought and perception is needed in order to understand the process of perfection. Here people use their entire body, their understanding, their memory, their feelings, and their spirit” (Kaplan, n.d.:2).

Kaplan then presents a table that systematically presents his view of Alevi values, including noting which parts of the lamp correspond to which of the four gates (dörtl Kapı) on the path to Truth: 1. şeriat (order) – oil lamp; 2. tarikat (mystical path) – wick; 3. marifet (knowledge [Erkenntnis]) – oil; 4. hakikat (truth) – light. This parable-like explanation of the Alevi path and system of values is fascinating on its own terms but for my purposes I am especially interested in the complex valence of materiality here. The physical world is that which must be disciplined from the outset—the world governed by shari’a (Tur: şeriat, Ar: sharī’a) the traditional legal path of Islam. (I explore the valences of shari’a as law and as pathway in or flow of water in Pathway 3.) As such, one might expect that the body is to be disciplined—interpellated into the sacred order of things—and gradually overcome in this framework. But in fact, it keeps re-appearing: at the third gate (marifet), the thought/perception process calls for “feeling” (Gefühl); and at the final gate (hakikat), “reaching the terminus [Endstation] of spiritual maturity (the secret of existence),” the critical verb is “to do” (tun). So the body is still on the hook, so to speak, for a variety of responsibilities. But apart from this ambling back-and-forth between the material/corporeal and the more fully spiritual, esoteric stages of this path, the entire analogy is a kind of mental materialization of the process. Much like the very imagery of the path itself, replete with gates, stations, and now a terminus (suggesting, at least within
a Berlin context, not the *Endstation* of just any train, but particularly the terminus of a subway or bus line), this oil lamp parable nudges the ineffable and transcendental back into the realm of the physical—and tellingly, into the realm of sensory technologies.

The *cem* ceremony more broadly can be understood in such a light (no pun intended), as a highly scripted, yet also empowering constellation of sensory technologies and human actors that are simultaneously acting and being acted upon, resonating with, and feeding back against one another. At some other point, I hope to be able to analyze the *cem* ceremony more fully on its own terms, but since other scholars have written on German Alevi *cems* at some length (especially Martin Sökefeld, in his engaging account of changing roles of the *cem* and of *dedes*, 2008a:145-177), I would highlight a few key aspects of sensory resonance in conjunction with the sound of the *bağlama*. I realize that such a focus inevitably skews the meanings of the more general ritual, but I question whether a general overview (i.e., without a particular focal point) would do it greater justice. At risk then of missing more “central” aspects, I would briefly examine three critical sonic moments: soundcheck; interactions between the congregation, the *dedes*, and the *zakirs* playing *bağlama*; and *secde* prostrations.

Preparation for the *cem* begins, unsurprisingly, well in advance of the actual congregational gathering. Different *cems* have different needs, but at Ashura, where the community breaks their fast together the evening before and also offers *aşure* soup the morning of the *cem*, a certain rhythm falls in place. To accommodate the workweek, *cem* ceremonies generally take place on the weekend—a kind of temporal remapping of the traditional emphasis on winter ceremonies (where work in the fields, according to Arif Şağı’s account, constituted the ritual activity of the rest of the year, cf. Şağı 2004). But in
the month of Muharrem in 2012 (1434 AH), the twelfth and final day of fasting (November 26) fell on a Monday with the cem on the day of Ashura. As such, Monday evening after dinner, a massive cleaning enterprise was launched, as tables were collapsed, the main hall was swept and vacuumed, special carpeting was brought out in massive rolls to cover the entire floor, and women prepared food. The labor process was quite welcoming of any and all hands—in fact, at the Ashura cem in 2013, a Sunni friend of mine who came to learn more about cem simply walked straight into the kitchen upon arrival and began helping with preparation of lokma food distribution. Early the next morning, a group of women arrived to make massive pots of aşure soup—made of 12 ingredients and in the case of the Berlin cemevi, made slightly sweet, though same make a more savory-flavored version—for members of the community who began stopping by mid-morning, bringing their own aşure to contribute and also sampling the cemevi’s. (“Every family should have their own recipe—or at least they used to,” explained one of the women preparing the aşure in 2012.) Crowds came and went through the middle of the day, milling around and socializing over aşure, but the kitchen remained in high gear, shifting from aşure to the massive quantities of meat, rice, and produce that would be parcelled out for cem participants. Several of the dedes stopped through, at one point blessing the food and its preparation.

Within the main hall, however, the first visible activity of the day of the cem would be the setup of the sound system and arrival of the zakirs, the bağlama players who have been designated to the hizmet service of playing music for the ceremony. For several years, the cemevi has hired the same sound technician to help them run their sound system. While the use of an amplified bağlama, sometimes known as an elektrosaz
(cf. Stokes 1992), has historically caused quite a stir, amplification seems to have become a non-issue in the Berlin cemevi, where zakirs play for cems with built-in pickups, temporary microphones, and even just close-miking with instrumental microphones. As was emphasized several times to me, the sound technician they typically hired was German—a strange commentary, from my perspective, given the broad base of technical skill in the community (as evidenced by their renovation project and former website).

Prior to the cem, the zakirs typically set up and then played for a considerable period (as much as an hour) while the technician set levels, all the while people began slowly to trickle into the main hall. Not surprisingly, these early stages entailed some feedback from the bağlama feeds; but somewhat surprisingly, feedback problems continued throughout the event at Ashura and were not altogether uncommon at other cems. One bağlama player who was not playing there told me that he thought it was a matter of the excitement of the ceremony building over time. Whatever the case, the amplification of the ceremony introduced a classic tradeoff between control of sound (a central concern of an acoustic instrumentalist) and the ability to reach a large audience (likewise a central concern of the dedes). Whatever the cause of feedback problems—the building acoustics, the excitement of the zakir musicians, mistakes made by the sound technician, or some combination—is not necessarily important, but the introduction of amplification in these ceremonies highlights the occasional misfit, in this case sonically, between traditional ritual acoustics in rural Turkey and those of contemporary life in urban Germany. (Of course, a large cemevi in Istanbul splits the difference between these two extremes, suggesting the instability of this binary.) Here ritual sound goes beyond the capacity of
the channels designated to transmit it—an over-resonance that perhaps bears similarity to
the ecstatic moments at the end of the muhabbet a day earlier.

Microphones allow—and almost inevitably encourage—the assertion of sonic
power in space. Even among the various participants with active roles in the cem (e.g.,
the süpürgeci, or person designated to handle the sweeping hizmet), some either do not
have a microphone or else engage in an activity (like sweeping) that requires two hands.
The zakirs’ voices and instruments are amplified. But the most powerful voice is that of
the dede, who directs the ceremony, with all its complex structure, and also becomes the
most prominent voice. On occasion, I have seen a dede address particular individuals in
the congregation, chastizing them for an unsilenced cellphone or for trying to leave the
ceremony early (which was traditionally not allowed, and was enforced by the kapıcı
watchman at the door, though at present it seems to be permitted with only minor
consternation). One of the high points of the ceremony is the performance of the semah, a
complex dance-like set of motions choreographed to a complex musical piece—described
by Adil Arslan as “symphonic,” with a number of shifts in time (tempo and meter) and
tone (mood and mode). Among the many courses that the cemevi offers is one on dancing
semah. Dozens of different styles of semah exist, usually associated with different
regions in Turkey, and the classes target young people who would otherwise likely not
have the chance to learn them. In addition, the cemevi has a designated musician to
perform the music (including vocals) to accompany the semah, a young blind woman
named Pınar. At the same cem for Ashura described above, the semah group was in the
middle of performing, moving through a series of steps and arm motions while rotating
counterclockwise in a circle. About halfway through the semah, an older man stood up—
the entire congregation sits on the floor or on thin cushions throughout most of the
ceremony—and approached them from his seat nearby. Without any discussion, he began
participating in the semah dance. Despite looking a bit unstable on his feet generally, he
was able to match the group’s rhythm and pace with relative ease, though he struggled to
find a spot within the group’s formation. The cemevi was particularly packed that day,
and there was really no space for the circle to expand further, with the result that the
gözcü, one of the 12 designees with particular responsibilities in the cem, came and
pulled him out of the circle. Sökefeld describes the gözcü’s as being “in charge of order
and silence during the cem” (2008:148), and in a variety of ways, this particular man was
silenced at this moment. At a break in the semah music, he seemed to be trying to make
his case with the dedes that he should be allowed to join with the group, but the
conversation was inaudible to almost everyone in the building. Even those who were
close enough to hear him (zakirs, performers in the semah) were uncertain what the two
sides of the discussion were. The older man clearly felt entitled to join them, and indeed
in other cems, they have opened up the floor for any participants who would like to join
the official group. In this case—and here I found conflicting explanations for the denial
of his request—the dedes rationale for rejecting his request was either because of lack of
time (the ceremony had already run several hours) or space (the crowd was too large for
them to expand the semah circle and include him and others who might like to
participate).

What struck me most about the incident—which was really quite minor in the
larger flow of a three-and-a-half-hour ceremony—was how much it diverged from the
ethos of muhabbet. In muhabbet, disagreements and counter-opinions seemed to be
welcome, no matter how much they may have derailed otherwise focused question-answer exchanges between the congregation and the dedes. But here, empowered with a microphone and a more pressing ritual schedule, there was simply no room—physically, acoustically, temporally—for such a conversation. After the cem, I discussed this moment with several attendees, all of whom had slightly different views, ranging from complete agreement with the man to complete agreement with the dedes. Most found it rather unremarkable—after all, the focus of the cem should be on more transcendent events, including Muhammad’s miraç (mi’rāj), or miraculous night journey through the seven heavens (where he encounters Imam ‘Alī, according to Alevi and Shi‘a tradition), and especially at Ashura, the tragic events at Karbala, in which the Prophet’s grandson, Imam Hüseyin, and his companions were killed. These emotional contours of the cem are driven by these two events, both of which entail particular musical accompaniment (semah and mersiye, respectively). In the hands of the zakir, the bağlama sets out the sonic and emotional arc of the ceremony, which often culminates in intense weeping throughout the congregation as they reflect on the martyrs of Karbala. These tears are not simply a figure of speech of the text of a poem; they are real and the experience, even just as an observer, is powerful.

But it was precisely in the contrast between this affective topography, embedded into a massively complex ritual involving hundreds of participants—ritual as corporeal apparatus, as it were—and the man’s seemingly benign request to join the semah. Here “order” becomes a fraught term, and one that played out through sound in many ways. In a particularly ironic twist, a group of young people who had committed to a formal regime of learning these semah dances, was unable to accommodate a participant whose
sole claim to legitimacy would appear to be the order of tradition. Whatever one may think of the two competing orders—ritual efficiency (and perhaps safety) versus tradition—or their unequal access to sonic power in that moment, the moment brought into relief the ritual apparatus of the *cem* and its network of people, sensory technologies and the *bağlama*.

The impetus for conveying understanding to a younger generation drives a tremendous amount of activity in the *cemevi*, from *muhabbet* sessions to a youth council to a variety of educational and recreational activities. But it also feeds a much less formal realm of interactions. In November 2013, a year after the Ashura ceremonies described above, I sat with Kasım Yıldız, the *zakir* musician responsible for that ceremony, and together we watched the *cem* from the upstairs balcony, which served as an overflow area. He repeatedly offered to answer any questions I may have, and I peppered him with questions from the outset—about repertoire, microphones, the *gülbenk* as a genre of sacred speech, and even the history of the building. And then something remarkable started to happen: other people around him started asking him questions too, ranging from a very young boy who had asked his mother about the *semah* and then, at her encouragement, asked the same to Yıldız. I could barely hear his answers to me, let alone to others. But it was touching to see a teacher work his craft, creating an almost-silent sonic augmentation to the *cem* ritual that was unfolding around us.

**The Stringed Qur’an**

While the foregoing discussion highlights the centrality of the *bağlama* for (some) contemporary Berlin Alevis, and of the important role of sound in Alevi ritual more
generally, it does not necessarily clarify the claim that the instrument is a stringed Qur’an. This claim appears frequently in scholarly discussions about Alevism and music but is rarely elaborated upon in much detail, as though the idea of a stringed Qur’an were a self-evident (and uncontroversial) claim. For example, Martin Greve writes the following in his prodigious volume, *The Music of an Imaginary Turkey*:

> In its use [Verwendung] in a *cem*, the *bağlama* is also called “a Qur’an with strings” (*Koran mit Saiten, telli kuran*)—an analog to the expression “a speaking Qur’an” (*sprechender Koran, konuşan kuran*) for humankind: almost the entirety of religious knowledge is transmitted in villages through *deyîş* songs accompanied by *saz*. The *saz* itself thus represents Ali, the resonant body [*der Resonanzkorpus*] his body and the long neck the sword *zülfîkar*. Some Alevi musicians play instruments with exactly twelve frets—symbolizing the twelve imams. (Greve 2003:286-287)

Greve’s commentary highlights an intriguing slippage between the human (voice) and the non-human (the *saz*), both in the dissemination of “the entirety of religious knowledge” through sound, as well as in the symbolism of the instrument, where the body of the instrument and the body of Ali are both understood to be resonant bodies. In fact, the two ideas (a speaking Qur’an, Ali’s body) are quite closely related. As I relate in greater detail below, while a “speaking Qur’an” can be understood to be any person articulating truth through sound, *the* speaking Qur’an was (and is) Imam Ali. Greve does not cite any particular source for this interpretation but in my experience this interpretation is rather commonplace, if not quite as focused on the body-as-resonator.

Writing shortly thereafter, Béatrice Hendrich adds important details in this regard in her 2005 article, “‘In the Month of Muharrem, My Lute Weeps’: The Alevi Long-Necked Lute as a Medium of Memory.”17 In a section entitled “The *Saz* as a Bodily

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17 The German title of the article is “‘Im Monat Muharrem weint meine Laute!’: Die alevitische Langhalslaute als Medium der Erinnerung.” As so often happens with translations, the Turkish version of Hendrich’s article sheds further light on her ideas, appearing in a volume of essays as “Dimensions of Memory and Communication of the *Saz* in Alevism” (*Alevîlikte Sazın Belleksel ve İletişimsel Boyutları*). Among other things, the nuanced differences in these titles suggest that the principal function of the *saz*’s
Medium” [Körpermedium], she notes a widespread propensity (in Western music as well) for “instrumental anthropomorphism,” in which instruments are represented as people with human body parts inspiring names of parts of the instrument (neck, head, etc.), finding in this anthropomorphism a mediation that extends (and blurs) the edge of humanness (165). She specifically enumerates a number of bodily terms used to describe the Arab oud, then follows suit with the saz: “The Anatolian long-necked lute consists of “ears” (kulak, also burgu, for tuning pegs [Wirbel]), an “arm” (kol, also sap, for the neck [Hals]), a “trunk” (gövde, also çanak, for the body [Korpus]), and a breast (göğüs, also kapak, for the soundboard [Decke].” This organological litany is fascinating in its own right—that is, as evidence of the corporeal imaginings of the instrument—but it also creates an (apparently) unintentional layering of heteroglossial meanings that becomes quite relevant in the case of my fieldwork. For example, several of the German terms here are already only articulable as body parts: Korpus, meaning “body”; and Hals, meaning “neck,” both of which have equivalents in English organology; but also Wirbel, which means not only “tuning pegs” but also “vertebrae.” So while Turkish offers equivalent, non-bodily terms (e.g., burgu instead of kulak), German does not. In my lessons with Adil Arslan, this terminology was introduced in the very first lesson in both languages (even though Arslan teaches much more in Turkish) and points to a question of mediaity is actually its ability to communicate—in this case, to communicate memory. I take up the issue of what constitutes a sonic medium in Islamic contexts in the next chapter. The productively unsettled duality of memory and mediality in Hendrich’s work can be reflected in the titles of the two conference papers that appear to have led to these publications: the first (in Turkish) is entitled “‘In the Month of Muharrem, My Saz Weeps’: Dimensions of Memory [Hafizavi] of the Saz in Alevi Culture” (which uses the word hafizavi, of Arabic origin and closely associated with the idea of memorizing the Qur’an, instead of the Turkish neologism, belleksel, as in her published version); the second (in German) is entitled: “The Saz as Medium: Dimensions of Memory [Errinnerungsdimensionen] of the Alevi Long-Necked Lute.” These subtle shifts in linguistic emphasis elucidate the underlying “archaeology” behind these ideas and the productive entwining of a musical instrument, mediality and memory.
the sociolinguistics of music pedagogy. Halit Çelik, a former student of Arslan’s and the
principal teacher at the Berlin Saz Evi in the district of Alt-Moabit, told me on multiple
occasions that he considers it an important part of his work to be able to speak both
German and Turkish to his young students, many of whom know German better.\textsuperscript{18}

Drawing on ethnographic writing by Ayten Kaplan and her own research,
Hendrich also extends Greve’s symbolic reading of the instrument, noting:

Hendrich notes that Ali does not begin with \textit{alif} in Arabic, but in many ways the
conflation offers insight into the flexible interpretations of the body of the instrument. In
any interview with Kasım Yıldız (which I discuss at greater length below), he performed
a similar kind of instrumental exegesis, not only for the \textit{bağlama} but also the \textit{dutar} and
\textit{setar}, found further east in Central Asia. “For example, the \textit{dutar} has two strings, the
\textit{setar} three, in Alevism the \textit{bağlama} only has 12 frets because of the 12 Imams, with one
fret tied to [\textit{bağlamışlar}] each imam. That’s what we’re playing. Or the \textit{setar}: Allah
Muhammad Ali. It has three strings which have a meaning of these three words which are
so central to Alevism.” I was joined by another colleague, Petra Stawowczyk, a \textit{bağlama}
player and researcher on Central Asian musical culture, who then asked, “What about the

\textsuperscript{18}Çelik himself was born in the village of Ketenci near Erzurum in 1966, then moved to Berlin when he
was three years old. At the age of 18 he began studying with Arslan, then continued with focused lessons
with Yavuz Top, Tayfun Erdem, Erensoy Akkaya, and others. In 1998 he began giving lessons at the
Yozgat Bahadın Derneği and from 2003 at as a permanent teacher at the city-owned \textit{Musikschule “City-
West”} in Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf. (This brief biographical sketch is based on conversations and
dutar?” Yıldız seemed taken back for a slight moment, then replied, “The dutar—there’s the Ehl-i Beyt [the family of the prophet Muhammad]. It means “Fatima-Ali.” He then continued, unprompted: “In all of these things, there is a sacredness [kutsallık]. In Alevism numbers have a sacredness more generally: for example, 12 is a sacred number, three is sacred, seven. There were Seven Exalted Poets [Yedi Ulu Ozanlar].¹⁹ There’s also Fazlıullah Hurufi, for example, whose teachings [Hurufilik] were banned in the Middle Ages and he was ultimately executed, but they live on in Alevi-Bektaşism. Alevi-Bektaş is inherited [sahip çıkmıştır] Hurufilik and the two are bound together [bağlamıştır]” (Yıldız 2013). On the one hand, Yıldız’s comments suggest a kind of arbitrariness: if any instrument can be interpreted as holy through numerology and symbolism, perhaps none are. Yet the act or performance of interpretation here is intriguing, coming as it does in response to physical objects that grant the speaker some kind of agency through interpreting the physical world. In other words, one of the affordances of these instruments seems to be their ability to order the rest of the world. A similar response to the physical world seems at work in the Hendrich’s example (drawing on Ayten Kaplan’s work) suggests just how rich this interpretive schema is. In other words, what matters is not whether the 12 Imams are materialized as frets or as strings—though the slightly different connotations of orienting the body (frets) or of resonating against and with the body (strings) could be interpreted as meaningful—but rather that such numerical associations are actively sought and discussed explicitly.

¹⁹ According to Neşe Ayıştı Onaç, “The ozan poets, known in Alevi-Bektaşi religious thought [inancında] as ’ermiş’ [saints, mystics], ’7 Ulu’ [Great Ones], ’7 Kutup’ [Exalted One; literally “poles”] veya ’7 Büyük’ [Great Ones] are: Nesimi, Fuzuli, Şah Hatayi [Shah Ismail of the Safavid Empire], Pir Sultan Abdal, Kul Himmet, Virani and Yemini” (2007:43).
Although Bayram Durbilmez and Eliot Bates mostly highlight the same points, they both offer useful reiterations in doing so. For example, Durbilmez builds on Hendrich’s work and others to move from a discussion of a corporeal instrument and symbolism to “the stringed Qur’an”: “In the Islamic period [İslamlık döneminde], the saz has become the object of the reverence [saygı] which was felt for the kopuz in the shamanistic period [Kamlık/Şamanlık döneminde] and in some Alevi-Bektaşi circles, the saz is called ‘the stringed Qur’an’ [telli Kur’an]. For instance, Aşık Nevruz Bacı says in a line of poetry, ‘Do you have a saz? It is a stringed book’ [telli kitap]” (2010:149). He likewise offers a rich assortment of folklore about the instrument. Like Durbilmez, Bates recounts what he provocatively calls “saz anatomy” (2012:384), adding the term yanak (cheek) to a list like Hendrich’s and also noting the practice of the dede (as well as zakirs) “kiss[ing] the saz and touch[ing] it to his head before commencing playing” (ibid.). But he also situates this discourse of the saz’s sacredness, in which its materiality shapes its existence and the cultures surrounding it, in a larger ecology of material representations of the instrument, such as the iconic image of Pir Sultan Abdal (385), which can be seen as a statue throughout the Anatolian countryside or as a massive wall hanging in the Berlin cemevi.

Ali Yaman, a scholar who was frequently mentioned to me by members of the cemevi as someone whose work I should know, and who participated in a muhabbet discourse at the cemevi during Muharrem 2013, has also written about “the stringed Qur’an.” In a small booklet that would later be re-published by the Cem Vakfı (Cem

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20 The dedes in Berlin I spoke with said that while kissing the instrument three times, one should also say “Allah, Muhammed, Ali.” Erseven confirms this practice (1990:162).
Music and art also have an important place in Alevi life. There is music in Alevi rituals. This is also a part of the ritual. Before the cem, the dede or zakir performs niyaz [ritual kissing of the instrument] to the saz three times and then begins to play. The saz is also called “the stringed Qur’an.” Without the saz, there can be no söz [utterance, recitation], and without söz there can be no saz. For Alevis, the saz, also known as the bağlama, is a sacred musical instrument [kutsal bir müzik aletidir]. This is because the beliefs, feelings, and thoughts of the community are articulated [dile getirilmiştir, literally “brought to the tongue”] with the accompaniment of the saz. The deyiş poems, dûvaz for the imams, mersiye laments, miraçlama poems [of Muhammad’s miraj night journey] and semah rituals can be counted as types of Alevi music. (Yaman 1998:121)

Here the quranness of the saz is largely a question of articulating sound, including once again a blurred spaced, or codependence, of instrumental music (saz) and the voice (söz).

Significantly, Yaman clarifies what (he believes) is being articulated: “the beliefs, feelings, and thoughts of the community.” The saz takes on an affective, articulatory role—and arguably not simply one that reflects that community but also generates it.

A slightly different notion is advanced by İlhan Cem Erseven, writing a few years earlier in 1990. For him, the quranness of the bağlama stems not from its articulations per se, but the way it is listened to:

In muhabbet gatherings the aşık’s saz is very sacred and esteemed [kutsal ve değerli]. Behaving in the same way as when the Qur’an is recited aloud [söylenirken Kur’an okunuyormuş gibi], one must listen to nefes hymns with respect [saygı ile dinlenilmesi gereken] while they are recited with the saz. The one playing the saz does not allow the saz to be insulted [saza hakaret ettirmez]. The ozan poet kisses the saz [niyaz ederek] when picking it up and kisses it when setting it down. (1990:161)

Although he does not call the instrument “the stringed Qur’an,” Erseven suggests that one of the key points of comparison is the kind of attentive listening, as well as other forms of showing respect (like niyaz, or kissing the instrument). He also extends the kind of “instrumental anthropomorphism” above even further, such that the bağlama is not
simply a symbol of a person (e.g., Ali) but also can be interacted with like one through listening, insulting, or kissing.

Speaking more broadly, Erseven also highlights the importance of context: the performance of these texts is secret, on the one hand, and proscribed in other settings: “Secret music [gizli müzik], like the secret religious dances [gizli dinsel oyunlar], or semahlar, is performed in cem and muhabet gatherings. Outside of cem and muhabet ceremonies, reciting nefes songs and playing [this] music is highly sinful. No believing Alevi would or could do such a thing. This is prohibited by religious rules [mezhep]” (1990:160). While such universalizing statements are suspect as ethnographic or historical data, their characterization of ceremonies is intriguing: the sacredness of Alevi music is such, at least as Erseven understands it, that it could be taken out of that context. And the authority for such prohibitions are mezhep, the term used in Islamic jurisprudence to distinguish between schools of thinking (and also a term for “path,” which I explore in the next chapter). This appeal to traditional Islamic authority, accompanied later with citations of the Qur’an and hadith against the prohibition of music (161-162), contrasts strikingly with a different source of authoritative thought on the topic which Erseven draws on, namely poetry: “In poetry written about the saz, all of its sacredness and importance are explained [anlatılmıştır].” He then quotes two stanzas from Pir Sultan Abdal, including the lines:

- They attached a string to my arm
- It caused 1,001 tongues to be spoken
- I became the nightingale of the cem ceremony

Erseven next alludes to a famous nefes poem by Aşık Dertli (d. 1845), in which every stanza ends with the question, “Where is the devil in all this?,” allegedly in
response to a qadi judge who called the instrument “the work of the devil” (şeytan işi).

Although the poem does not use the term “the stringed Qur’an,” it resonates with Aşık Cevri’s poem in its focus on materiality, its formulas for naming the instrument (telli sazdır instead of telli Kur’an), and its meditation on the relationship of (Sunni) Islam not merely to Alevism, but to the instrument itself:

The stringed saz is its name
It listens to neither the Qur’an nor qadi judge
He who plays this himself understands
Where is the devil in all this?

If you do ablutions, it doesn’t care
If you perform prayers, it doesn’t care
Unlike a qadi judge, it doesn’t eat haram food
Where is the devil in all this?

Its strings come from Venice
Its neck [kol, arm] from a juniper tree
Oh, Allah’s bewildered servant
Where is the devil in all this?

Is he inside, or outside
Is he in at the top of the tuning pegs
Is he in the breast’s [soundboard’s] rosette?
Where is the devil in all this?

Its body is from a mulberry tree
Its fret tied to the opening
Hey, you good-for-nothing
Where is the devil in all this?

Like Dertli, it wears no turban
And no sandals on its feet
It has no horns, no tail
Where is the devil in all this?

As before, the bağlama is personified both through organs—musical and corporeal—as well as actions (e.g., listening, eating). But strikingly, Dertli’s defense against the charge of “the work of the devil” is not to assert an outright sacredness, but rather a kind of banality: strings from Venice, a neck from juniper wood, a body from mulberry, not to
mention no horns, no tail, and so on. The case might be made that a key aspect of the sacred for Alevism is the natural environment, but this poem mostly fends off—sometimes playfully, sometimes forcefully—Sunni claims of heterodoxy, whether or not it came in response to an actual Islamic judge.

Toward the end of his discussion of music, Erseven adds a more affirmative (less reactionary/anti-Sunni) note about organological sacredness, with a final stanza from a nefes poem by Aşık Sulhi that explains “what a saz is”:

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Every utterance from God to us is benevolent  Haktan bize her dem inayet olur
The entry to his path from Muhammad, Ali  Muhammed Ali’den hidayet olur
Playing saz is a sacred ritual for Allah  Saz çalmak Allaha ibadet olur
We have the rebab from the prophet David  Davut Peygamberden rebabımız var
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(in Erseven 1990:163)

He then connects this sacred ritual of playing the saz to the particular sounds of the instrument, a relatively rare move in this discourse: “In the sounds of the saz, there is a clear, sober, and uniquely melodic sound [açık, ağırlı ve kendine özgü ezgisel bir ses vardur]” (ibid.).21 While not all Alevi performers might agree with this prescription, Erseven’s overall narrative begins to flesh out a framework of sacred instrumentality.

With the context of Erseven’s narrative and his sources (including considerable poetry about the bağlama), the stanza of poetry from Aşık Cevri that opens this chapter, with its formulation of the bağlama as a Qur’an of tongue-path-strings, becomes all the more evocative. In the essay that opens his 1988 book of notated türkü folk songs (Notalarıyla Türkülerimiz), Aşık Cevri, writing using his scholarly/given name, Nejat

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21 In relation to the sounds of the saz, Erseven gives a (relatively rare) commentary on the ideal qualities of the voice as well: “In order to carry out these particular qualities, both the saz player and the nefes reciter (and even woman and girls) should try to reach up to a “tenor” voice in the melody which is carrying them away by raising their voices [seslerini yükselterek], rather than by using something like their natural voice [doğal sesleri]” (163). The question of aesthetic norms within Alevism (and the articulation of such norms) exceeds my scope here but certainly warrants future attention.
Birdoğan, sheds more light on his own text and the sacredness of the bağlama, or saz (his preferred term). He traces out a history through poetry, finding the “first traces” (ilk izler) in shamanic prayers and then in the Book of Dede Korkut as the first written source, in which the kopuz, often cited as a kind of organological ancestor to the saz from Central Asia, and in particular its sacred status, prevents internecine bloodshed in the episode of Eğrek and Seğrek (Birdoğlu̱an 1988:78). The great poet Yunus Emre composed multiple poems about the kopuz and its sacredness, including the following couplet: “Instead of reciting subhanallah or prostrating in secde prayers / I listened to the six-stringed kopuz” (ibid.). After mentioning the use of the saz by epic protagonists (e.g., Kerem, Kurbani, Tufarganlı Abbas) within those poems, he moves to the 20th century, where he recounts a story of an encounter between an aşık, Narmanlı Sümmüni, and a Sunni imam, Rıza Hoca, in the village of Camışlı near the city of Kars in northwest Turkey in the year 1900: “It was the month of Ramadan. The village imam, Rıza Hoca, saw that the villagers were not coming for teravih prayers.22 When he angrily arrived at the coffeehouse, Sümmüni was tuning his saz and the villagers were preparing to listen. Rıza Hoca asked Sümmüni, “Why do you drag around this hellish instrument?” (Bu cehennem teknesini niçin gezdiriyorsun?), to which Sümmüni responded with a divan poem.” (ibid.) The poem is a stirring rebuke of the narrow-mindedness of shari’a law and ‘ulama scholars like Rıza Hoca. In particular, he accuses the imam, “You are an expert in the religious science of the visible world [ilm-i zâhirde] you know shari’a / From whom and to whom

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22 The teravih (Ar: tarawih) prayers are an extended set of prayers that take place at night after the end of the Ramadan fasting and, not insignificantly for this discussion, entail a recitation of the Qur’ân. The entire Qur’an is broken into thirty sections (ijza’), one of which is traditionally recited each night during the teravih prayers in Ramadan, such that the entire Qur’an will be recited over the course of the month.
does the Truth [Hak] set out on a path [yol] and send the Higher Path [tarikat]? He then continues, arguing that the saz, or his instrument (here tekne, the term used today for the resonator bowl of the saz), allows an even further progression beyond tarikat: “With this three-stringed body [tekne], we have found Perfect Truth [hakikat].” He then engages in esoteric numerical plays on words (“What is my name in seven letters?”), proclaims the equivalence of the heart of a believer (mümin gönlü) and the Ka’aba in Mecca, and then insults the imam’s proclamations by comparing them to smoking hashish. His final stanza retains a similar polemical edge but weaves together many of the strands heretofore employed:

Thirty-two letters brought together the knowledge of the Qur’an [ilm-i Kur’an’ı]
How is it the aşiks bring to remembrance [zikreder] the moment with three strings?
Who gave you grounds [hüccet, proof] for the way you slander Sümman?
Hoca, are you the only one who knows the noble shari’a [şer’at-i garrâyi]?
The Creator who created us knows the small and the great. (in Birdoğlu 1988:78)

On its surface, the poem might be seen as a straightforward attack on the imam and the kind of learning an imam might be expected to have. From my experience, such a reading has a certain validity, as so many Alevis articulate their definitions of Alevism as somehow being not-Sunni Islam. But the presumption that such tensions are universal, monolithic and unchanging over time seems misguided. And indeed, Aşık Sümman’s poem articulates some of the complexity of this relationship, as well, and particularly begins to elucidate some of the connections between his musical instrument (saz, or tekne) and the Qur’an. Throughout the poem, traditional (i.e., Sunni) forms of religious knowledge—shari’a law, theological sciences (ilm), the Qur’an itself—are not necessarily disparaged but rather seen as a preliminary, exoteric step toward further,

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23 It the original, shari’a (Tur: şeriat) and tarikat rhyme in the original. I occasionally use şeriat in this section to highlight that connection, though the word is common enough that I typically use shari’a.
esoteric understanding. Significantly, this understanding is created through sound, as seen in the passage above where Sümmâni ascribes a “Higher Path” (tarikat) and Perfect Truth (hâkikat)—two of the “gates” (kâpî) that follow shari’a (şeriat) in Sufi and Alevi thought (cf. previous chapter)—to the revelation of God’s path (yol) made manifest in sound by means of a “three-stringed tekne,” a musical body or instrument. These paths are not entirely figurative, though; he calls for a remapping of sacred geography, a radical localization that reorients the devotional focus of the traditional Sunni world from the Ka’aba in Mecca as the “house of God” (seyret Kâbe Beytullah’ı) to the hearts of believers (mümin gönlüne). The aforementioned motif of a three-stringed, resonating source of knowledge returns in the final stanza (given above), where Sümmâni reflects on the knowledge, or Islamic science, of the Qur’an (ilm-i Kur’an). Here he avers a critical distinction between written and oral scripture, suggesting that the inscription of qur’anic knowledge (ilm-i Kur’an) through writing requires—or more precisely, was brought together, using the same word cem as is used for the Alevi ritual—by means of thirty-two letters. He then rhetorically poses the question: how is it then possible that aşiks (like himself) are able to call to remembrance (literally, to carry out zikr) the moment of its revelation with just three strings? But surely an aşık must have known the rich sonic life of the Qur’an, fixed as it may have been—and indeed, Sümmâni seems to take for granted that the Qur’an is, in fact, a powerful resonator of divinely sanctioned truth. But the aşık’s instrument and utterance is even more so.

Birdoğan then concludes this section with two deyîş poems, the first taken from a collection from the Western Thracian dede Vâhit Lütfî Saleçî called “Hidden Turkish Music” (Gizli Türk Musikisi, first published in 1938). Before getting to the poem, he
notes some of the same kinds of symbolic ascriptions to the instrument (according to unspecified research of Süleyman Gülşeni): “…there [in Thrace] the saz’s body [gövdesi] is compared to Ali, the lowest string [bam telî] to Muhammad, the 12 strings to the 12 Imams, and its sounds [sesleri] to the 14 Mâsum,” literally “innocents,” but meaning the holy lineage of the Ehli-i Beyt (Muhammad, Fatima) and the 12 Imams, beginning with Ali (1988:79). The deyiş poem itself once again focuses in on the instrument, beginning “My saz is long-necked / its surface is inlaid with mother of pearl,” before moving into more religious/esoteric language: “There are 12 strings on the saz / There are 12 Imams / Oh Ascetic [Zâhit], the four mezhep schools are yours / There are 12 Holy Ones [Erkânlar].” The text includes its own musical commentary as well, noting that the singer’s words [sözü] “are sweeter than honey” and then construing that voice as part of a polyphonic texture: “My saz is extremely powerful [gayet güçlüdür] / Its voice is two parts of three [Sesi iki üçlüdür]” (ibid.).

The final poem is his own deyiş, attributed to his poetic alter-ego, Cevri, by far the most pointed reference in poetry to the quranness of the bağlama in published writings on Alevism. He introduces the text succinctly and self-deprecatingly: “The second deyiş is from one of the little known [imi timi bilinmeyen] ozan poets, Cevri. It deals with the understanding of sacredness [kutsalik anlayışı] of the bağlama which came from their forefathers” (1988:79):

Oh son who asks me about the Truth! Bana Hakk’i soran oğul!
Hear it from the saz of an aşık. Haber al, aşık sazından,
Its soundboard [göğüs, breast] is the tree of the Prophet Göğsü Peygamber ağacı
Its case is from the cloth of Ali. Kılıfi Ali bezinden.

24 In a footnote of his own, Birdoğan clarifies that the line was understood to refer to polyphonic music, which was part of the Thracian tradition, a topic he takes up in later writings too (1990): “Vahit Dede, who made a note about this line, ’Its voice is two parts of three,’ says that an unknown ozan poet mentioned polyphonic music [çok seslîge] in reference to this line of poetry” (1988:88).
The letter *alif*—its neck is a sign of Truth,
It opens the door to reality.
A structure beginning from the bridge,
Its song becomes a yellow crane.

*Elif, Hakk'a nişan sapı,
O gerçeğe açar kapı.
Eşikten başlayan yapı
Sarı turna avazından.*

The Shah is the finger pressing on the fret,
Those who kiss it arrive at the Truth.
Its melody is a flowing river
From the True Twelve Imams.

*Şah perdeye basan parmak,
Niyaz eyler Hakk’ya varmak.
Ezgi olup akan irmak
Hak imamlar düvazından.*

When it bursts, its cry is to the letter *jim*
It lowered its head and came to the *cem*
Surely it clings to the *dem* songs
Its pain comes from its elusive Beloved

*Dolunca feryadı cim’e,
Baş indirip geldi cem’e.
Elbette sarılır dem’e,
Acısı cânân nazından.*

*Cevri, here is a talking Qur’an,
Also a Qur’an of the path of uprightness.
Holding a stringed Qur’an,
We walk in the footsteps of Truth…*  

The rhetoric of this *deyiş* poem resonates strongly with its predecessors, as made explicit by Birdoğan/Cevri in the essay surrounding this material, with some new variations: the corporeality of the instrument remains, but within new constellations, like the Prophet’s tree (the soundboard), Ali’s cloth (the case), and the yellow crane’s song (the bridge).

Distinctions continue to blur between human agent, musical instrument, and sacred actor, as the Shah (Ali) becomes the finger on the fret, those who perform *niyaz* by kissing the instrument experience divine Truth, and as mentioned repeatedly above, the *qurannness* of the poet, the path and the instrument are all bound up together. The entire text by Birdoğan, which I have treated at some length here, is both a helpful expansion of his scholarly and poetic thinking on the topic, as well as a useful marker in tracing out a sonic history of the Alevi revival of the past quarter century.

One final text by Birdoğan/Cevri, written two years later in 1990, clarifies some of the imagery from this previous *deyiş* and gestures toward an ethnographic context that
will help pivot from the kind of universalizing Alevi discourse found here and the specifics of ethnography in Berlin. Again he situates his narrative historically, beginning with a sizable discussion of the role of invocations to the *kopuz* in shamnistic rites (for example, “Oh my *kopuz*, my *kopuz*! Grant us goodness, give us good news. My *kopuz* which was taken by chiseling it out of the tongue of the *uyengi* tree. My *kopuz* which I made frets for from the red *kızıl* bush,” 1990:430). But he quickly jumps to the kind of explanation an *ozan* poet in the Alevi tradition might give in the face of Sunni criticism—and in doing so makes the instrument not just holy but a sacred, sonic city:

Alevi *ozan* poets and Alevi belief [*inanç*] have never given up the *saz*. They interpret the *saz*’s parts in their own way. For example, “According to Alevis, the body [*tekne*] of the *saz* is a treasury wherein one finds secret knowledge and God [*Tanrı*]. Because of this, they say it is ‘*ilim şehri,*’ the city of knowledge. If there were no breast piece [*soundboard*], there would be no sound. In addition this breast piece is the gate/door [*kapı*] which leads prevents the knowledge of the instrument’s body [*teknedeki bilim*] from being spoiled or from getting lost. They call this breast/soundboard ‘gate.’ The bridge/threshold is also sacred in Alevism. The bridge of the *saz* bears a separate significance. The neck is in the shape of the letter *alif*. *Alif* is sacred because it refers to Allah and Ali. In Alevi music played on the *saz*, the *la* fret which is used as the *karar* (final) tone, is called ‘the Shah’s fret.’ The notes *fa*, *sol*, and *la*, which are readily found in *aranığme* instrumental refrains, and of which the first two are known as *anımsatma* (mnemonic) and *arama* (searching) tones, are given the name *niyaz* frets [after the ritual of kissing the instrument three times before and after playing].” Taking the question of the *saz*’s sacredness even further, some *ozan* poets have even given it the name ‘the stringed Qur’an.’ (1990:431)

Once again the image of ‘Ali and the city of knowledge returns (cf. the Opening above), but in the context of the *saz*, it becomes an acoustically resonant city. ‘Ali makes the instrument holy, and the instrument reanimates ‘Ali through sound. Birdoğan then includes his own *deyîş* poem on “the stringed Qur’an,” one of the most emphatic articulations of that notion.25

25 Writing at the same time (1990), Rıza Zelyut makes a similar note about the temporality of the name in a passage that otherwise yields little insight into how this term was (or is) understood: “Today, Alevis call the *saz* ‘the stringed Qur’an.’ This is because it is believed that the melodies which are articulated on the *saz* are sacred [*kutsal*]” (1990:168).
The Stringed Qur’an in Berlin

Many of these descriptions seemed to hold true for many of the bağlama players I met in Berlin—though some did not. The overall care, the kissing of the instrument, and more generally, the centrality of the instrument in rituals, imagery and discourse suggest a similar understanding to that articulated in more general scholarship and poetry. But bağlama players in Berlin offered some compelling insights that clarify and specify how they understand this notion of a “stringed Qur’an.” In particular, these conversations suggest that: the instruments sacredness is a process more than a state of being (whether permanent or temporary); that its sacredness was circumscribed by particular temporal limits; and that the politics of naming is part of a larger project of ontological reclamation by Alevi in line with the kind of radical organological understanding I suggested above. In hopes of situating these ideas in as concrete a context as possible, I include here some biographical background, not so much as a representative sample of any ur-experience of transnational bağlama playing, but rather to be as specific as possible about the musical and life pathways that shape these perspectives.

Kasım Yıldız, the zakir at the 2012 Ashura cem and a frequent participant in events at the cemevi, added extensive detail to the general case (made above) for understanding the bağlama as a “stringed Qur’an.” Yıldız was born in a village near Erzurum in Turkey in 1968 and in the same year his father came to Berlin to work. In 1978, at the age of 10, he and his family joined his father in Berlin. He began to play thanks to his father, as he recounted in the aforementioned interview: “Every house certainly had a bağlama in it, and so did ours. My father didn’t play a lot but he loved to
sing, so he encouraged me to play…In our village we listened to all the aşık, all the ozan. I grew up listening to them and they deeply influenced me. For some people, they hear some music and it goes in one ear and out the other, right? But it would make its way into my dreams, it influenced me so much” (Yıldız 2013). When he came to Berlin, he began playing on his father’s bağlama during the work day: “When my dad went to work, I would take it and I played by myself. That’s how I learned on my own especially right at first.” He would study for some time with Adil Arslan and Sıddık Doğan but his “great teacher” (büyük hocam) was the late Neşet Ertaş, widely acknowledged as one of the great masters of bağlama in recent decades:

He was such a solid [dört-dörtlük] person. He was a very good teacher and person of real integrity. We Alevis speak of a kamil insan, and he was really such a person. We learned from him in a master-apprentice [usta-çırak] relationship. Rahmetli Neşet Ertaş taught lessons in a small room in the Volkshochschule in Berlin. He didn’t know music notation, so he would play and then we would translate it into written notes. ‘Alright guys [değerli çocuklar],’ he would say, ‘I’ll play something for you, you watch my fingers and my hands and then you play it.’ And that’s how we learned. Unfortunately this only lasted a year but it was extremely fruitful for me. It was really enlightening for me [çok iyi feyz aldım]. I learned a lot and it was a major reason for me continuing my development on bağlama. (ibid.)

He and Halit Çelik, the principal teacher at the Berlin Saz Evi now, were family friends and pursued their musical education together, tracking down teachers (e.g., Erensoy Akkaya, Çetin Akdeniz) and recording cassettes in Turkey over their summer vacations, touring together in a small ensemble, and even teaching together. He currently works for Siemens and teaches in his own small school in Wedding, and while he readily affirms that it’s not inconceivable that an aşık could work at Siemens, he generally feels that

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26 I was also accompanied by Petra Stawowczyk, with videography by Stephan Talneau.

27 Becoming an insan-i kamil, or kamil insan, is an enlightened state of being which awaits those who traverse the path of seriat, tarikat, marifet, and hakikat, a common theme for Sufis I met and Alevis.
because of migration to cities (both in Turkey and Western Europe) “there’s not an aşık tradition any more,” with few exceptions like the Berlin-based Ozan Şahturna.

The topic of the aşık tradition led to the question of instruments. When asked by Stawowczyk, “Why does an aşık play saz? Why saz and not something else—like maybe a violin?” Yıldız responded, “No, there certainly could be an aşık who plays violin. The instrument a person plays depends on the place where they live.” He noted other aşık traditions in Central Asia that used other instruments (dutar, setar, tambur), though he ascribed the absence of a similar tradition among Arabs to prohibitions on instrumental music “because of their beliefs.” He continued, “For example, if we look at the period of the Middle Ages, instruments were forbidden. They were viewed as something very devilish [çok şeytani bir şey]” (ibid.). Later during a break, Yıldız asked how he was doing, and Stawowczyk answered, “Great—better than what’s in books.” Yıldız responded, “Everything is inside of people—we know that.” He then elaborated with Alevi teachings: “According to our ozan poets, ‘The greatest book is a person.’”

Continuing, he turned to the topic of the Qur’an: “This is why, for example, among Alevis we say, ‘The Qur’an lies within a person’ [Kur’an insândır]. A book by itself is nothing but if a person reads/recites it [okursa], if a person articulates it [dile getirirse], it comes to life [canlandır]. If not, it’s nothing. But if a person causes it to come to life [yaşattırsa], if a person speaks, we become a speaking Qur’an [konuşan Kur’anı]. Imam Ali said this, ‘I am the speaking Qur’an [konuşan Kur’an benim]…Everything is present in me, it is not in the sheets of writing [yapraklarda],’ he said.” He explained that this statement was made during the War of Siffin when copies of Qur’ans were being

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28 In Turkish, “En büyük kitap insandır,” a proverb attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli.
gathered up, and Ali affirmed that the sheets of manuscript were not the essence of the text but rather its sonically articulable version. The entire narrative is bound up with a complex theological historiography that resembles Shi’a narratives but also entails a forcible orality, as Yıldız explained it: “Because it is a stringed, speaking Qur’an, we had strong oral traditions. Many were written down but also many were lost—they were forbidden and were gathered and burned.” Such incidents were frequently mentioned to me (not only by Yıldız) with regards to tensions with Ottoman rulers (especially Sultan Selim I) but the ongoing violence against Alevis throughout the 20th century—as recently as the burning of the Hotel Madımak in Sivas in 1993 and a spate of violence against Alevis in Istanbul’s Gazi district in 1995—remains central to Alevi life in Berlin as a source of traumatic memory and collective identity.

Given this framework of sacred orality, it may not be at all surprising that the sonic resonances of an instrument can likewise be understood as a form of holiness. I later returned to this topic of the bağlama’s sacredness (kutsallik), asking what its source was. Yıldız responded:

Where does its sacredness come from? It’s in the cem ceremony, in the cem it becomes sacred [kutsallaşıyor]. For example, outside the cem it is a normal instrument. But in the cem it becomes sacred because in the cem, when the duvaz-imam is recited or when a nefes is recited—without the recitation of nefes, the duvaz-imam, the mersiye lamentation, or the semah, the cem is incomplete. And the bağlama is found throughout these sections that complete [tamamlayan] the cem. So naturally the bağlama becomes sacred in the cem, it becomes a ‘stringed Qur’an.’…The pir there [i.e., the presiding figure in the cem] represents Imam Ali. Only they represent him, it’s not like the rest of us become the Shah. In that moment a person may forget that it is just a representation…This is why I said that the nefes and other words recited by ozans are foundational. The bağlama becomes sacred there because it causes us to remember through zikr. And so it takes on a sacred state. But outside of that, like I said, it’s a

29 A rich historiographic discourse has also emerged among Alevis on this topic, involving both written and oral sources, including some more standard Shi’a texts as well historical narratives of acts of violence and book-burning committed against Alevi communities. This kind of forcible orality is beyond the scope of this project but warrants serious attention, both as a historical claim and also in order to better understand contemporary attitudes on and practices of orality among Alevis.
normal instrument. You can play anything on the baglama—any kind of türkü folk song. Today we can even play Western works, baglama playing has developed this much. But in the cem it becomes sacred.

Thus the baglama was not intrinsically sacred but could become consecrated through certain ritual actions—through worship, aural remembrance (zikr), through its function as a medium to bring about certain sonic foundations.

Not yet satisfied, I asked about whether the process of building the instrument was ever understood to be holy. He responded: “No, not in building it. It’s just a common object. But you know, in Anatolia there are ziyaret visits [e.g., to tombs of saints]. It’s possible that a tree in the mountains near one of these sites could maybe be seen as sacred. If it were made from that tree—just to give an example—ozan Ali Ekber Çiçek had such a baglama. This baglama was made from a part of a tree near the dergah shrine of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Parts of various mausoleums have been taken and used and so of course that is then a sacred baglama.” He then explained that even the name of the instrument was highly mutable: “The stringed Qur’an’ is a Turkish term. It’s a word that came much later [çok sonradan cıkmış] but before that it was called kopuz, for example. Whatever it’s called, its importance doesn’t change.” As described above, he then reflected on the symbolism and numerology of the instrument (and its close organological relatives like the dutar and setar). He also added that in addition to representing Ali, the baglama also represents other important martyrs, Imam Hüseyin and Mansur-I Hallaj. He highlighted Mansur as an example of one whose ideas about the divine were too controversial for his time “because he said en-el hak [I am the Truth, ana al-haqq]. They said he was an infidel and an unbeliever but for us he’s sacred. For us he is a speaking Qur’an…He was executed and burned and we are representing him in the cem as well. In the cem Mansur is present, as though we were approaching his execution and the baglama represents
Mansur.” Finally, at my prompting, he returned to the words saz and bağlama themselves, giving a standard answer at first that saz is a Persian word that simply means “instrument” in Turkish. “Bağlama is a Turkish term, and it actually means bringing sounds into resonance with one another….That was the view of our ozan poets, it brings the sounds to resonate together because it is bound together [bağlandığı için] at a certain place on the strings.” Triangulating between Ali Ekber Çiçek’s talismanic, naming conventions (both as history and as a verbalized form of organological analysis), and the politically-charged ritualization of memory with Mansur, we see an emergent, radical organology that inhabits a place of ongoing in-betweenness: it is continually vacillating between the material and the immaterial, between sonic presence and political interpretation, and between real and symbolic modes of being.

In contrast to Yıldız, who considers his Alevi identity to have a strong religious component, Adil Arslan offers a relatively secular perspective as an undisputed virtuoso with relatively little interaction with the cemevi today. But that was not the case for him when he was younger. Born in a village outside Tunceli (formerly Dersim) in 1962, which he described as “a city which had an especially high concentration of aşık and bağlama players,” his earliest memories of the bağlama likewise came from early listening experiences as a young child. But for him, those experiences were tied particularly to cem, not just to the broader realm of aşık and ozans. In an interview with him, I actually began with a quotation from an interview he himself had given to Martin Greve years earlier, in which he said: “In the past, the dede would come two or three times in the year and perform cem. At the time, I was young, four or five years old. That was when I heard the bağlama being played for the first time, as I sat at the feet of the
dede. When they would take breaks and set the saz aside, I would pick it up and pluck it.

I told myself then that I would also like to play that” (2003:290). He expanded on the context and emotions of those early experiences in our interview:

These kinds of gatherings were organized and cem ceremonies took place. And actually every family had to participate. This was an obligation...whether you were seven or 70 years old. At that time, our parents also took us to cems. They were held in the biggest room in the village. And that was the first time I saw a bağlama: in that atmosphere with the dede playing the bağlama and singing, and there were people entering a trance [transa girdiği]. I watched—how was it being played? How were things being sung? In those ceremonies I witnessed and really internalized how the dede played and sung in such a complete way with feeling. I was both influenced by the words [sözler] and struck by how the feeling and movement [hâl ve hareker] while they sang and played during the zikr affected people, how it excited them [coşturduğu], how it spread among them. And principal among these things was this instrument, the bağlama. It was used with such impact in the cem ceremony. Their playing and singing technique also influenced me a lot—it was very plain, spare, and striking. (Arslan 2013)

Arslan then continues, elaborating on the particular affects of the instrument—the way the bağlama as an object, as vibrant matter, affected him then and others:

When the dede had played and sung and there was a break, I immediately was at his side, squeezing up next to him, trying to handle it. I wondered how something could be so powerful. In my eyes, it was something very sacred [kutsal]. I would touch it—touching it in our Alevi traditions required respect. In fact, anyone wanting to touch it should have clean hands, since this instrument is actually called “the stringed Qur’an.” That’s how highly valued it is, not just something made for the purpose of entertainment [eğlence amacıyla]....It hung in the best corner of the house, and when it was picked up, it was kissed and held with feelings of great virtue [çok temiz duyularla] and played in a virtuous way [temiz bir şekilde]. This was the value ascribed to it. Because of this, sometimes when I would be holding it, the thought would occur to me: am I doing something wrong? If someone sees me, will they scold me? So I was constantly looking around and I would touch it then run away. That’s how it was—I wanted to be right at the side of every dede and feel without a doubt that enthralling sound [büyüleyici ses] that affected all those people. (Arslan 2013).

Arslan’s ascribes an almost otherworldly quality to the sound of the instrument and its purveyors, with the former generating an “enthralling sound” and the latter a “spare and striking” quality. Coming from a virtuosic performer—that is, from someone who might be inclined to give credit to the players of the instrument rather than the instrument—these remarks are all the more indicative of the kind of power the bağlama possesses.
This “vibrant” agency is emphasized in his description of how the instrument shaped behavior around it: it was hung in a particular place, kissed when it was picked up, held and played with great care and virtue (literally “cleanliness”). He uses long strings of so-called passive verbs: was hung, was picked up, was kissed, etc. Language (especially English) fails to convey these ideas in any other way, but Turkish’s flexible agglutinative structure actually allows one to imagine a grammatical idea like: “it caused itself to be kissed” or “it caused itself to be handled with virtue” (even if such a thing would not make sense in daily usage).

Ultimately, in his assessments of the notion of a “stringed Qur’an,” however, Arslan takes a more pragmatic view—one informed, I suspect, by his own cultural and political history. As he grew, his fascination with the bağlama turned into actual playing. He would tag along “everyone who played bağlama and sang,” leaving behind his work to follow them around. “I cultivated friendships with them and it didn’t matter how old they were—they could be 10 years older, 20 years older, but I was always at their side, engaging them in a conversation. But the real goal was always to be as close as possible to the bağlama.” Tunceli in the 1960s and ‘70s was a turbulent time politically and Arslan’s commitments to life there “culturally, artistically and politically” kept him from joining his parents, who were already in Berlin. And in fact, some of his earliest experiences as a performer came at “rallies, political gatherings and festivals,” as well as other more traditional occasions like weddings and parties in surrounding villages. Like so many Alevi and people from eastern/southeastern Turkey, his political commitments veered toward the political left. He came to Berlin at the age of 18 in 1980 as a response both to the intensifying violence in the area and age limits on family migration to
Germany, arriving along with a new wave of political refugees from the conflict and aftermath of the military coup in September that year. Not surprisingly then, he sees political implications in much of life, including the bağlama and its names:

It has an important role in terms of societal ways of speaking. That role has always been different at different times. When a political quality [vazif] was necessary, they might call it something different. Or [it could take on] a religious sensibility [dinsel bir motif], or something more progressive….For example, one thing it’s been called is “the stringed Qur’an.” There’s something to this. Again, it has a religious sensibility and highlights religious functions. As I said, Alevi society has constantly been under attack, especially with regard to written records. There was a time that houses were raided and written records were gathered and burned. Many people at that time were imprisoned and some were killed. From that time to the present there was a need for people to transmit [taşımak] their cultural values orally from one point to another. And in that process of transmission, the most appropriate thing capable of bringing about such an influence came in the figure [or personage] of an instrument [enstrüman şahsında]. It was able to transmit things that they were forgetting from one generation to the next. And what needed to be passed on? There were religious functions, rules, a worldview. And this is why it was also said, “This is my stringed Qur’an.” (ibid.)

Like Yıldız, Arslan sees in the bağlama a temporally bounded state of qur’anness. But for him, that becoming of the instrument was not bound to a particular religious ceremony (i.e., cem), but rather to historical needs and political contingencies. Given Yıldız’s comments that aşk’s could play any instrument, it may seem that the bağlama plays the role of a place-holder, an interchangeable instrumental medium; but Arslan takes a stronger position still, inverting this formulation, suggesting that the ceremonies themselves were contingent on the bağlama transmitting them.

In both cases, the bağlama incites what Hans Gumbrecht might call “epiphany” through its occupying and blocking of space, through its resonances, and through its mediality in transmitting key principals, rituals (or “religious functions”), and a worldview. Gumbrecht’s notion of epiphany emerges from his own explorations of “materialities of communications” but then goes further to articulate (in a “post-metaphysical” manner) a world of aesthetic affects, or “moments of intensity” (2003:97),
which comprise aesthetic experience, or “certain feelings of intensity that we cannot find in the historically and culturally specific everyday worlds that we inhabit” independent of particular interpretations of those experiences (99-100). But these experiences are fleeting, engendering a feeling “that we cannot hold onto those presence effects, that they—and with them the simultaneity between presence and meaning—are ephemeral” (111). This fleeting oscillation between presence and meaning, matter and idea, being and interpretation seem to undergird the Yıldız’s and especially Arslan’s descriptions of “the stringed Qur’an”: it is sacred but not forever and the moments when its sound overcomes its listeners are unpredictable, manifest by a young child sneaking up to touch an instrument or an old man single-handedly initiating his own reading of tradition, as in the account of the cem given above. But as with so many theories that rely on metaphor, Gumbrecht precludes the idea that there may be an ethical impetus to such epiphany, or that there can even be a real-world material object at its core (102, 111-112). The epiphanic experiences of “the stringed Qur’an” here seem to suggest otherwise, hinting at an almost overpowering realm of sonic materiality that is somehow—and only sometimes—conjured by the bağlama, especially in the context of the cem ceremony, a space always already beyond the historical and cultural present, yet still somehow with an insistence on a kind of ethical entrainment, however beautiful it may be.

The precise values or ethics at stake are, I readily concede, not entirely fixed—even in just considering the views of these two accomplished Berlin musicians. Whereas Yıldız’s understanding of a sacred bağlama is inextricably bound up in cem and Alevi rites, Arslan would go on to articulate an ostensibly secularized narrative of the current affectscape of the bağlama. On more than one occasion he mentioned a project of his
own—and suggested it as a possible dissertation topic for me, as well—under the heading: “The Holy Bağlama: From the Mountains of Anatolia to the Concert Halls of Berlin.” This narrative, not coincidentally, follows the arc of his own life, as an awestruck child at the foot of dedes in Tunceli to fairly regular concerts at the Philharmonic with an impressive retinue of guest artists from Turkey and Western Europe (including Arif Sağ, Erdal Erzinçan and Erol Parlak in 1995; Sağ, Ali Ekber Çiçek, Yazuv Top and Musa Eroğlu in a single concert in 1996; a 2011 concert, “Biblical Light and Mevlana’s Fire”; and future engagements in preparation). But more importantly, Arslan narrates a path of the instrument that is sullied by years of performances—often amplified—in bars and clubs in Istanbul and Ankara, only to find redemption in the reified air of Berlin’s elite cultural institutions. What is striking in this narrative of a heilige Bağlama (somehow always articulated in German) is that holiness remains in play, even when such an aura must be conferred by the Philharmonie. Yet this secularized (and occasionally marketable) holiness is not without its detractors. Martin Greve notes that concerts of “Alevi music” in the ‘90s attracted more youth than lectures, panel discussions and even cemş themselves, and that many Alevi events “took on the feel of a concert” while some more popular performers were accused of profiting from their Alevi identities (2003:298-299). Ultimately the Anatolian Alevi Culture Center, the organization housed at the cemevi, called for a boycott of Arslan’s 1995 concert because of Arif Sağ’s presence and distributed leaflets outside the hall, offering a reminder that all bağlama politics is local—especially in Berlin.

The Other Qur’an
One of the incessant questions about Alevism is whether it is part of Islam or not. More broadly, the question of what Alevi means (Alevilik nedir?) marks the beginning of many (if not most) contemporary writing on the topic. But this question is not simply one being asked of Alevis—it’s also one being asked by Alevis. As I mentioned before, several people asked questions related to this topic during muhabbet discussions in the month of Muharrem in November 2012. On at least three (and perhaps more) occasions during these twelve days, some variant of the question “Are we Muslim?” was posed. Sometimes it was a direct question, sometimes it was couched in terms of anecdotal criticism from friends (i.e., “you’re Alevi, you’re not Muslim”), but it almost always led to more questions: Why don’t we read the Qur’an more often? Should we pray five times daily? Are we Sunni or Shi’a? The answer, which generally came from Hasan Dede, was simple: “We are Alevis. We say ‘Ya Allah! Ya Muhammad! Ya Ali.’” The origins of Alevism are indeed complex and Hasan Dede chose quite clearly to assert both similarity—a kind of family resemblance, based on invocations of these three unassailable figures—and uniqueness, that is to say, difference.

The question of the assembly and transmission of the Qur’an figures prominently into these discussions, as it does for most Shi’a theology, which likewise questions the authority of the ‘Uthmanic Recension (i.e., “the Qur’an” as we know it today). My intent in this chapter was not to answer this question but I would like to conclude with a brief meditation on what an understanding of the bağlama as a “stringed Qur’an” might mean. That bağlama bears a striking resemblance to the Qur’an in terms of the kinds of behavior it elicits from people who interact with it: it is placed in a high/honored position in a room, kissed when picked up, used with clean hands, and so on. More substantively,
however, it is to be sounded. It cannot bring listeners to tears or smiles or devout epiphany until it sounds, until it has an occupying encounter with a human body that sets it in motion. And yet, it is not helpless to do so; it allures and beckons would-be players to touch it when fathers (for Yıldız) or dedes (for Arslan) are not watching. Its potentiality for sound, the mere possibility of a Gumbrechtian epiphany, suggests its power, a kind of theosonic potential energy waiting to be unloosed in the kinesthetics of human interface, be it in a cem or a lesson with a novice student or the Berlin Philharmonie. It is a resonant body that can be called different names but by virtue of its sheer materiality cannot be simply interpreted out of existence. It is at once material and meaningful, vibrant and oral, saz and söz when deployed in tandem with its player.

As German-Iranian scholar Navid Kermani articulates powerfully in his book, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur’an* (1999), most of the foregoing points also hold for the other Qur’an—the ‘Uthmanic Qur’an known to Muslims around the globe. Taking an approach that would thrill Hans Gumbrecht, Kermani sets out to describe “the relationship of Muslims to the Qur’an and the meaning of the aesthetic for that relationship. At its core lies not the work but rather its performance for an audience” (1999:10-11). He understands the book not as an object but as a set of relations “between the text and those who receive it. Beyond these, the claim should be made from the outset, that there is no text” (11).30 It comes into existence through its performance—or, as one of my bağlama-playing, Alevi interlocutors might put it, the object begs to be set into motion through sound, at which point its sonic impact becomes all but irresistible.

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30 Kermani’s work fits nicely in dialogue with similar oralcentric perspectives on the Qur’an explored by scholars like Kristina Nelson (1985) and William Graham (1987), both of whom Kerman cites, as well as more recent scholarship by Michael Sells (and one might expect that more recent work by Michael Sells (1999/2007) and Ingrid Mattson (2008). Nevertheless, many scholars still approach the text as a printed, fixed book—in Gumbrecht’s framework, they largely fail to get beyond a metaphysical hermeneutics.
Kermani cites a quranic *aya* (among many other examples): “And those who disbelieve say, “Do not listen to this Qur’an and speak noisily during [the recitation of] it that perhaps you will overcome” (41:26). He then adds the following commentary by Muhammad Abu Zahras: “The greatest of Muhammad’s adversaries feared that the Qur’an would exert its powerful effect on them when they preferred unbelief to belief and erroneous to upright living. Thus they arranged not to listen to this Qur’an. They knew that everyone who heard it was stirred by its sublime power of expression [erhabenen Ausdruckskraft] which exceeded the powers of men” (in Kermani 1999:70-71). This passage is intriguing as it describes—in a positive light—the kind of overpowering of “perceptual agency” in listening (cf. Monson 2008) that the Qur’an makes possible. But as the language of the original *aya* suggests with the phrase “this Qur’an”—or just as aptly, “this recitation,” *hadha al-qur’ān*—there are other plausible *qur’āns* to be recited and heard with varying relationships to the ‘Uthmanic text now known as the *Qur’an*. Furthermore, these various *qur’āns*, as the *aya* suggests, have competed sonically from the earliest days of Islam. Hasan Doğan, one of the *dedes* at the Berlin *cemevi*, addressed this issue in personal correspondence, writing: “There’s a saying, ‘The word of the enlightened person is the original Qur’an’ [Kamilin Sözü Kuranın Özü]. In Alevi belief, the place of the Seven Great *Ozans* is very important. We accept all the *nefes* poetry they wrote as *ayat* [i.e., quranic verses] from God’s books [hak kitaplarındaki ayet]. Of course all the *deyiş* or *nefes* poems our *Ozans* sang were sung with the *saz* and on their *saz*, they were made sacred.”

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31 Personal correspondence, February 26, 2014.
Drawing on such an understanding of the *bağlama* as stringed Qur’an, I would then conclude simply by saying that the *bağlama* has become—or perhaps was always already—a material margin of Islam. It demarcates a boundary, but paradoxically, because of its thingness, the boundary it stakes out is one that is always becoming—every time the plectrum collides with a course of strings on the instrument, a new instantiation of ephemeral sound and religious possibility comes into existence. And this material margin of Islam then challenges a traditional Qur’an-centered religious practice but nevertheless is part of the same material world with similar material functions, a stringed Other that simultaneously resonates with and in distinction to Islam. Or to put it differently, the question is not “what is Alevism?” but “what is Islam?” Can Turkish Sunni Islam construct itself without Alevism as a kind of *neighbor* (to borrow from Jesus Christ by way of Slavoj Žižek), an Other who is also Self? How does the sonic materiality of this margin (i.e., the *bağlama*) register in the sonic materiality of the center (i.e., the Qur’an). This co-construction is one that probably neither Alevis nor Sunnis would be thrilled to acknowledge. Yet when heard in resonance with “the stringed Qur’an,” Islam becomes just a bit more Alevi.
3.1. Pathway: Freshwater Flows of Shari‘a and Mezhep (Neukölln)

“So have you noticed the difference between Shi‘i and Sunni Muslims?,” Fadi asked me. We had just left Friday prayers at the local Cäferi Shi‘i mosque, the İmam Rıza Islamic Center, in Berlin’s Neukölln neighborhood and were walking and chatting. We strolled down Flughafenstrasse, literally Airport Street, which would lead to Tempelhof Airport if we walked the other direction, which I will in the next chapter. We passed the local arcade—basically a shopping mall built vertically—and Neukölln’s Rathaus, or town hall, turning down Karl-Marx-Strasse, a major thoroughfare through the heart of Turkish, Arab and old-time-German Berlin. I could smell fried chicken and currywurst, especially pungent in the January chill. We were on the lookout—though not too urgently—for a good café to sit and chat, as we occasionally would after prayers. Although I had a good relationship with Fadi, a political scientist of Lebanese descent who lived near me, he tended to steer conversations into heavy topics fairly quickly. So I shouldn’t have been caught off-guard by his question but somehow I was: name the difference. Something observable. As we were drawing close to Burger King (of all places) we encountered some road construction—a jack-hammer drilling, suddenly a group of high school kids chattering loudly, the ring of bike bells. The chaos strangely bought me a moment of quiet to think. I racked my brain for a simplest, noticeable distillation of what characterized Shi‘i Islam: “I find it interesting that you communally recite salawat greetings to the Prophet and his family, the Ehl-i Beyt, so often during prayers.” He shook his head, wrong. We jostled our way across the street away from the construction. As we got to the other side, he turned and placed his hands on his stomach, looking expectantly
at me. Before I could even answer, he said, somewhat impatiently, “We pray with our hands to our sides. Sunnis hold them over their stomach like this.”

Our conversation would range quite a bit that afternoon: how the Shi‘i cleric and head of the Mahdi Army in Iraq, Muqtada al-Sadr, had willingly prayed behind a Sunni imam\(^1\); what really happened at Benghazi; his studies and mine; and the best place in Berlin to find recordings by Bassim al-Karbalayi, a reciter famous for his renditions of laments for the martyr Hüseyin. A great conversationalist, Fadi and I first met in the days leading up to Ashura in late November 2012. We knew each other by sight from Friday prayers from the back of the İmam Rıza mosque; I would sit and listen to the prayer and sermons, while he, as a non-Turkish speaker, was there simply to pray—the sermons were all but irrelevant. The night we finally met I was hustling from the Alevi cemevi in Kreuzberg, biking through the soggy November air. My routine was fairly fixed for the first few days of Muharram: mid-afternoon, head over to the Turkish bookstore in Kottbusser Tor to visit with an Alevi friend who was not religious but whose bookshop offered prime real estate to meet people (and coincidentally run into many of the people who frequented the various congregations I was visiting); by 4 pm, walk a few blocks farther to the cemevi for their muhabbet sessions for Muharram (described in Chapter 2); hang around for dinner or just conversation until about 5:45 pm; then hop on my bike or take the U8 from Kottbusser Tor to İmam Rıza (near U-Bahn station Boddinstrasse) for their matem gatherings, which began with yatsı (nighttime) namaz, beginning around 6:15 pm. As with many pathways through Berlin, it was fastest by bike, but dark (by definition, since the Alevis break their fast after sunset), cold, and sometimes wet.

\(^1\) On January 4, 2013, al-Sadr attended Friday prayers at the Sunni mosque of ‘Abdul Qādir al-Jīlānī in Baghdad (Schreck 2013), following the example of his father (also a cleric, Cockburn 2008:102). He created an audible stir: men crying out in the mosque, women ululating in the courtyard (Schreck 2013).
That evening I had been delayed by a lively conversation with a group of college-age Alevi who were organizing a number of events and activities for Alevi high school students. Also, truth be told, the routine was wearing me down, even though we were only five days into Muharram (i.e., roughly halfway to Ashura). I was always welcome if not actually welcomed at İmam Rıza. No one seemed bothered by my presence necessarily, but it took more active efforts to get to know people there than most other congregations I worked with. In addition, the mosque is relatively small and for their matem gatherings, they would cordon off the whole back half for women and children (about twice as much as is typically reserved for women during Friday prayers). Since they began matem with namaz, space for prostrations was at a real premium, meaning that extra bodies (like mine), while tolerated—as I was told so many times, “This is a
mosque, everyone is welcome here”—were not especially helpful. As such, that particularly evening I allowed things to thing, to hearken back to Heideggerian fieldwork principles (cf. Chapter 1), and I arrived somewhat late. When I arrived, I saw Fadi sitting in the small entryway room next to the shoeracks, listening to the imam’s lamentations. I sat down with him and we listened through the doorway. We talked afterward and within days we started to meet up for other things besides (or after) prayers: tea or lunch or a trip to a Lebanese matem across town.²

One of the great conundrums in ethnography is the question: how typical is a given situation? The İmam Rıza mosque is in many regards very typical for a German-Turkish mosque: it is situated in a Hinterhof courtyard, set back from the street; it was built into a (formerly) residential building; the mosque has connections with other mosques in the city and in Turkey; many of the congregants hail from the same region and many know each other’s families; they are raising money to renovate and expand their mosque; and in addition to prayers, they offer funeral services, youth activities, and so on. Yet as Fadi asked so bluntly, there are differences—plural. These are Shi’a. They come almost exclusively from Iğdır, a Turkish province bordering Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iran, and most identify as Azeri. Which is to say, Azeri-Turkish(-German). The mosque’s affiliations with Hezbollah have been chronicled in several profiles published in Berlin newspapers in the past decade (Musharbash 2006, Schirra 2006, Emmerich 2006). As Shi’a, their religious calendar overlaps in part with Alevis: they both observe Muharram and Ashura, for example, but the evening

² This inter-mosque visitation, as with Sufi congregations, was an important and culturally complex part of matem in Berlin. Popular destinations were Iranian gatherings in Tempelhof and the Lebanese matem I attended with Fadi. But other groups would visit even the two small (numerically and spatially) Caferi congregations, as well as the South Asian (Indian/Pakistani) gatherings held upstairs from the Caferis in Wedding. In these situations, German (and to a certain extent, Persian) became the lingua franca.
matem gatherings for Shi’i congregations run for 10 days until Ashura proper (as opposed to the 12 days for Alevis), commemorated with a special morning matem gathering on Ashura, followed by less frequent matems for more nearly two months. And like Alevis, they too have some tensions with Sunnis, but also observe many other broadly Islamic practices, like fasting in the month of Ramadan (though in a different way from Sunnis).

In the following two chapters, I explore a pair of closely intertwined Islamic “pathways,” shari’a and mezhep, within the sonic context of mosques. Shari’a is a relatively common term and one I have mentioned in previous chapters. The Islamic Encyclopedia published by the Turkish Diyanet Vakfı defines shari’a (şeriat) as follows:
Şeriat. A term meaning the entirety of religious, ethical and legal thinking pertaining to Islam. The word shari’a (plural, sharā’ī), derived from the root shar’, literally meaning ‘to set out in a direction, to continue going, to be clear or to clarify,’ and the word shir’āh mean ‘a flowing, freshwater stream from which people and animals drink water; the paths that lead to this water.’ Over time there have emerged different approaches and explanations of the meaning of the technical term [i.e., shari’a], which appears widely in Islamic sources in which it is used to mean ‘clear and correct rules, forms of established behavior (custom)’ and—like in phrases Jewish şeriat and Christian şeriat—‘the entirety of legal thought based on an Abrahamic religion [bir semavi din].’ (Türcan 2010:571)

Much more than simply “Islamic law,” shari’a signifies something much richer in which movement (setting out, going), knowledge (clarity), and divine law are all bound up in a landscape of waterways and paths leading to that water. That life-giving water is channeled through sound: the bases of shari‘a are the Qur’an, the recitation of God’s word; and sunnah, the words and deeds of the Prophet, as transmitted orally by his companions until years later, like the Qur’an, it was fixed in writing.

Like all systems of law, divinely revealed or not, shari’a is subject to implementation and practice, and at that level, the notion of mezhep is a critical term. Like shari’a, it is etymologically a pathway but like all pathways, its very existence creates difference between those on the path or off. Or more precisely, mezhep defines a subset of legal pathways within shari’a that nonetheless differ from one another in their precise application of that system of legal thought:

Mezhep. Systems of thought possessing unique approaches on matters of understanding and interpreting foundations of religious belief or the application of legal thought; the theological and intellectual accumulation resulting from the creation of schools of thought [ekolleşme] which come into existence around these approaches. The word mezhep is both the verbal noun [masdar] and the noun of place meaning ‘the place one goes and the path,’ from the root zehāb, literally meaning ‘to go.’ As a technical term, it can be defined as ‘the totality of opinions which authoritative âlim legal scholars have produced or the system which they have designated for locating indications [deliller] upon which the primary and secondary legal thought of a religious tradition [din] relies and for bringing forth and interpreting legal decisions from them. (Üzüm 2004:526)

Like shari’a, the etymology of mezhep suggestively signals both the destination and the route—“the place one goes and the path.” In addition, it is paradoxically both a totality—
a system—and a fragment—just one ekol (école), a school of thought—that by definition admits the existence of others.\(^3\) This blend of totality and partialness, of sameness and difference, once again can be traced in sound and materiality: Imam Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Hanafi mezhep that predominates Turkish Sunnism, was himself a former student of Imam Cafer-i Sadık (Ja‘far al-Sādiq), the sixth of the Twelve Imams, and namesake of the Caferi (Twelver Shi‘i) mezhep. According to Shii legend, Abu Hanifa preached a sermon against a few points of his teacher to the applause of his own students, when the deranged wiseman, Bahlul, hurled a dirt clod at him as a form of theological argument and defense of the teachings of Cafer-i Sadık on (im)materiality, the limits of human vision, and agency. When brought before the judge, Bahlul resorted to speech (“verbosity,” Rizvi 1992:21) to defend his actions, which amounted to a material (and complex) rebuttal of the sermon’s points. Bracketing theological points for a moment, I would note that more emphatic accounts end either with Abu Hanifa stunned into silence or the judge laughing—an acquittal in sound.\(^4\)

If the path of shari‘a is subdivided into multiple paths of mezhep, how does this layered pathway emerge among contemporary Berlin Caferis? One answer might be to pile on even more pathways, based on a close reading of the ethical demands placed on

\(^3\) *Mezhep* is typically often rendered as “juristic schools” or “schools of Islamic jurisprudence” (cf. Calder, et al. 2014).

\(^4\) In all accounts (of this obviously one-sided tale), Bahlul is acquitted. More emphatically, Abu Hanifa is silent: “Everyone in the court was stunned at this and Abu Hanifa was dumb founded [sic] – having nothing to say. So [Bahlul] was released without any punishment” (Sheriff and Alloo n.d.:11). Several versions of the laughing judge-motif appear on Internet forums, a rich source for popular lore and less-official accounts of Islamic culture. Hasnicktir, a Turkish-speaking user on a Dutch web forum, posted a version entitled “Abu Hanifa’s theology” (*Ebu Hanife’nin ilmi*), concluding with the verdict: “Upon hearing this, Harun al-Rashid laughed and acquitted him [Bunun üzerine Harun-i Reşid gülerek onu affetti]” (2009). As with most oral traditions, the historicity of this tale is flimsy at best—ethnography, like historiography, tends to have “little patience with dreams and legends as explanation” (Kafadar 1996:9), yet the very plausibility of such tales—the aspect that allows and encourages them to be told and retold in the first place—attests to an understanding that continues today that these mezheps emerged in literal dialogue with one other.
Shi’a. For example, in Şiiliğe Bakaş (A View of Shi’ism), Muhammad Ali Şimali gives the ten different amel, or works, that make up the “Furu-u Din” (Arabic furū’ al-dīn), literally the roots of the faith (2009:141-154). Corresponding closely to the well-known “Five Pillars” of Sunni Islam, the first of these are: namaz, the Ramadan fast, hajj to Mecca, charity (zekat). Next comes a one-fifth “tithe,” or humus. Already in Şimali’s account of these first few “roots,” one sees traces of paths: the phrase “Allahu akbar” in namaz should be accompanied “with the intention of drawing close [yaklaşıma] to God” (141); a similar intent of approaching God should accompany fasting and zekat charity (143, 147); the hajj is literally holy travel (and raises the question of whether a pathway is holy in itself or simply by virtue of a holy destination); again in a literal sense, stranded travelers (yolda kalmışlar) are designated recipients of humus (147); additionally the deeper meanings of zekat are taught to those “on Allah’s path” through the Qur’an (145).

The sixth of these “roots”—is this a rhizome yet?—is much more emphatic still: striving on the path of God. In contemporary American discourse, the word I render as “striving” is well-known (if not necessarily well-understood) even without translation: jihad. This phrase, especially in Arabic (jihād fī sabīl illāh), the path (or figuratively, cause) of God, has become a motto for militant Islamic fundamentalists but at its heart jihad is “polysemantic,” as Asma Afsarrudin describes (2013:2ff.), carrying multiple

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5 This book was one of several I was given while visiting the two Berlin Caféri mosques. (Besides the one in Neukölln I discuss at length here, another one is located in the borough of Wedding.) I very much appreciate both the generosity and the guided reading, though on at least one occasion (see below), the gifting of books seemed an act of exasperation when direct conversation seemed to fail. In any case, I privilege these texts in my ethnographic thought slightly more than others because of their provenance. I also maintain the Turkish transliteration of the author’s name (instead of the more common Ali Shomali) both because of this ethnographic factum and also for ease of bibliographic reference.

6 The final four roots are: enjoining good; forbidding evil; tevellâ, or loving God and his friends (Allah’ı ve Allah dostlarını sevmek); and teberrâ, distancing oneself from God’s enemies (152-154).
meanings that entail patience in personal suffering as much as weaponry. Şimali also emphasizes at length the “greater jihad” against one’s own ego, or nefs, while also highlighting polysemy, though for him this multiplicity comes, at least parenthetically, in the form of media: “Let jihad be carried out in whatever form it may be (by the pen, the tongue, or weapons), it is a ritual [ibadettir]” (150). In my conclusion I return to the kinds of media formations that ritual entails but for the moment, Şimali’s notion is suggestive in highlighting the struggle to define the struggle of jihad, a landscape inscribed with multiplicities of pathways competing with one another yet traversing similar (if not identical ground). The mapping of these pathways (including jihad) forms a cartographic backdrop for the mosque-based worship I describe here. For example, (parts of) the Berlin-based, ethnically Azeri-Turkish-German congregation at İmam Rıza mosque vocally (and literally so, in some of their matem ceremonies) supports the Lebanese Hezbollah, an institution with a significant historical connection to jihad, while railing week after week in Friday sermons against the trifecta of “Zionists, Imperialists and Salafists” (i.e., Sunni fundamentalists) penetrating Syria to overthrow the Assad government.

7 Faisal Devji’s Landscapes of the Jihad (2005) offers a fascinating account of landscape as a metaphor (i.e., for all the possible variants of jihad in all different places) and also as a trope in centuries-old Sufi poetry and contemporary jihadi media. While Islam is sometimes envisioned in “architectural terms” (e.g., a building with five pillars), “the landscape of Sufis was dominated by images of caves, ruins and wilderness….The imaginative power of this landscape, which has been celebrated in poetry for a millennium now, was taken up and transformed by Muslim movements of all kinds, including today’s jihad” (44). Significantly, migration—a central thematic in Berlin—is present in these mountainous landscapes: “The salience of the jihad’s use of hijrat [i.e., migration, especially in Islamic history] is that it opens up a whole new landscape for moral action, a wild and disordered landscape distant from the urban centers of juridical Islam—namely the landscape of mysticism and poetry” (46).

Yet for all the etymological pathways given here, one key term remains: Shi’a itself. According to Iranian cleric and philosopher, Allame Tabatabai, in his consideration of “the true identity [hüviyet] of the Shi’a mezhep” (1998:21): “The word Shi’a, which literally means ‘follower,’ is used for all those who recognize the special right to the succession [hilafet makamı] of the Generous Prophet (s.a.w.) by his family line [sülale] and who follow the school [mektep] of the Ehl-i Beyt in their teachings of Islam” (25). Obviously tradition, culture and din far exceed reductive etymologies of words, yet a phrase like Tabatabai’s “Shi’a mezhep,” taking both terms more literally, becomes “a pathway of followers.” Granted, they must follow someone (i.e., the Prophet and his family, especially the 12 Imams) and yet this image suggests another important aspect of pathways generally: difference and repetition. Pathways by definition dig out a groove, a furrow distinct surroundings; the furrow is made more permanent the more times it is used, a metaphysical anti-consumption. Recursions, returns, repetitions tramp down and carve out stability, and in stability, singularity—difference from surroundings.

The pathway of mezhep, “the place one goes and the path,” overlaid on the shari’a, the oasis-like streams of ethical living, joined with the sabīl ullāh, God’s path, or din, all become material through the repeated traversal of followers. These followers, izleyici, transform a trace (iç) of earlier trailblazers into a living, breathing, sounding community,

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9 I use the Turkish spelling both to minimize bibliographic confusion for readers and also to reflect my personal history with this book but the more common transliteration convention would be Muhammad Husayn Tabatabaei. Allame, or Allāmah, is a spiritual title. Like the aforementioned book by Ali Şimali (Ali Shomali), this book was a gift to me. Tabatabai begins his account with a discussion of din, Islam, and Shi’a, describing din in shari’a-like terms as “the entire body of laws [yasaların tümü] which entail one’s religious duty in life.” Din may then subdivide into mezheps “if divisions and factions emerge” (1998:23). For him, Shi’a and Sunni Islam (Ehl-i Sünnet) are “the two great Islamic mezheps” (21).

10 Tabatabai makes this connection of din and path explicit in the same opening section. Din, he explains, “is the path which leads to God [Allah’a ulaşılan yol]” and “those who accept Islam as the true faith [hak din] immediately enter into God’s path” (1998:24).
a cemaat (congregation) and a cami (mosque). The path, itself a groove in the earth, leaves its own grooves—its iz—in the body of the faithful, themselves bodies made of earth. Five namaz prayers a day, two to four rekats per namaz, in each rekat dozens of words of holy recitation. Every Friday, congregational prayer. The holy months of Muharram and Ramadan, subdividing the year into asymmetrical parts: lament or fast, tears or praying—well into the night, either way.

Deleuze writes in *Difference and Repetition*: “To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent. And perhaps this repetition at the level of external conduct echoes, for its own part, a more secret vibration which animates it, a more profound, internal repetition within the singular” (1994 [1968]:1). One of Deleuze’s two protagonists in the book, Kierkegaard (the other being Nietzsche), serendipitously localizes these “echoes [of] secret vibration” even more concretely in his own meditation on the topic, *Repetition*. In order to test “whether repetition was possible and what it mean[s],” he suddenly thinks: “you can go to Berlin, since you were there once before, you could in this way learn whether repetition was possible and what it meant” (2009:3). Meaningful repetition is embodied and located in an actual place and material experience. For Henry Louis Gates too, the prized art of “(re)double[d]” communication (in African-American culture) “turns upon repetition and difference, or repetition and reversal,” yielding layer upon layer of sonic histories, “histories of its internal repetition and revision process” (1988:44, 63).

Histories forged in suffering, recalled through sound, and repeated. Followed-upon. The grooves of sonic history, of ritual, and of repetition. The materiality of a Berlin mosque.
3.2 The Mosque is a Medium, I: Amplified Deadness at Ashura

You’re asking me about microphones in our mosque? These are the wrong questions—you shouldn’t be asking them, and I shouldn’t be answering them. Didn’t you say you were studying music? These questions are political.

— Cemalettin Türkyılmaz, president, İmam Rıza mosque, Berlin-Neukölln¹

Every part of the mosque takes into consideration acoustics.

— Ender Çetin, president, Şehitlik mosque, Berlin-Neukölln²

mutisme/silence:
Like a bad concert hall, affective space contains dead spots where the sound fails to circulate. The perfect interlocutor, the friend, is he not the one who constructs around you the greatest possible resonance? Cannot friendship be defined as a space with total sonority? […]

pleurer/crying:
Who will write the history of tears? In which societies, in which periods, have we wept?

— Roland Barthes³

According to legend, during the construction of Süleymaniye mosque in Istanbul, Mimar Sinan, the greatest architect of the Ottoman Empire, was found one day smoking a nargile, or hookah, pipe inside the mosque. Word reached the Sultan, Süleyman the Magnificent (Kanuni), who came to learn for himself what was going on. To his dismay, upon entering the mosque he found that the rumors were true: his chief architect sat beneath the mosque’s dome, puffing away. Shouting across the mosque, he demanded to know the reason for such behavior. Sinan calmly pointed out that his pipe contained only water, and that he was listening to the sound of its bubbles reverberating through the

¹ Interview with author, January 25, 2013.
² Interview with author, January 18, 2013.
mosque to ensure that the sound of the imam’s voice, directing prayers from the mihrab, or prayer niche, would reach congregants in all parts of the mosque with clarity.4

In the following two chapters, I pick up where Mimar Sinan and his nargile pipe left off: listening to the acoustics of mosques and the role sound plays in mosque-based worship. But the sonic life of mosques in Berlin differs rather dramatically in many cases from the religious practice Sinan would have designed for. As with so many aspects of Islam in this dissertation, difference is made manifest through sound—and so it is with mosque-based worship. While mosques are sometimes seen as monolithic representatives of a singular Islam, differences in mezhep (theological/legal “pathway”), in architecture and real estate (whether built, owned or rented), and in geography create highly individualized modes of sounding among different mosques in Berlin and around the globe. I focus primarily on two mosques in Berlin’s Neukölln neighborhood that articulate this divergence in practices: first, the İmam Rıza Islamic Center (İslam Merkezi), the meetingplace of a small Caferi Shi’i congregation of mostly Azeri-Turks located near Neukölln Town Hall; and in the following chapter, Şehitlik mosque, a large Sunni mosque and arguably the best-known piece of Islamic architecture in the city, located near the airport-turned-public-park at Tempelhof.

For all their differences—and there are many—these two mosques illustrate a basic reality of sound in Muslim congregational worship: that a mosque is a medium. It mediates materially between individual and community, mundane and sacred, private and

4 My narrative here is a composite account based on a detailed telling by Ender Çetin (2013), the administrator of the Şehitlik mosque in Berlin-Neukölln, as well as more terse versions in conversations with rank-and-file congregants and various uncited tellings online. The definitive scholarly treatment on Sinan’s life is Necipoğlu 2005, while Mutbul Kayılı has occasionally published (1988, 1996, 2005) on the acoustics of Sinan’s architecture in particular. Neither mentions this story of Sinan, however, though it clearly circulates widely in oral tradition.
public, living and dead, and so on. More specifically, a mosque is a medium in three senses related to sound. First, it is a physical medium in which soundwaves pass and resonate. Second, it is a technological medium, as Friedrich Kittler proposed, combining recording, processing and transmitting of information—especially rituals in and through sound, a very particular kind of information. Third, it is a medium of communication between the living and the dead, a theological site for communion beyond the confines of mortality through embodied sound. This channeling of presence between living and dead is most prominent for Shi’ā during their gatherings during the holy month of Muharram, as the living experience the presence of ancient martyrs; but at Şehitlik Mosque, which is built into a cemetery, the living are given special opportunities to make utterances for and to the dead (Chapter 4).

The mediality of mosques comes about first and foremost through the sheer, physical material of their architecture, which traditionally was designed to amplify certain sounds within that sacred space while muting others. More recently, this architectural mediality has been augmented by technologies more readily associated with mediums and media: microphones and loudspeakers, video cameras and television screens.⁵ In Berlin mosques like İmam Rıza and Şehilik, the traditional mediality of the mosque—primarily a consequence of its architecture—is challenged by a new mediality of microphones and loudspeakers that re-map the acoustic space of the mosque.

This re-mapping is paradoxical to a certain degree, as the use of electrical amplification attempts to address the same difficulties as does the architectural

⁵ Furthermore, the advent and broad circulation of smartphones that can readily record sound and images (both moving and still) adds yet another layer of what some scholars might call “remediation” (cf. Bolter and Grusin, 1999, Philipsen and Qvortup 2007, or Eril, et al., 2009).
amplification but the two frequently undermine one another. For example, how can the imam’s voice reach congregants most clearly and powerfully? Traditional solutions were enacted through architecture; contemporary solutions rely on microphones. The simultaneous resonances of these two solutions often compete with one another, resulting in a kind of acoustic palimpsest, one layer (amplification) upon the other (architecture), but both perceptible. This sonic layering is then further complicated by the challenges of Islamic architecture in Berlin, where mosques are generally not built outright, but rather remodeled from existing structures like apartment buildings. These so-called “courtyard mosques” (Hinterhofmoscheen) lack certain traditional mosque features (high domes, resonant surfaces), leading to an architectural deadening of sound.

A final sonic layer comes into play when people—with their voices, their bodies, their clothes, their prayer beads—enter a mosque like İmam Rıza. These acoustics are especially powerful during matem gatherings held frequently in the month of Muharram to lament the martyrdom of Husayn and his companions at Karbala in the year 680 CE. Focusing on those commemorative gatherings, I highlight here an acoustics of deadness, as a phenomenon of both architectural acoustics (i.e., non-reverberance) and theology (i.e., martyrdom). Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut have argued for an idea of intermundane sound worlds in which “the living do not one-sidedly handle the dead, but participate in an inter-handling, a mutually effective co-laboring” (2010:14). But here, that sonic co-laboring is not an artifact of recording technology and modernity per se (though both are significant); rather deadness can be heard in longstanding rituals and contingent religious architecture in Berlin. In both cases, deadness is a challenge to be overcome, an acoustic state to be resisted and enlivened—often in very political ways.
Entering the Hinterhof

“Just write your personal information down here and explain why you’re here.”

“What kind of personal information?,” I asked, slightly puzzled. “Your name, address, phone number, and what you’re studying,” he responded. I was sitting in the office of Cemalettin Türkyılmaz, the president of the İmam Rıza Islamic Center in Neukölln, Berlin, a middle-aged man who spoke Turkish with an accent I struggled to place. His office felt like the innermost core of the mosque: from the street, I had entered into a typical Berlin courtyard surrounded on three and luckily happened upon an older man walking across the courtyard from the bathroom and ablutions room in the basement; he then led me up a side staircase outside the off-white building inside into a small café—a standard affair for Berlin mosques—on the second floor; he led me across that room, where a handful of men sat sipping tea and chatting before Friday prayers, while across the room a man stood preparing tea in a small kitchenette; from there, we entered a doorway in the back corner near a small library and he introduced me to Cemalettin, leaving us to talk in privacy there in his office. After only the briefest of introductions, Cemalettin sprang to his feet to arrange tea for both of us and I was left to sit and listen to the distinctive tink-tink of tea with sugarcubes and muse on the décor around the room: a few books on a shelf, a calendar, and no windows, as we were tucked in the deepest recesses of the building.

When he returned, he asked me again: so what are you doing here? Explaining ethnomusicology to an impatient audience is difficult on the best of days, but it becomes exponentially more difficult to communicate adequately when all parties involved agree
there is no music available to be heard. “So you study music? And why are you here then?” The questions were fair but also presupposed so much about what we both understood music to be. “I’m interested in sound in Islamic rituals,” I explained. He suggested I come back at Ashura (which I would do—and it would indeed prove sonically rich, whether as “music” or “sound”). He asked how I chose their mosque but was unsatisfied when I responded that I wanted to hear Shi’i rituals. Our conversation continued in this way until it was nearly time for prayers. At that point, he asked what I wanted concretely, to which I responded I simply wanted to attend prayers—regularly. “The mosque is open to everyone,” he replied, and agreed to help me get set up in an appropriate place to sit. But before doing so, he asked me to leave my contact information, which he deposited hastily in his desk drawer. I was on the record.

We walked back out of his office, out of the café, down the stairs into the courtyard, and into the mosque itself, located on ground level. We entered first into a small entryway with racks for shoes and pegs on the wall for coats—thankfully unnecessary on this gorgeous Friday in June. Even before we entered, we could hear the sound of someone reciting the Qur’an with a microphone and loudspeakers. I did not recognize the sura but I remember thinking that whoever was reciting was moving deliberately—not quite slowly but with careful attention—from word to word. With our shoes removed, we then passed through a second door into the musalla, the actual space for prayer. By the time we arrived, most of the men from upstairs were sitting in the mosque getting ready for prayers. We walked past them to the back corner of a long, rectangular room with a low-ceiling. He pointed out a place for me to sit, about 15 feet behind the nearest member of the congregation with plenty of room to “sit comfortably”
(i.e., cross-legged, as opposed to kneeling on top of my feet). I sat down and was immediately struck by the thickness of the carpet—fairly standard for a mosque, but it felt like new, at least back where I was sitting. The air hung with a light rosewater scent, again like many other mosques I had visited in Berlin, but somehow distinct. Although I would never feel entirely comfortable in this mosque, the familiar smell always gave a sense of belonging.

Much of the area in the back of the mosque had been set aside with thick black drapes that hung from rungs almost as high as the ceiling all the way to the ground—a space for women to pray within the same room but effectively not the same ritual space. A large flatscreen TV had been set up at the front of the women’s area, connected to a small high-definition video camera aimed at the front corner of the room where an elevated chair with thick wooden armrests. As other men entered, each would greet the group audibly, esselamu aleykülm, and a quiet murmur would answer back, waleyküm selam. Before long, the imam arrived, donning a long brown robe and placing a white turban on his head. By this time, the area in front of me had begun to fill up too, with each congregation carrying a small taş (turbah, a small stone or piece of dried earth) and prayer beads, both available at the door for those who may not be carrying them.

The imam took his place in the elevated seat—which doubled as a kursi seat and the minber staircase from which Berlin Sunni imams preach on Fridays. The sermon that followed was broken into two parts, with congregational prayers interspersed. The imam, Sabahattin Türkyılmaz, carries the title Hüccet-ül İslam Vel-Müslimin Şeyh: the Authority (or proof) of Islam and the Muslims, and Sheikh. His voice has a certain pleasing quality to it, not fiery per se, but with a real sense for dramatic crescendo and
pause. The first part of his *hutbe* that day dealt with the birth and life of Imam ‘Ali, extolling his courage, then after prayers, shifting gears completely (to my ears) to speak in support of the Syrian government as it fought off an unholy trinity of Salafists (Sunni fundamentalists), Zionists, and Imperialists.

Such vitriol notwithstanding, the most memorable aspect of the prayers was the sound of rushing wind that blew through the congregation during whispered recitations. In Sunni congregations, these portions are barely mouthed, perhaps audible only to the next person in the *saf* prayer-row. But when the entire congregation began whispering, the sheer sound of it caught me off-guard (I was still sitting in the back, admittedly somewhat tuned out), and gave me chills. It was such a strange sound to hear indoors—it could have been wind or flowing water, but it enlivened the sonic space of the room unlike anything I had heard in a mosque before. It was delicate but powerful, a sound that would stay in my ears for several days after the prayers.

After prayers I spoke with Cemalettin in the courtyard as other congregants streamed out. He asked what I thought but before I could answer, another person jumped into the conversation and suddenly we were talking about what *mezhep* the Companions of the Prophet would have belonged to and the difficulties of placing Alevism into a *mezhep*—all topics he initiated with Cemalettin, as I listened with curiosity. The courtyard bubbled with conversation. It was a gorgeous day and I would have happily stood and soaked in the sun the whole afternoon had I not booked for myself a full afternoon and evening: a phone interview, a trip across town to Alt-Moabit to meet Halit Çelik at the Berlin Saz Evi, a concert in Kreuzberg’s Tiyatron, followed by a Cerrahi
zikr in Wedding that would keep me out until 3 am. Fridays were primetime. I excused myself and slipped out the courtyard, back onto the street. Back into the rest of Berlin.

**Music Concrete: Listening to Mosques as Architecture**

What does it mean to listen to a mosque? The study of mosques as architecture is a rich intellectual tradition dating back centuries. However, these studies (including contemporary research) have almost always privileged the visual (e.g., calligraphic inscription, visual monumentality, light), the spatial (e.g., domes, courtyards and surrounding complexes) and the functional (e.g., the communal/social life that grows out from the mosque, additional buildings like schools, hospitals, inns, and cemeteries). When sound is considered in a mosque, it is most often associated with the very public practice of the *ezan*, or call to prayer, traditionally issued from the minaret of the mosque. But apart from occasional legends about architects or other incidental stories, the sound *inside* a mosque has rarely attracted much attention—except as semantic information, as when Friday sermons are cited for their content. But as in other aspects of Islamic religious life (cf. Kermani 1999, Graham 1987) and similar to other groups seen here already (Sufis, Alevis), sound plays a central role in mosque-based worship, to the point that the entire architecture of a mosque can be understood in terms of its acoustic function. This internal soundspace is all the more pertinent in German Islam, where public calls to prayer are generally forbidden (cf. Şen 2002, Bas 2008).

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7 Two significant exceptions to this rule are Nina Ergin’s work on Qur’anic recitation in 16th-century Istanbul mosques (2008) and Bissera Pentcheva’s recent examination of Hagia Sophia as a “multisensory” space (2011), in addition to the aforementioned work of Mutbul Kayılı.
Standard descriptions of mosque architecture might be described as a discourse of protrusion. Architectural objects that differentiate themselves from the surrounding built environment are named and highlighted. The most foundational of these is the aforementioned mihrab, usually translated as a prayer niche. Most often, the mihrab’s function is tied to the very practical function of signifying the qibla, or direction in which the holy city of Mecca lies. Believers should face this direction while praying. But strangely, when considered from Berlin, such rationale takes on new meaning. While mosque architecture in most Islamicate lands orients mosques themselves toward Mecca—so the entirety of a building wall faces the city—Berlin mosques typically lack this control, so congregants end up lining up at skewed angles relative to the buildings’ walls. Carpet designs with lines or other lengthwise patterns become a crucial point of orientation, not aligned to the walls of the building in most cases, but rather to the qibla. Many congregants have pointed out to me the added importance of the mihrab in places like Berlin for such cosmic orientation.

But why then have a mihrab in Turkey? And even if the answer is to orient those praying, why build it as a niche rather than with just visual ornamentation on the wall or patterning on carpets? The answer is best heard, rather than seen—though many miharrabs undoubtedly add tremendous beauty to the mosque. During the course of many rek’at, or cycles of bowing and prostration, the imam recites certain key phrases: Allahu akbar, sami’ allahu li-man hamida, and so on. But his leadership in prayer is simultaneously vocal and physical, so that he recites these phrases while also moving through the same bowing, kneeling and prostrating motions as the congregation. These motions affect where his head is, with some phrases being uttered as he bows his face to the floor or lifts
it up from it. Not coincidentally, his position is not simply at the front of the congregation, but directly in front of the mihrab. The mihrab itself is constructed with hard-surfaced materials (usually tiled), often with grooved channels as part of the mukarnes, a corbel cut into the top of the niche. The reflective surface and these grooved channels direct sound backward, up and over the imam as he prostrates and rises, allowing believers behind him to hear and follow along. In other words, the mihrab functions as a non-electric, architectural form of sound amplification.⁸

This sonic interaction between a community of prostrating bodies, the voice of the imam (and sometimes the voices of the whole congregation), and the architecture of the mosque itself is richly complex, relying on architectural innovation to maximize the acoustics of the entire ritual. Much as Laura Marks has argued for the visual complexity of Islamic design and its relevance to media studies (2010), I would point out that the acoustic design of Islamic architecture—not unlike Christian churches in Europe—showed clear preoccupations with shaping sensation, and especially hearing, in ways that we frequently associate with “the soundscape of modernity” (cf. Thompson 2004) and contemporary practices of sound design emerging from the digital.⁹ Indeed, while architectural studies has begun to turn its attention to phenomena of sound in space (e.g., Blesser and Salter 2006), this intersection of sensation and the (often built) landscape still lags far behind analogous work on visual culture (e.g., film and architecture).¹⁰

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⁸Not surprisingly, the size of a typical mihrab is roughly the size of a person standing upright, even sloping inward at the top as though following the contours of the head. (Naturally there are also exceptions to this rule in larger mosques built to accommodate thousands of congregants.)

⁹Although these characteristics typify modern architecture, they can also be seen piecemeal over centuries in Europe, from ancient Greece through the Christian Middle Ages.

¹⁰The tradition of writing about architecture and cinema that includes contemporary authors like Emily Thompson and Giuliana Bruno (1993, 2002) can be traced back at least to Walter Benjamin’s writings on
The architectural features of the *mihrab* described above are hardly exceptional. Among the other “protruding” features of a mosque, the *minber* and *kursi* pulpits likewise offer natural modes of amplification for other facets of ritual worship. The *minber* is typically a staircase located just to the right of the *mihrab*, offering an elevated position for the imam or *hatip*, a designated preacher, to offer the *hutbe*, or Friday sermon. As a staircase, the *minber* requires its speaker to stand, giving greater vocal projection, and its position generally places the speaker quite close to the body of the congregation. The *kursi*, meaning literally a seat, is a smaller pulpit (often located to the side of the mosque) where a designated speaker may give a sermon or recite passages from the Qur’an prior to the formal beginning of prayers on Fridays. Like the *minber*, but in less pronounced ways, the *kursi* elevates the speaker, giving added projection to his voice and in turn making it easier for the congregation to hear his speech. As mentioned above, however, these two functions are combined at İmam Rıza in Neukölln, while other Berlin mosques only have the *minber* staircase or neither.

One obvious omission from my discussion thus far is the *kubbe*, or dome, that so often graces mosques, especially in the Ottoman style exemplified by Süleymaniye and the other mosques Mimar Sinan designed. Few mosques in Berlin are built with *kubbes* (even among those that were built specifically as mosques), but one feature that works hand-in-hand with them is carpeting, which is found in almost all mosques. As with the

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arcades (1999). In addition, certain filmmakers like Heinz Emigholz (e.g., *Sense of Architecture*, 2007) or Alexander Kluge (e.g., *Brutalität im Stein*, 1961) engage this topic quite actively. With regards to sound, perhaps sound artists and composers have taken the lead vis-à-vis research, ranging from Iannis Xenakis’s iconic design of the Philips Pavilion in 1958 with LeCorbusier to Francisco López’s *Buildings [New York]* project (2001).

11 *Hatip* literally means “the one who delivers a *hutbe* speech,” but the task defaults to the imam in most congregations in Berlin.
mihrab, carpeting can be understood to serve multiple purposes, giving those praying a softer surface to kneel on. Even this function has acoustic significance, as the sound of gravity pulling bodies to the ground as worshipers drop to their knees is one of the most distinctive sounds of mosques—and an instance of communal, bodily sounding that is not often encountered outside of a mosque. But the carpet in a large, domed mosque creates a tension in acoustic design. On the one hand, sound traveling upward from the imam or muezzin (the designated reciter of the ezan, or call to prayer) is reflected without much interference at all. This was presumably what Mimar Sinan was testing—the acoustic reflectivity of the kubble at the Süleymaniye mosque. But sound reflecting from the kubble back downward, toward the gathered congregation is mostly absorbed and scattered by the carpeting and bodies. The result is an acoustic space more ambiguously resonant than, say, many Catholic cathedrals, which traditionally consists of vaulted open spaces above the congregation, but with many hard, reflective surfaces on the ground as well (cf. Paoletti 2013). Or even Hagia Sophia, which Bissera Pentcheva and her team of acousticians are currently exploring in their Icons of Sound project. Formerly a church (Hagia Sophia) then the central mosque of Ottoman Istanbul (Ayasofya) and now a museum, the building no longer has carpet, a significant acoustic change leading to greater reflectiveness and reverberation. In a mosque, carpets offer a muting of that

12 In addition to measuring acoustics and exploring the historical implications of those findings, the Icons of Sound project also focuses on contemporary performance of space itself throughauralization, a process by which the acoustics of one space (e.g., Hagia Sophia) can be measured and re-created or “rendered” in another space (e.g., a concert hall in California) by means of amplification and loudspeaker diffusion (Abel, et al. 2013). The vocal ensemble Cappella Romana gave a concert in Bing Concert Hall at Stanford on February 1, 2013 that entailed just such an auralization—a process much like the acoustic remapping I describe here (amplification layered on top of architectural acoustics). Notably, performance in this newly rendered acoustic space altered vocalists’ performance behavior (e.g., singing at slower tempos to deal with a reverberation times up to almost 11 seconds; adjusting drone pitches to find building resonances) (Countryman 2013). Although I have no historical evidence for the claim, it seems impossible to imagine that muezzins, imams, and qaris (reciters of the Qur’an) would not have made similar sonic adjustments.
reflectiveness. Perhaps a more apt comparison is the acoustic space of storefront churches in the United States,\footnote{Cf. Kostarelos 1995 and Abrums 2010.} often sites for disaporic communities that have not yet built their way into local soundscapes with their own religious architecture. Here too the numinous quality of reverberant space is unavailable.

Most mosques in Berlin are not built as mosques, let alone with domes or vaulted ceilings; instead, they are rented spaces, often located far back from the street. These mosques, known as \textit{Hinterhofmoscheen}, or “courtyard mosques,” thus lack the kind of resonant architecture of a dome, and in fact often have very low ceilings, which are all the more pronounced because the prayer room is otherwise entirely open except a few pillars. Yet carpeting is still ubiquitous. The result is an architectural space that is actually quite dead, acoustically speaking. Mosques deal with this deadness in different ways, most often by using microphones to project and considerable reverb on the microphones. Indeed, the absence of reverb is more noteworthy than its presence, as made clear to me by one prayer-goer at the Mevlana mosque in Kreuzberg who described the visiting hatip one Friday as “having such a beautiful voice that he didn’t \textit{need} any reverb” (and only very little was used). I discuss the use of sound amplification in more detail below, but it bears repeated mention that this amplification is always bound up closely with the existing architectural choices and constraints of mosques.

These sonic protrusions of mosques are the most commonly mentioned “features” of mosques. But of course, many parts of mosques shape and limit the sound of that space. For example, windows play an important acoustic role that is often tied closely to the question of body heat: as more congregants gather, the room warms and, in response,
windows are often opened. This creates a rupture between any straightforward notion of interiority and exteriority of sacred space, as sounds from either side of the window are able to pass through. Thus at Mevlana mosque, located right along the street at Kottbusser Tor in Kreuzberg, sounds of the U-Bahn, passing traffic (including fairly frequent sirens), pedestrians, bicycles (including their bells), and other urban sounds drift into the mosque. Conversely, sounds from within the mosque—especially those like the Friday sermon or call to prayer—can easily (if somewhat faintly) pass outside to the street. Since the windows are often opened during the course of Friday prayers, one of the more interesting moments for this sonic mingling of the urban and the sacred comes immediately after prayers, as a few remaining devotees sit at various points around the room (usually scattered quite evenly) and recite the Qur’an aloud—with the windows still open. During my time in Berlin, the mosque was undergoing remodeling to extend the back of the mosque. The construction crews would take a break and join the congregation for prayers, but would then resume work immediately thereafter. Thus the sound of construction swirled together with trains and bike bells while reciters sat contemplatively in the midst of this sound and re-articulated the sacred text of the Qur’an—a text that insists upon its own orality. In courtyard mosques, like İmam Rıza, the sound of an open window is a part of the community—children playing (sometimes loudly), or women talking about food being prepared for a special meal afterward.

In addition to windows, racks for shoes and tesbih, or prayer beads, also create mundane but important sites of sounding. The sound of shoes is actually almost non-existent until congregants exit prayers. At this point, they take their shoes from a communal rack and then, in order to put them on, frequently drop them on the ground.
This sound, like that of knees hitting the floor, articulates nothing less than gravity, yet does so in a manner so mundane that most either disregard the sound or even try to stifle it. The sound of shoes falling also indirectly articulates fine points of theology, as most schools of *sharia*, or Islamic law, specify certain numbers of prayer cycles (*rek’a*) that must be completed, while others later in the prayer are optional. As a result, partway through the prayer, many congregants may (and frequently do) get up and leave. Again to use Mevlana mosque as an example, this exit is marked acoustically most clearly not by these worshipers standing up or walking through the carpeted prayer space, but by the sound of their shoes hitting the floor.

Most mosques in Berlin also have a rack for tesbih prayer beads. These racks are by themselves relatively quiet, but many congregants take a set (or bring their own). The quiet clicking of beads buzzes throughout the prayer space before prayers begin, as well as at certain moments in the prayer service (especially at the end), where congregants recite a certain number of set phrases (e.g., *subhanallah*). In Shi‘ite mosques like İmam Rıza, the placement of tesbih is part of an important ritual of spacing. In addition to these beads, congregants pick up (or bring) a small prayer stone (*taş*) taken from Kerbala, the site of the martyrdom of Hüseyin and his family. When prayers begin, congregants set their stone on the ground, approximating the distance of their prostration so that their foreheads will land not on the carpet but on the stone. Next to the stone, they then drop their tesbih beads—always with a quiet but distinct timbre and sound quality—once again creating a subtly spatialized soundspace in the mosque, articulating gravity and personal space. As a sidenote (which I will return to later), many now also place their phones and
sometimes keys on the ground in front of them. On more than one occasion, the mosque floor has lit up with the idiosyncratic buzz of vibrating cellphones.

Finally, I would mention one sound whose absence is extremely important: the voices of women. It will come as no surprise that women play no clerical role in most of the congregations I visited. (At the cemevi, women did have leadership roles in the institution broadly but not in its religious councils/rituals. Also, although I do not write about it here, another prominent exception to this norm is the Mevlevi lodge (Mevlevihane) in the town of Trebbus in Brandenburg, which is jointly led by Sheikh Abdullah Halis Dornbrach and his wife, Sheikkh Nuriye Krieg-Dornbrach.) Women often participate but in some kind of emended space or capacity (i.e., being sequestered in other physical spaces for prayers), usually far enough away that they can be neither seen nor heard. In some smaller mosques, however, like İmam Rıza, the only division between men and women is a heavy curtain. Although their voices rarely penetrate this curtain, the sound of the door opening and closing serves as an acoustic reminder of an invisible presence, participating and yet definitively separate.¹⁴

Some would argue that these less intentioned sounds—prayer beads, windows and doors, shoeracks—have no relevance to understanding the soundspace of a mosque. Certainly as sounds themselves, they have less explicit ritual importance than, say, affirmations during a prayer (amīn, or communal greetings pronounced upon the prophet) yet they also index extremely important social realities in a mosque: personal space and body movements during prayers, the presence (or absence) of children and women, and

¹⁴ I would another important exception to this norm at İmam Cafer-i Sadık mosque, a Caferi mosque in Wedding—formerly part of the same congregation as İmam Rıza—which I discuss at the end of this chapter. Even prior to that discussion, it bears mention that so many of these arrangements are deeply contingent on real estate, architectural space, a particular imam, the needs of a congregation at a given time, etc. Diasporic Islam repeatedly makes clear that there is no singular, universal version of Islam.
rituals of cleanliness (like the removing of shoes). These social realities are not merely context, as they might otherwise be understood in ethnomusicology; they are integral components of the resonant space of the mosque, behaviors tied to particular parts of the mosque-as-medium that are transmitted from one generation of worshipers to the next without registering as a distinctly aural phenomenon.

An Archaeology of Pious Amplification

If the traditional architectural “features” of a mosque vary widely from mosque to mosque—especially in postmigrant contexts as in Berlin’s “courtyard mosques”—one feature that is almost universal is the use of microphones and sound systems, and to a slightly lesser degree, video cameras and live feeds. These technologies appear to serve a very straightforward purpose: to amplify the voices of those who lead religious ceremonies (ibadet), including imams, hatips, and muezzins. This practice is similarly widespread in Turkey even in mosques (such as Süleymaniye) that were designed to have ideal natural (architectural) acoustics for worship. Not surprisingly, the use of microphones takes on a particular role in Berlin mosques, which I will explore here. These technologies, I argue, simultaneously reinforce traditional principles of acoustic and visual design and re-map them, producing a sensory ambiguity that is highly indicative of the marginal position of Islamic worship in contemporary Berliner culture.

While writing about microphones in a mosque may seem like the imposition of a “sound studies” agenda on Islamic sacred spaces, this concern in fact is widespread in

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15 One universal feature of mosques that I omit here is the washing space or fountains for ablutions before prayers, which certainly has a strong sonic profile and can often penetrate acoustically into the mosque itself. However, because of the climate, most mosques in Berlin keep these facilities indoors and totally separate from the prayer space—indeed, quite often they are simply indoor restrooms with areas specially designed for sitting and washing.
Islamic theological discourse itself. As Ender Çetin, the administrator of the Şehitlik mosque pointed out, “There have been many fatwas, or religious edicts, given by Muslim scholars on the use of microphones, not simply to avoid modern innovation but also because of the question: what is a voice when amplified? Is it still the voice of the reciter or the muezzin?” (2013). Indeed, the same questions remain just as central (if not theologically so) for sonic culture more generally: Does a microphone change the ontology of the voice through electric transduction? And again in Islamic contexts, what kind of precedent does this set for other longer-distance transmissions of religious instruction and direction for worship?

Before addressing this question of the ontology of transduction within Islam, I would point out that the issue of innovation, within an Islamic context, is perhaps not as cut and dry as Çetin suggests. For example, one of the major Turkish-language fatwa websites, Fetva Meclisi (fetvameclisi.com), posts a very similar question under the heading, “Is the use of a microphone bidat (sic., excessive innovation)?” The question states, “Peace be upon you [Esselamu aleykum]. Dear teacher [hocam], is it theologically acceptable [caiz] to perform namaz prayers and recite the call to prayer over loudspeakers [hoparlör]? Is praying with loudspeakers excessive innovation [bid’at]. The site’s primary legal scholar, Nureddin Yıldız, gives a written reply as follows:16

Peace be upon you. Because it’s not possible to find this issue in old jurisprudential books, divergent opinions exist on the question of praying with a sound amplification apparatus [ses yükseltme cihazı]. According to general practice [genel teamül] such prayers will be theologically acceptable [caiz]. When possible in larger spaces where namaz is prayed, a physical connection should be ensured so as to have the smallest possible visual distance [en az görme mesafesi] between rows of congregants. A sound apparatus cannot be excessive innovation [bid’at]. Because bid’at means adding

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16 Such fatwa sites are both a rich source of contemporary thought on Islamic law and practice, as well as a front line of sorts in the negotiation of new media in Islam. For example, Fetva Meclisi includes not only written responses to inquiries but also video responses.
something to worship ceremonies [ibader]. This is merely an instrument [alet, also tool, device]. Whether its usage is theologically acceptable [caiz] is subject to discussion.\textsuperscript{17} Yıldız’s answer frames the debate historically: since no clear jurisprudential precedent exists, prevailing custom [genel teamül] becomes adequate justification for considering amplification acceptable. Although he concludes by re-opening the question of whether microphone usage is in fact acceptable, he emphasizes that the practice cannot be an innovation because of its mediality: a microphone does not in fact add to or alter worship [ibadet], it is “merely an instrument” [alet]. Unfortunately he does not elaborate on what he means by alet but he does give some indication earlier as to its purpose—which he clarifies by reference to the visual. During prayers, especially in larger places of worship, congregants should gather as close as possible to minimize visual distance. In other words, there should be a sensational proximity among worshipers; presumably this sensory closeness facilitates that worship. By analogy, a microphone serves as an acoustic instrument of such proximity, overcoming the distances that might otherwise thwart the intimacies of congregational worship—at least among men.

The question of whether a microphone alters worship or merely mediates it relates quite closely to the issue Çetin raised (or rather noted that others had raised). Çetin highlighted that some were concerned that amplification altered the voice itself, implying that a certain personal presence was integral to proper worship. This question may seem inconsequential, given the ubiquity of recording and transducing sound technologies, yet

\textsuperscript{17} Yıldız, n.d., “Mikrofon kullanmak bidat midir?,” from website fetvameclisi.com. Unfortunately no date is given for the issuing of this fetva, but it does link to a number of “similar topics,” including: “Is it bidat to recite the fatiha prayer in a cemetery?”; “Is it bidat to recite the tesbihat prayers [ed: numbered recitations of phrases such as Allahu akbar or subhanallah] as a congregation?”; “Using an electric mosquito killer”; “or “Putting on perfume after ablutions.” In other words, these fetvas cover almost every aspect of life, so the existence of such a fetva on the use of microphones is neither surprising nor a sign that the matter is of tremendous spiritual importance per se. It does suggest, however, that the use of microphones poses serious (if not altogether clear) questions about Islamic theologies of sound.
western academia is only now seriously addressing questions of what electric transduction does, how it affects meaning, and what the stakes of such transformations may be. Anthropologist Stefan Helmreich’s recent work on underwater sound (2007, 2009) raises many of these same questions, recognizing transduction as enacting a major ontological change in soundwaves that travel through the ocean—without transduction, we would otherwise perceive the ocean as being “silent.” He thus celebrates the potential transduction has not only to hear new soundspaces (i.e., submarine soundscapes that are otherwise not audible to human hearing) but to serve as a model for the representative transformations of ethnography more generally (what he calls “transductive ethnography,” 2007). In any case, both Helmreich’s study and the debates connected to Yıldız and Çetin’s comments raise many questions for Islam: how substantive is the change to the human voice when amplified? If the ontological changes in transduction are theologically acceptable, are there other limitations to the spatial transmission of such amplified sounds? Does the introduction of a microphone signal the beginning of the demise of a physical cemaat, or congregation? For now, the issue of amplification in Berlin (and elsewhere) seems to be driven more by practical concerns for worship than by these more academic questions, but they are not entirely unrelated. For example, in many of Berlin’s “courtyard mosques,” congregations have outgrown the original space intended for Friday prayers. In such cases, the call to prayer, the Friday sermon, and directions from the imam for prayers are broadcast into adjacent rooms or sometimes even nearby buildings. Constrained by real estate and the needs of a growing community of worshipers, Friday prayers in these “courtyard mosques” serve as a space of
negotiation between architecture, acoustics and community, all mediated through the technologies of microphones.

This negotiation, however, is not entirely new. Indeed, it hearkens back to the acoustics experiments of Mimar Sinan, who wanted to ensure that these various needs (architectural, acoustic and communal) could all be met. Microphones and amplification, in many cases, serve precisely that function. They offer a larger number of congregants a chance to participate in prayers and the attendant rituals (sermons, etc.) at the same time in roughly the same space. In other words, whatever the ontology of transduction may be, these electric sound technologies are fundamentally extensions of much older technologies that were simply built into the physical structure of the mosque: the mihrab niche, the minber and kursi podiums, the kubbe dome, and so on. They too served to extend voices, to empower listening. However, these new electric technologies do not map onto the old architectural technologies perfectly. Microphones pick up sounds besides just voices; loudspeakers must be aimed in certain directions; and in the small “courtyard mosques” of Berlin, the entire acoustic space functions more like a private apartment than a public house of worship. I discuss the concrete (no pun intended) challenges of using microphones in the İmam Riza mosque in the following section, as well as the way they are deployed outdoors at bigger Berlin mosques like Şehitlik in the next chapter. But for now I would simply say that sound amplification introduces (or at least allows for) new timbres (especially of the voice), extensive use of reverb, and a new

18 Mostly just notes to self, but some of the examples of acoustic re-mapping/extension-interference of acoustics at Şehitlik include: the imam speaking outdoors with mic at funeral at Şehitlik—total schizophrenia with speakers only on one side of courtyard but him standing in middle staircase; Friday sermons at Şehitlik harder to understand in mosque than outside or in one of the offices, where only the amplified voice is heard rather than the amplified and the “real” voice reflecting off the dome, wall surfaces, etc.
physical mapping of soundsources in the mosque, depending on the placement of loudspeakers. This sonic transformation is paradoxically both part of an older ethos of pious acoustics and a challenge to that tradition, enacted through sound.

Not unrelated, many mosques have started to use video cameras to send a live feed of events in the mosque to those gathered in nearby rooms—that is, most often, to women congregants. As described in Chapter One (but in contrast to Chapters Two and Six), much of Islam adheres to practices of gender division during worship, a division deeply rooted in questions of sensation: seeing, hearing, touching. Practically, that means that women are allowed to see and hear men, but should not be seen or heard in turn by those men. In larger mosques in Turkey, this means having sections for women in the back of the mosque. In many tekkes, women sit in a balcony during zikr, obscured behind a thatched latticework that keeps them invisible and mostly inaudible. But in many cases, in smaller mosques or tekkes, the main congregational area fills up entirely with men, heightening the dilemma of gender and essentially excluding women from hearing hutbe sermons or sohbet discussions altogether. Microphones and live video feeds make it possible for women to be real-time spectators, affording them rights within a mosque that might previously have been only available when convenient (i.e., when there were not so many men to preclude their co-presence). In other words, the rights of audition and spectatorship have been extended more fully to women by means of these technologies, even though those sensory experiences are mediated by vocal microphones, home stereo speakers, consumer-grade HD camcorders and flatscreen televisions. And yet, this extension of pious sensation simultaneously reinscribes the physical separation that
continues to exist. Like the use of sound amplification, the use of video straddles 
modernity and tradition, partially destabilizing that tradition while also reinforcing it.

Another important tension emerges out of the use of these technologies—they can 
generally be understood to amplify and extend the reach of sound and image. But what of 
mosques that (sometimes aggressively) seek to maintain a sense of closedness and yet 
still use these technologies? İmam Rıza is an intriguing example of such a congregation. 
As Shi’a, they feel (at least as expressed regularly in Friday sermons) that they and the 
rest of Shi’a Islam are under constant threat of or actual attack from Sunni terrorists, 
western imperialists, and Israeli Zionists. They make no attempt to make their services 
intelligible to non-Turkish speakers (though several attend regularly). And as a 
“courtyard mosque,” they are able to easily monitor who comes and goes from the 
premises, even without video monitoring. As many acquaintances described, they are 
“very closed” (çok kapalı). And perhaps most importantly, they are a relatively small 
congregation. Most weeks during my stay their attendance at Friday prayers topped out at 
perhaps 40 men. They hang a thick curtain between the men and women, but based on 
how many women were seen in the courtyard after prayers, I would estimate that no more 
than 10 women attended the Friday prayers. (Indeed, the size of the space cordoned off 
for them would not hold more than 15-18 congregants.) In other words, a strong focus on 
interiority pervades the entire congregation. Given their historical suffering at the hands 
of various religious and political adversaries, perhaps such wariness of outsiders is to be 
expected. But why then amplify sound and image? The video feed certainly adds a 
meaningful visual component for women, but in a room no more than 60 feet long, why 
use microphones? Unfortunately, although I was welcomed to attend prayers and other
ceremonial gatherings at the mosque, my repeated attempts to speak with either of the two imams or with the mosque administrator about amplification were refused (sometimes with explicit concerns that I was part of the CIA). So I am left to my own observations and informal conversations with members of the congregation. In the sections that follow, I explore how interiority and technologies of sensory extension (microphones, videofeeds) reinforce and challenge each other during the commemorative mourning ceremonies (matem meclisi) of Muharram and Ashura.

**Flesh, Tears and the Poetics of Deadness**

Death reverberates powerfully, especially among Shi‘i Muslims. On the first ten evenings of the month of Muharram, families gather to the İmam Rıza mosque to give voice to such sound. These gatherings, known as matem (or matem meclisleri), commemorate the tragic events surrounding the death of Hüseyin, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad and third imam in Shi‘i belief. Matem is not unique to Turkish Caferis; in fact, Shi‘i congregations across Berlin host similar gatherings, while Alevis likewise fast and hold sohbet discussions about the life of the twelve imams and faith more generally. But matem gatherings at İmam Rıza sound uniquely dead, to appropriate a term from architectural acoustics. By this I mean that İmam Rıza is still sufficiently small that they can meet—barely—in their regular mosque space, with its low ceilings, thick rugs, and heavy curtains separating men and women/children. Additionally, the very presence of bodies ensures that soundwaves will have little room to reverberate off walls or the ceiling. This acoustic deadness paradoxically amplifies the deep materiality of the ritual lamentations themselves. Furthermore, this acoustic deadness transmits a
culturally heterophonic sound: that of Shi’a resistance to what is perceived as Sunni hegemony within Islam. This sounded narrative is powerfully resistant, simultaneously countering perceived Sunni hegemony (what I have called heterophony, or the sounding of difference, within Islam) as well as Western imperialism (i.e., heterophony within Berlin/German culture more broadly).

A typical ceremony during Muharrem in 2012 (beginning November 14) roughly followed a regular pattern in which darkness and sound were intimately entwined. Congregants gathered for evening prayers (akşam namazı) after sunset at around 6 pm. The entire mosque courtyard as well as the interior of the mosque itself was draped with black curtains and posters, many of which bore inscriptions like “Ashura is every day, Karbala is everywhere” (Her gün Aşura, her yerde Karbala) and “Oh Hüseyin!” Congregants likewise wore dark hues—mostly black. While the mosque normally reserves less than 1/4th of its space for women, it is almost divided in half for matem gatherings, with women and children in the back behind heavy curtains weighted down to maintain a sense of decency. Although the lights remained on for the evening prayers and the beginning of the ceremonies that followed, they were then turned off for most of the remainder of the gathering except for a couple small lights at the mihrab and minber—literal highlights of the entanglement of sight and sound through the evening.

Prayers largely followed the usual patterning of Friday prayers. In contrast to the congregational prayers of their Sunni counterparts, the Caferi Shi‘i prayers at İmam Rıza involve several unique elements that evoke reminders of a distant-but-not-forgotten soundscape of Karbala. Of utmost importance is the use of the aforementioned taş stone

19 For a fuller treatment of the doctrinal details of worship (i.e., ilmihali), cf. Keskin 2012.
hewed from Karbala itself, touching the head to it while prostrating. A central—and highly audible—aspect of Caferi prayers is the call-and-response of salawat, or greetings to the prophet and his family (the Ehl-i Beyt). At fixed occasions during the call to prayer (the ikamet, not the ezan) during congregational prayers, and during the hutbe sermon on Fridays, congregants chant together: “Peace be upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad.” Sometimes the phrase “and to the one who will come in the last day,” referring to the 12th imam, Mehdi, is also appended. This salawat is one of a larger genre of recited prayers (or dua) pronounced for the prophet. However, its recitation is slightly different among Sunnis and Sufis. For example, Sunnis recite the same salawat during the second cycle of prostrations (rek’a) in their daily prayers, but even when assembled as a group only whisper or silently mouth the words; the greeting is not sounded. Sufis pronounce a similar prayer but with a different prosodic and melodic contour, while omitting any reference to Mehdi. But for Shi’a, the blessing is a clear evocation of their particular theology, and as such is expressed repeatedly and audibly during sacred gatherings. In particular, their references to Muhammad’s family and to Imam Mehdi highlight their particular theologies of religious authority and succession after Muhammad. During matem ceremonies, these greetings were regularly pronounced during prayers at the anticipated times, but also spontaneously, when the imam would mention Muhammad or recount a particularly emotional part of the narrative of Karbala.

If the prayer stones and salawat greetings indicate subtle theological differences or point to the tragic landscapes of the martyrdom of Hüseyin at Kerbala, the ceremony that follows makes those distinctions utterly clear and palpably audible. The underlying narrative of the battle of Karbala is that of treachery and martyrdom, on the one hand, and
bravery and lament on the other. The battle was fought over the succession of Islamic leadership, effectively pitting those who would become Sunnis against those who would become Shi’a.\(^{20}\) Thus the sounds and bodily movements that come on the heels of the evening prayers, which form the core of the matem ceremony, are not simply lamentations, but theological critiques through sound. While most Muslims I encountered would emphasize that the notion of mezhep—again, literally a path, but commonly a juridical school—is not of central import to their daily practice of Islam, rituals like matem suggest that those differences of religious pathway still matter in substantive ways and are articulated at İmam Rıza primarily through sound.

After prayers have concluded, the imam begins a devotional narration in Turkish prose of the events at Karbala. These accounts are essentially an epic tale, focusing episodically on various characters involved, with special emphasis on different figures each day. The lights remain on at the beginning of this account, but the tale inevitably turns tragically violent, and around this time the lights are turned out as a new sound emerges: amplified weeping. The imam, who holds the only active microphone at that moment, initiates this weeping, which spreads almost immediately to the congregation. But not everyone cries. In an act of unselfconscious emotional dissonance (literally, a sonic incongruity), children continue to play and tease and run around, even as the emotional tenor of the evening changes so markedly. As a non-Muslim male, I was always invited to sit/kneel/stand at the back of the men’s section, placing me just in front of the curtains that sequestered women and children. But children (especially but not

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exclusively boys) were enterprising enough to simply slip under the curtain and move back and forth between the two spaces. Often toting their parents’ smartphones or other audible gaming devices, they would banter back and forth, weaving through the densely packed crowd to find their father or simply to engage in religious flânerie, roaming and watching. The weeping of men was audible and visible (even in the dark) as sobbing bodies heaved up and down; women could likewise be heard doing the same; and all the while, the imam continued on with increasing fervor. But the children remained, voicing their emotional counterpoint through German insults and Angry Birds.

Even so, the focus of the congregation remained rapt. As the narration built, the imam began reciting mournful mersiye poetry in about the event. This poetry was the emotional and ritual heart of the evening for many, even if it was not as physically active as what followed. Its content focused more narrowly on the tragic final days of the ordeal at Karbala—the military predicament, the thirst and hunger of Hüseyin and his companions, and their daring deeds in battle. In a remarkable performance of pious vocalization, the imam simultaneously recited poetry in a second language while weeping aloud, all of which was amplified by microphone and carried around the mosque.21 (Although the lighting was presumably poor enough to severely limit visibility, the live video feed was also turned on for women and children in the back.) At several breaks in the poetic form, he responded in kind with an emotional break, a heavy sobbing that resonated hauntingly through the space. Not unlike the dissonance of weeping parents and squabbling children, the amplification of weeping created a certain sensory

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21 The fluid moves between poetry, weeping and song was reminiscent of Steven Feld’s work on Kaluli poetics and weeping in New Guinea (1990), particularly as sounds themselves transitioned from one ritual portion to another: at one moment, the imam was clearly weeping aloud, but then his voice trailed into a melody that the whole congregation joined with, then again weeping at the end of the ceremony as he recited the call to prayer.
dissonance between the visual and the aural. After all, the lights had been turned off, and most of the men were covering their faces, hunched over, and avoiding and clear visual interaction. (Boxes of tissue or paper towel passed through the congregation frequently, as well.) In other words, the weeping itself, while entirely a communal action, was still clearly a private affair, not to be seen but rather heard as a collective body. The imam’s voice signaled this separation of visual and aural: he too was barely visible (despite having a light to allow reading for his narration and poetry), yet his voice—his weeping—was amplified and made more audible, more public, more exposed.

If these amplified sobs marked out the emotional and acoustic highpoints of the first half of the matem ceremony, the sound of flesh articulated the second half. After the imam finished his mersiye recitations, the entire congregation stood and an entirely new spirit overtook the room. As Hamid Dabashi argues, Shia Islam is fundamentally a religion of protest and revolution (2011), and the matem ceremony at İmam Rıza is suggestive of just this spirit, situated within a larger framework of grieving. After the congregation arose (with the lights still off), the imam and other delegated individuals led the group in singing and chanting, still in commemoration of the martyrs of Karbala, but now with vigorous body movements suggestive of a different attitude—one of morose defiance coupled with a deep sense of corporeality. Not only do congregants sing (including one with a microphone), they also beat their breasts rhythmically. This beating of the chest, known as sinezen (or sine-zani in Persian), aligns rhythmically with the songs sung (cf. Chelkowski 2011). In four-beat patterns, (1) congregants would beat their chest (beat 1, though sometimes displaced to beat 3), drop their arms to their side (2),

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22 Sine-zani means striking the chest. In Turkish, sinezen can also just refer to singing mersiye laments.
raise them high in the air (3), swing them toward their chest with a brief hesitation (4),
then beat their chest again (1) and the cycle repeats. No longer weeping, individual
congregants (especially young men) frequently cried out the name of Ali (“Aliiiii!”) to
which the rest of the congregation would respond in kind (“Aliiiii!”).

The King of the Loyal: Listening to Ebelfez

I was told by several people in Berlin that if I wanted to see a proper matem
gathering, I should go elsewhere—İmam Rıza is too small a congregation, the imam is a
non-native Arabic speaker, etc. Heeding such advice, I took the opportunity to visit other
matem ceremonies held around the city, including a predominantly Lebanese gathering in
a rented hall to accommodate the hundreds of attendees, with Fadi (mentioned above in
the “Pathway” section). These gatherings were indeed impressive in their scope, and
included traditional practices like taziye, or the dramatic re-enactment of the events of
Karbala, usually by youth groups from the associated mosques. However, much of the
power of the İmam Rıza gatherings stemmed precisely from their peculiar sense of fleshy
deadness, especially in the latter half of the ceremony. This ritual deadness was
intensified by the precise setting of İmam Rıza and the way that particular congregation
carries out matem. Musicologists (and other scholars in the humanities) speak of hearing
(or otherwise experiencing) “presence” or “embodiment” or “corporeality.” More often
than not, the bodily traces in these discussions are rather incidental—a performance

23 For a broad treatment of taziye(h) and its various manifestations throughout Iran and the Shi’i world, cf.

other fields in the humanities, the work of Hans Gumbrecht (2003) and Mladen Dolar (2006) bears mention
as well.
mistake, a cough, a vocal timbre. Indeed, in my own discussions of the voice in Chapter One, I make a similar claim to such fleshy sound in the use of the voice in Cerrahi Sufi rituals.

The *matem* ceremony is different—it is quite literally the sound of flesh commemorating the passing or decaying of flesh. Just as importantly, unlike larger gatherings in more open spaces (bigger mosques, rented halls, etc.), the acoustics of Imam Rıza reinforced this sense of deadness, with its low ceilings, carpeted floors, and densely packed congregation. (Several times I found myself so close to others that I was unable to change kneeling positions through the opening half of the ceremony.) The “dead” acoustics of the space reinforced the ritual commemoration of deadness through self-mortification. This repeated, corporeal thud was not just a rhythmic gesture, but a mode of communal participation and re-enactment of the physical destruction of Hüseyin and his companions.

Although repertoire varied from night to night, often emphasizing a particular person among Hüseyin’s companions at Karbala, certain *sinezen* texts formed a core repertoire at Imam Rıza. One particular *sinezen*, “Şah-i vefa Ebelfez,” always seemed to call forth an emphatic response that offers an opportunity for closer reading of how sound, body and deadness unfolds in a Berlin *matem*. The title, essentially an extended epithet, refers to ‘Abbās ibn ‘Alī, “the king of loyalty” (*şah-i vefa*) and “the father of virtue” (Ebelfez, or ‘Abū al-Fādl), a half-brother of Hüseyin’s who was brutally killed at Karbala while going for water for the women and children among the companions, all of whom were suffering greatly from hunger and thirst. The *sinezen* begins with a refrain consisting of these epithets repeated with a slight *rubato* feel:

*Şah-i vefa Ebelfez*
This introductory refrain is generally sung by the whole congregation together after brief prompting by the designated, miked-vocalist (who is himself under the loose direction of the imam). As the repeating nature of this opening fragment suggests, the entire refrain (and arguably *sinezen* poetry broadly) creates an opportunity of productive repetition—faintly suggestive of the kind of sonic dynamic of repeated names in Sufi zikr (Chapter 1). But *matem* is a commemoration, a remembrance, not always of God (though certainly God is invoked throughout, especially in *salawat* benedictions on the Prophet’s family) but of a first generation of martyrs. Remembrance of the deceased, of those whose spirits are no longer embodied, calls for particular ways of comporting one’s voice and body—technologies of the self, to be sure, but something deeper too.25

In the case of *matem*, the text and the bodily ways of engaging with it give some hint of that ideal comportment. It continues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is this strapping youth?</th>
<th><em>Kim bu pehlivan?</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The standard bearer</td>
<td><em>Alem olup heyran</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who gave his life</td>
<td><em>Zehra esgine</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25 In the following chapter, I consider the commemoration of a different kind of martyrs at the Şehitlik (Martyrs’) funeral, also in Neukölln. These two different types of commemoration are certainly closely related (despite Shi’i-Sunni differences in ritual practice and on certain theological issues), but they entail different kinds of movement on the part of the still-embodied mortal participants: *matem* is a *meclis*, or gathering together (literally to sit), while a *ziyaret*, or visiting, points to a stronger emphasis on getting there (to the grave, mausoleum, etc.) and back. But in both cases, the real issue is how to comport oneself once there—and sonic expression becomes a critical mode or medium of initiating that communication.
For the tears of Zahra and for Hüseyin

The offspring of the Lion
The apex of loyalty
His name is ‘Abū al-Fādl
Hüseyin’s comrade-in-arms

Love—I don’t know what it is
I must learn
Let him teach me
Who gave up his arm for love

On the battlefield of love
Side by side in their ranks
His father, the Lion
As though he were at Kerbala

Ja’far Tayyār,
The Lion of God,
And like a prince
‘Abbās the Standardbearer

Let roses bloom
And adorn you with fragrance
Forever now a rose garden,
May they come to know my rose

Everyone marvels at you
But they don’t know me
I have gone mad
From the tears of ‘Abū al-Fādl

Through its poetry, this sinezen simultaneously explores multiple aspects of ‘Abbās’s life. First and foremost, it depicts (or at least alludes to) key moments from his participation at Karbala: ‘Abbās was Hüseyin’s standard bearer and he also lost both arms from being shot at while riding to get water. His heroism is positioned within a genealogy of deceased relatives, most prominent of whom is his father, ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib (d. 661), the Lion of God and for Shi‘i Muslims the successor to the Prophet and first of the Twelve Imams. His wife, Fātima, the mother of Hüseyin, is also mentioned by the epithet al-Zehra, the magnificent one. In this account, ‘Abbās’s bravery is not only on behalf of Hüseyin but also his weeping mother, who had long since passed away in 623
CE. Here we begin to get a sense for the relations between living and dead and the way that mourning can function as a conduit between them. Additionally, Cafer-i Teyyar, Ja‘far Tayyār or Ja‘far ibn Abī Tālib (d. 629 CE), the brother of ‘Alī and another early wartime martyr, joins these exclusive ranks. A key term here is sanki: as if. It’s as if these heroic relatives were there at Karbala with ‘Abbās, who himself is like a prince (Hamza șebihi). A sense of modeling emerges: ‘Abbās aspires to the bravery of an earlier generation and they are all-but-physically present with him. A pattern is set for contemporary matem practice too, not just in remembrance of Karbala but a kind of re-enactment: remembering, communing with and thus enlivening the dead. This communing takes place through sound, even within the poetry, where a dialogue, or at least a self-examination, is taking place: who is this heroic figure?

But the hero in question is not simply a master soldier. Again, as declared from the very first lines, ‘Abbās is the King of the Loyalty and the Father of Virtue. The body depicted is clearly masculine, but not pure brawn either. Beyond these qualities of loyalty and virtue, he also possesses abiding love (aşk) for Hüseyin. The battlefield becomes a stage for such affection that contrasts with the many tears (eşk) that flow from both Fātima and ‘Abbās for Hüseyin. The driving question here becomes: how can one cultivate this kind of love. The poem implores: Let the one who gave up his arm for love teach me what love is. The image is somewhat gory but this multifaceted quality is precisely what propels the sinezen forward: arms are severed as an act of love, so show me what love is. Martyrs die but their reward is eternal fragrance and beauty like a rose.

This tension between the pleasant and the painful, between immortal paradise and a torturous death. It culminates for the speaker of the poem in a kind of madness, between
the aspiration to follow these role models yet a sense of frailty—of already being broken. Everyone marvels at the princely martyr, but I—the speaker, the participant, the fleshy body in the here-and-now—am unknown, and adding insult to injury, the entire burden of the tragedy of Karbala is too much to bear. The performance of matem captures this whole variety of emotions and articulates them—utters them, makes them audible, and in so doing transforms feeling into sound in a way that is both catharsis but also aspiration, both shameful failure and unquenchable pride. Dabashi describes this as “a combustive combination of deferred obedience [i.e., defiance] and the guilt of infanticide [i.e., that Hüseyin, the son and grandson was killed by Muslims] coming together to make a revolutionary faith, antiauthoritarian and quintessentially distrustful of the authority of father-figures in position of power” (2011:22).

This revolutionary quality of Shi‘i faith would emerge quite explicitly later in the same ceremony, but even early on the repetitions, the striking of the body, the urgent vocalization of a historical event over a millennium old: these aspects already point to a kind of simmering within the bodies that morphs from listening to a sermon to weeping with the imam—and with Fātima and ‘Abbās—to singing sinezen to crying out for Hüseyin while beating one’s breast. At this juncture, sound, body and difference become resonant, all housed within and somehow thus distilled through the confines of the mosque itself. And with each repetition, that distillation thickens and intensifies. “Difference,” in the sense Deleuze or Gates points to in the preceding Pathway, comes precisely as these texts are repeated—different voices from the congregation engage, the text swells, and significantly, these refrains offer a time of anticipation and rest from the breast-beating. This sense of expectation is almost palpable as the congregation
prepares—often with visual cues—to be sure that when the beat drops, so to speak, the thud of the chest is precisely where and when it should be.

During the matem ceremony falling on the morning of Ashura in November 2013, “Şah-ı vefa Ebelfezl” gave way at the end to an extended group recitation of the lamenting but rhythmically crisp phrase, “Vaveyla Ahu Vaveyla.” Like much of the language of Caferi matem, the text derives from Persian, meaning (roughly) “Howl, dear friend, howl.” Another voice then entered with a higher-pitched, melismatic tone, delivering a piercing “Hüseyin.” The congregation had pulled the ceremony away from the reciter for a moment, but it slid back smoothly after a moment and the next sinezen could begin. On several other occasions, the whole congregation would launch into similar repeating cells—“Hüseyin, Hüseyin!” or alternations of “Hüseyin Vay!” with short interjections by a single speaker. Improvisation is such a loaded term, but clearly a certain sonic contingency comes about. Yet that should not imply that anything could be called out; on one occasion in the same matem, not long after the spontaneous “Vaveyla” swell, the reciter stopped the congregation telling them to interject with “Hüseyin Can” (Dear Hüseyin) rather than “Hüseyin Vay” during the sinezen “Ya Hüccet Allah Sığindık Sana” (Oh, Clear Proof [of Truth], We Take Refuge in You). As they discuss among themselves, the thick reverb on the microphone hangs in the air. Then they resume. These repeated cells are emphatic and sudden but not interruptive. These utterances and body movements are entrained from a young age, as seen and heard throughout by the presence of young children (mostly playing and not paying attention) and young men (mostly not paying attention until the sinezen begins). But their attendance is clearly welcomed. The
congregation—and the mosque—is transmitting this special, ritual knowledge through voice and flesh.

One other manifestation of deadness—this time much more figurative, but no less audible—was that of amplification. On several occasions, the wireless microphone cut out in ways that seemed mostly inexplicable to those using them. Whether these microphone malfunctions were brought on by dead batteries or other technical difficulties, the impact was acoustically jarring. For example, the chorus of congregants picked up their volume slightly to compensate for the absence of a lead vocalist. With loudspeakers no longer sounding, the physical formations of the room were suddenly audible, though they remained barely visible: the men formed two sets of concentric circles, with the most active participants in the sinezen chest-beating in the center. Meanwhile the imam and lead vocalist(s) remained at the front of the room near the minber pulpit. Finally, the voices of women pierced (faintly) through the curtains in the absence of the amplified sound. Given the kind of stereotypically masculine postures through much of the latter part of the matem ceremony (especially the sinezen), these moments of non-amplification figured all the more loudly in acoustically acknowledging the gendered realities of the space. This question of gender highlights once again the ways in which architecture and ritual mediate one another. The interplay of the curtain, the microphone and loudspeakers, along with the live video feed, create a locus of mediation overlaid on gender divisions. Theological ideas of the divergent roles of women and men in ritual play out in these highly material phenomena, mediated by a variety of audiovisual technologies.
We are the Nation of Hezbollah!

The *matem* ceremonies at Īmam Rıza typically concluded with something of a decrescendo during Ashura in 2013. Because they started with the communal evening prayer, they simply finished when they were done and then headed outside to eat together (despite the chilly November air). But on the day of Ashura itself, November 17, the *matem* began around 10 am. As it had been the entire month, the prayer area had been covered with black cloth along all the walls, giving a visual sense of deadness to accompany the sonic sense as well. The ceremony did not begin with prayers, but was slated to end with it. Because communal prayers have a highly scripted aural beginning with the *ezan*, or call of congregants to prayer, it was clear from the outset that there might be occasion for a kind of heterophony within the *matem* ritual itself, and indeed there was.

While much of the ceremony, as described above, allowed for communal participation, the imam was generally in control—distributing the microphone to the appropriate singers, working out repertoire, and so on. For the most part, congregants followed along with the singer at the microphone. Toward the end, however, as the energy (and heat) of the gathering peaked, a more decentralized atmosphere took hold, particularly as the microphone cut out on several occasions. The most extreme of these occasions came just a few minutes before the call to prayer would sound, as a small group of young men on the far side of the room began boisterously calling out the couplet: “*Yā Abā ‘Abdillāh! Nahnu ummat Hizbullāh!*,” or “Oh Father of the Believers! We are the nation of Hezbollah! As I would later learn, Abū ʿAbdillāh is another special religious name for Imam Hüseyin (there are many). But the chants about Hezbollah were
immediately clear—and confusing, at first blush. I had heard that the mosque had affinities for and perhaps more formal affiliations with Hezbollah; indeed, it was publicly-available knowledge, as the mosque’s connections with the Lebanese paramilitary group had almost prevented it from receiving permission to build a larger mosque (Musharbash 2006, Schupelius 2009). It was a powerful chant to hear, but also unnerving (at least for me), as much of the congregation responded quickly and energetically.

As an articulation of identity, it charted out a powerful, if roundabout sonic pathway of its own: in a mosque in Berlin-Neukölln, dozens of young men (in particular) whose families—many of whom consider themselves ethnically Azeri—had come from the far eastern regions of Turkey (e.g., Iğdır) were chanting in Arabic that they were the nation or people (ummah, an Arabic word thick with connotations for Muslims) of Hezbollah, a Lebanese group, all as a sign of commemoration for events that had happened over a millennium ago at Karbala in modern-day Iraq. Here the acoustics of diaspora extended far beyond the physical pathways they had traversed, but much like the space of the mosque itself, this re-mapping of identities through sound entailed its own distinct distribution aural power. As I would later find listening to versions of the song (for lack of a better term) online, I was struck by how much further this pathway might extend. Multiple versions can be found easily, but perhaps the most common (often simply called “Hezbollah Anthem” in English) opens with the following refrain:

Oh Father of the Believers! (Hüseyin)    Yā Abā ‘Abdillāh!
We are the nation of Hezbollah    Nahnu ummat Hizbullāh
In the way of Khomeini we set out    Fī nahj il-Khumainī namdī
On the path of God    Fī sabīlillāh
In the way of Khamenei we set out    Fī nahj il-Khāmana ’ī namdī
On the path of God

The refrain posits Ruhollah Khomeini and Sayyed ‘Ali Khamenei, the first two Supreme Leaders of Iran, as the figures leading the way along the path of God, sabīlīlāh, or the cause of jihad. Similar themes as the matem return: the sufferings of Hüseyin as an example for modern-day struggles and a conflict through sound: “We do not fear kings [salātūn] nor the voice [sawt, sound] of the executioners.” Sound commemorates Hüseyin, calls for contemporary political action, and resists (the sound of) oppression.

Online, these sonic aspects can be excavated further through commentaries about sound. In another version, “Hezbollah – Nasheed – Ya aba abdillah,” posted by YouTube user EmperorDarkling, the musical genre is explained: “Anasheed [plural of nasheed] is Islamic vocal music that is either sung a cappella or accompanied by percussion instruments such as the daff. In general, true Islamic anasheed does not contain lamellophone instruments, string instruments, or wind and brass instruments, although digital remastering—either to mimic percussion instruments or create overtones—is permitted.”

Digital forums (like YouTube and online discussion boards) are not simply mediums for conveying sound or images; they also offer new modes of producing sound in ways that might offer a whole new theology of digital Islamic music based on digital sound synthesis (mimetic percussion, overtones/spectral analysis). A related conversation about the sonic qualities of the music can be found on the forum ShiaChat.com. A member of the online community, lemonade, starts a thread, “Translation Of Ya Aba Abdillah Song Plzzzzzz” (May 23, 2012). Three hours later, another member of the

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26 The most common sound recording I have found online, used in the background of dozens of audiovisual montages with still images of Hezbollah, can be found at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAeuA_G5yG4 (Mohammad Ali. 2011. “Hezbollah – Ya Aba Abdillah,” uploaded June 26, 2011.)

community, AlAbd AlThaleel, writes back “Bro/sis, inshaAllah when I get home from school or when I find time today I will add a rough translation.”

The forum picks up with a discussion of sonic/musical preferences and embedded videos:

south-lebanon: Wow, great effort… Can you also translate this version: [embeds video clip] LOL just kidding brother, it will probably take you a whole week to do this one.

AlAbd AlThaleel: No worries bro, inshaAllah if I can find time to do this one. It's actually one of my favourite versions, I'm more a latmiyah [i.e., sinezen] kind of guy InshaAllah it won’t be too difficult.

south-lebanon: me too, i like the latmiya version too ....anyway i was only joking about translating the long latmiya version i don't expect you to go to all that effort, plus i understand it anyway, but i leave it to you, if you want to do it, then i'm sure there will be hasana [divine rewards] for your efforts.

ireallywannaknow: Oooh I've never heard this version before but I like it!! I used to kind of avoid listening to the other version because I felt like it was a little too upbeat--it was kind of a guilty pleasure once in awhile but now I'll just listen to this version.

south-lebanon: Here is a video of a ya aba abdillah latmiya during the funeral of hezbollah fighters in South Lebanon.

The combination of conversation/video exchange sheds light on the Berlin Cafteri ceremonies through its emotional multivalence and commentaries on sound and affect.

Latmiya is the Arabic term for the Turkish sinezen, the combination lament/striking of the chest. ireallywannaknow uses especially telling language about the affective quality of both: “I used to avoid listening to the other version because I felt like it was a little too

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28 The YouTube video embedded by lemonade has been removed but the translation provided by AlAbd AlThaleel would end up copied verbatim on the first video cited (uploaded by Mohammad Ali), highlighting the rich media reflexivity of the web. lemonade’s thread (2012) can be found at www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/235002311-translation-of-ya-aba-abdillah-song-plzzzzz/.  


upbeat.” He characterizes it as “a guilty pleasure” but one he no longer needs to indulge in. This sonically ascetic attitude—not wanting to indulge in sound too much—contrasts strikingly with the way in which participants in sinezen so fully give themselves up to the lamenting texts. They are safe, recited under the watch (and audition) of the imam in a mosque. These powerful affects are bounded, even as they build into piercing cries about Hezbollah. The final video posted (wrexyl 2010) then shows footage from a 2006 funeral of a Hezbollah fighter. A bright yellow truck with the Hezbollah flag painted on the hood (and decked out with four other flags) leads the way for the funeral procession. The truck has mounted loudspeakers; mourners stand in the back and recite poetry, before settling on “Yā Abā ‘Abdillāh!” The funeral becomes a sonic pathway through the city, channeling grief and abstract poetics into physical passage and body movement. From Berlin to Turkey to Lebanon, then through the streets.

Charles Hirschkind describes an “acoustics of death” that relies heavily on direct experience—on “tasting” something of the sensation of death as a way of better understanding our fate as mortals (2006:175ff.). While his focus lies on sermons (both in person and on cassette) more than formal congregational rituals, the notion seems to apply to Caferi Shi’a in Berlin as well: “The tasting of death through continual acts of remembrance enables an ethical orientation in this world, a moral-emotional bearing proper to pious human action” (176). The sinezen of Ebelfez (‘Abū al-Fādīl) similarly makes death a sensory experience, above cast death in terms of smell, a less canonical (i.e., non-quranic) description but one that similarly binds death to mortal sensation. The imam, not unlike the Sufi sheikh, would guide by listening, intervening only occasionally to channel these sensory processes—the tasting and smelling of death through sound.
(chanting and breast-beating, and listening) and touch (again beating the breast)—in appropriate ways. The Hezbollah chants at Imam Rıza seemed both to bring the whole ceremony to its sensory culmination and in so doing reached a sensory threshold: after participants there had chanted about Hezbollah for a few iterations of the refrain, the imam took the microphone and began the call to prayer. Once again, heterophony: the powerful unamplified chanting and breast-beating for Hezbollah; the amplified voice of the imam lifting-up the call to prayer over these other sounds while still weeping; all of which was unfolding in a cramped, hot space with thick carpeting, children squirming around, and behind a thick veil, another congregation of women. Meanwhile the rest of Neukölln was slowly waking up on an otherwise unremarkable Saturday morning, heading to the local shopping center or passing through the square at Town Hall. The interior sounds were almost overwhelming; yet to the outside world, the morning might as well have been silent.

If all mosques are mediums, then these Berlin “courtyard mosques,” like Imam Rıza, are a special type: one that resists the outside world of Germany in many regards, yet has deep commitments to international affairs. It sounds deadness in and through the mosque as a means of amplifying the tears and breast-beating of the congregation; yet this deadness marks the month of Ashura, a new Islamic year, and a commitment to a particular way of living religiously.

**Postscript: Another Year, Another Mosque**

One of the beauties and shortcomings of ethnographic writing is that it ultimately speaks to a particular circumstance—at best a cluster of closely-related times and places.
This working method is sometimes called “qualitative,” reminiscent of what Peirce described as firstness: “Firstness is the mode of being which consists in its subject’s being positively such as it is regardless of aught else.” (Peirce 1955:76, cf. also Massumi 2014). This suchness, this “flavor sui generis,” is elusive, especially in writing. But it pervades participant-observation, giving a feeling of experienced realness, however difficult that may be to communicate. Furthermore, the contingency of that realness becomes readily apparent with the slightest shift in perspective—the passing of time, a new geographical or spatial configuration, new faces in an old place. If the notion of the “field” in fieldwork has any clear valence in an age of industrial globalization, it may well be the passage of the field—the sense that it is always slipping away, if not passing away altogether.

I returned to Berlin for Ashura 2013 with hopes of making similar rounds as I had the year before: regular trips to the cemevi for late afternoon sohbet discussions and food, then to the İmam Rıza mosque as well. I was pleased to confirm that chanting about Hezbollah, for example, was not a one-time anomaly: the same chant took place on multiple nights during Ashura 2013. But familiarity brings its own hazards. I was well into my writing process and had already realized the geographical patterning that had emerged in my research: one congregation, or pathway, per borough, each with its own form of materiality. I thought I was all set.

But again, things thinged. On the seventh day of Muharram, I decided to visit the İmam Cafer-i Sadık mosque in Wedding, another Caferi mosque that had initially been part of the same congregation as the İmam Rıza mosque when the former opened in 1978. When I first arrived—a couple hours before sunset, in hopes of talking with the imam
beforehand—the mosque was locked. Unsure what to do, I wandered around the neighborhood, ate some halloumi, and then began to record the sound of airplanes flying low overhead as they made their final descent into Tegel Airport. Unsure if I could really afford to miss more matem gatherings at İmam Rıza across town, I stood on a street corner, still holding my recorder with earphones in, thinking through the finer points of scheduling my evening. A bird in hand, I thought. I should head back to Neukölln.

Nearby, church bells began ringing. I checked my phone, texted a friend who had expressed interest in attending matem with me, then looked at the time again. The bells were still ringing. My internal deliberations were interrupted, repeatedly. Why were the bells still ringing? I began recording, the vibrant thingness of bells and my recorder guiding my ears (and feet) along Soldiner Strasse toward the church. It turned out to be the Laternelauf, or lantern procession, for St. Martin’s Day at Stephanuskirche, replete with a brass band, a children’s choir, and of course the bells.

After the service I headed back to the mosque—now opened—and met the imam, Kerim Uçar, also a Hüccet-ül İslam Vel-Müslimin Şeyh. We chatted briefly then proceeded to the matem. At risk of compromising the suchness of matem at İmam Cafer-i Sadık (or at İmam Rıza where I had started), the entire experience seemed to be less intense, and calculatedly so: the sinezen segment of the commemoration was shorter; the imam’s weeping mersiye segments were also shorter and less interconnected with the flow of the ceremony as a whole, giving some sonic and emotional respite; the space was more open, with higher ceilings, no physical divide between men and women beyond a row of benches (though women were definitively located behind men); the volume was slightly lower, the reverb slightly less; the room had more light even during matem (when
the lights were turned off/down in both mosques); even the mosque itself, which is likely no bigger than its counterpart across town, is a freestanding building rather than facing into a courtyard such that the front doors open right onto the street. In other words, the deep sense of interiority and enclosure at İmam Rıza in Neukölln was not quite so deep. The depth of ritual was no less, I imagine, for participants in the congregation. But these slight differences in sound and sight signaled once again the subtle differences among things that are ostensibly the same—in this case, that at one point were indistinguishable if not identical as part of the same institution.

A decade ago, music scholars Kofi Agawu and Veit Erlmann engaged in a scholarly volley about sameness. Agawu called for “an embrace of sameness” by ethnomusicologists (2003:169) with the aim of reconsidering essentialism. Erlmann responded in defense of difference, incidentally articulating a vision of sound-focused ethnography with a focus on process, listening, and analysis beyond musical frameworks (i.e., the work, genre, etc.) (2004). While Agawu’s “sameness” seems to be primarily a sameness of methodology—to use “universal” modes of analysis as a starting point for music research—it raises an important epistemological question that neither of them really addresses: how does any person (music scholar or otherwise) recognize sameness? These *matem* gatherings, through their bodily mediations of repetition, suffering, death and life, seem to point to a way in which repetition begins to bring forth simultaneous difference and sameness—always. No repetition is exact, but the gesture of doing so calls into play an entire metaphysics of being. In the case of *matem*, this metaphysics is (perhaps paradoxically) deeply physical, drawing on voices and bodies and sound technologies, all housed within and channeled by the mosque as a medium. Roland
Barthes asks, “Who will write the history of tears?” At the İmam Rıza mosque, and in a slightly different manner at the İmam Cafer-i Sadık mosque, that history is already being written, transmitted through the deadness of sound and flesh.
4.1 Pathway: Visiting the Dead (Tempelhof)

“Many roads lead to Tempelhofer Freiheit.” This tagline appears prominently on the “Map and Route” page of the website for the massive open-air park (Freiheit literally means “freedom”) situated on the runways and greenspace of the former Tempelhof Airport.¹ This cartographical utterance, which can be simultaneously read as driving directions, an advertisement, and/or a broader meditation on the historical geography of Berlin, bears a striking resemblance to a Hadith commentary written by the 18th-century Ottoman diplomat and poet, Giritli ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi: “‘As many people as there are on the earth, that many paths lead to God.’ That means each person finds a path to God in himself that no one has taken before him” (Schmiede 1988:101). The Crete-born (i.e., Giritli) ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi would die in Berlin in 1798 after just one year as Ottoman ambassador to Prussia. Upon his death, the King Frederick Wilhelm III would donate a parcel of land for burial, ultimately leading to the creation of the Turkish Şehitlik cemetery and mosque—next door to the Tempelhof airport-turned-Freiheit park.

Tempelhof: mosque, cemetery, airport/park, and before that, military parade ground, and long before that, home to the local order of the Knights Templar, the site’s namesake. The history of these places and institutions, especially in the 20th century, becomes intertwined in fascinating and sometimes tragic ways, bundling together the history of flight, both World Wars and their aftermath, assassin squads after the Armenian Genocide, candy-bombers, mosque-builders, long-haul truck drivers from Turkey, 21st-century janissary bands, and tour guides. In contrast to the study of

architectural interiority at İmam Rıza in the last chapter, the chapter that follows will take up these various historical threads in considering the role of courtyards—exterior spaces—in the sonic lives of mosques in Turkish Berlin. In both cases, death becomes a common theme, and I continue here my exploration of death against the backdrop of sharia and mezhep, the legal structures—again, literally pathways themselves—that constrain and give rise to ritual in all its sonic richness.

Figure 4.1. "Many Roads," Tempelhof’s “Map and Route” webpage (Şehitlik Mosque not labeled)
But death itself, as Shakespeare’s Hamlet reminds us, is itself a pathway: a journey to an “undiscover’d country from whose bourn / No traveller returns” (1904:65). A millennium earlier, the Qur’an articulates a similar notion of death as passage with a more complex twist yet: “The race to accumulate thing distracts you / Until you visit the graves” (102:1-2). The phrase “visit the graves” (zurtumu l-maqābir) is a play on word suggesting both a literal visit to pay one’s respects and a more figurative visitation of death itself. Even without considering the role of the neighboring airport/park, the Şehitlik mosque complex becomes a critical site of visitation, in terms of death and funerals (which include processions, adding yet another layer of passage), paying respects to the dead, and in the past decade, tours and other less weighty but culturally significant ways of moving through and to these spaces.

Figure 4.2. Route: Rathaus Neukölln (A) - İmam Rıza mosque (B) - Şehitlik mosque (C)
One of my earliest encounters with Şehitlik came on a warm June afternoon in 2012 during their annual Sommerfest (summer festival). I approached from the Neukölln walking from City Hall (Rathaus) along the aptly named Flughafenstrasse (Airport Street) past the İmam Rıza mosque. Even before I could see the two minarets poking out above the treeline, I knew I was getting closer: small cars with German license plates parked alongside the road gave way to long-haul trucks with Turkish license plates and advertising slogans. (On most days of the week, it was common to see at least one or two drivers using the pull-out stoves on the undersides of the truck to make tea and lunch, often with one another.) Nearly as soon as I could see the mosque, I could hear and smell it too: Ottoman classical music from a PA and the savory spices of köfte sausages on a grill mingled in the air, wafting well beyond the gates of the mosque.

As I passed through the gates into the mosque courtyard, I was greeted by a dense atmosphere of sights, smells, and sounds—with plenty of options for tastes, as well. Even on a “regular” day (i.e., without any special festivals), the courtyard is immediately striking. One major path cuts through the courtyard from the street toward the entrance of the mosque, built 1999-2004, replacing a smaller mosque built 1983-1985, which itself took the place of an old guardhouse. Flanking both sides of this small walkway are graves, mostly from the past century. Since World War I, the cemetery has been called Şehitlik. Like so many terms, it translates poorly into German or English—it though usually the terms “martyr”/“martyrdom” are used: the cemetery of the martyrs. More literally, the term means “witness”—one who sees something or who bears witness, i.e., stating and adhering to the confession of faith (the Kelime-i şehadet, or in Arabic shahāda): there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.
The question of who qualifies as a şehit (or şahit) has provoked considerable discussion for centuries and is again shifting in response to contemporary Islamic movements (e.g., Cook 2007, Klausner 1987, Apaydin 2010), but the issue is further complicated in the context of migration. Muhammed Amrânî begins his discussion of problems in Islamic family law in gurbetçi (exile, immigrant) contexts by defining what immigration (of various sorts) means and how it relates to becoming a şehit:

Gurbet: The origin of this term’s literal usage is ‘exile’ [sürgün] and ‘to be driven away from one’s homeland’ [vatandan kovmak]. İbnü Manzûr says: “Tağrib: to be exiled from a country….The words gurbet and gurb mean to migrate [göçmek] from one’s homeland. The words iächtirab and teğarrûb have the same meaning.” In al-Misbah, it is put this

2 These various terms are all variations on the same basic Arabic trilateral root (in Turkish: ġ – r – h).
way: “It means to have moved far from one’s homeland. A ğarib is one who remains far from his homeland. The hadith expression is ğuraba.” In the hadith it is said, “The death of an immigrant is martyrdom [Garibin ölümü şehitlik].” In this account it is also put: “A death in migration is martyrdom [Ğurbet ölümü şehitlik].” (2006:31)

Thus şehitlik, martyrdom (for lack of a better term), is a constant for Muslims living in a foreign land. Yet this legal terminology, carefully constructed though it may be, highlights one of the perennial tensions of immigration: that any notion of homeland, vatan, is a slippery one that changes—sometimes very quickly—from one generation to the next. While Berlin may have clearly been a place of exile or gurbet for Giritli ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi it is home for many young Berliners whose families come from Turkey.

Although I did not buy this book at Sommerfest, I did (on another occasion) get it from Şehitlik’s bookstore—also at the end of the long walkway through the graves. Muhammed Amrânî, the author, as may be apparent, is not Turkish but Moroccan. In the introductory notes to the first of three volumes making up this work, both the publisher and translator clarify how this legal text (on fiqh, or Islamic jurisprudence) might apply to a Turkish-speaking audience. The publisher, Özgü Yayınları (based in Istanbul), writes:

Beginning in the 1960s, a major wave of labor migration began, especially to European countries. As the number of Muslims there began to increase, the need arose for them to learn about the Muslim faith on issues like relations with neighbors, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. To this end, religious leaders were sent and masjids and mosques were opened. It is thought that three million Turkish citizens live in Germany alone; we are of the opinion that this work may be useful in eliminating problems there. (2006:5)

Besides highlighting challenges of migration, this passage points to the different registers of Islamic living: Muslims needed to be taught the Muslim faith (müslümanların dini). So imams were sent, mosques were built, books were published to do so. The publisher goes on to identify the author, Dr. Muhammed Amrânî, as an Islamic scholar (alim) who has “lived for many years in Holland” and thus knows of these problems first-hand (ibid.).
The translators/interpreters go on to position the work even more precisely, noting that the author’s Moroccan heritage may raise questions:

The vast majority of our Muslim sisters and brothers from Morocco are part of the Maliki mezhep [juristic school, pathway]. Although this detail may be noticeable in the author’s work, not all the issues he examines in his research are from the Maliki mezhep; he also includes opinions on contemporary issues from other mezheps,…[W]e have noticed that Turks in Europe, who share a common denominator of being Muslim and living in gurbet, experience similar problems and are of the opinion that this translation will perform a service (Özcan and İyibildiren 2006:8).

This translation points to a flexibility in thinking about mezhep that deserves attention.

While perhaps not quite as extreme as Ihsan Yılmaz’s description of “surfing” between

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3 The publishers’ text notes that the process entailed expanding Amrânî’s original text from two volumes to three in order to simplify and clarify some points; the translators/interpreters, open their statement by highlighting this dual nature of “interpreting/translating” (tercüme/çeviri), describing it as “a means of transfer from one culture to another among different nations” (Özcan and İyibildiren 2006:8).
mezheps at will (2005), especially in the teachings of Fethullah Gülen, the (relatively) new, shared context of migration intimates a remapping, if not a complete reconfiguration, of the traditional geographies where different mezheps prevail. Brinkley Messick defines mezhep as an “interpretive community” (2005:159) which seems apt, as Turks (and Kurds, Azeris, et al.) meet and interpret with Moroccans (and others) in contexts of gurbet life in Europe and elsewhere. Geography (still) matters.

This brief excursus simplifies these notions of şehitlik (martyrdom), gurbet (migration/exile), and mezhep (juristic school) to point to some of the complexities of death and visiting. In the booklet the Şehitlik mosque produced for its General Committee Meeting, held March 2, 2014, a number of visitors are shown. In many cases, these visitors are political dignitaries (including German President Joachim Gauck, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davetoğlu), local civic leaders, and religious guests (including Turkish Minister of Religious Affairs, Mehmet Görmez) (Şehitlik 2014:9-23). More generally, Şehitlik prides itself in its robust tour program, led by 12 different guides who collectively lead up to three groups of 30 people daily, resulting in Şehitlik winning the Berlin Tulip prize “for German-Turkish public spirit.” To loop back to the Sommerfest, the day’s activities included: I-Slam, a “Muslim poetry slam” featuring young artists from the Şehitlik community; performances by a mosque

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4 Yılmaz’s description of surfing is intriguing, not least for its possible connection to the “waterways” of sharia, which I discuss in Chapter 3. But it also implies a certain paradox about the stability of mezheps: in order for someone like Fethullah Gülen to be able to readily surf between mezheps, they must be relatively stable. (Yılmaz’s article reads like an apologia for Gülen, perhaps biasing his claims.) Eyyup Said Kaya, in the same volume, points to interpretive flexibility within a single mezhep, suggesting a less delineated model for these schools of thinking (2005). Rudolph Peters similarly challenges the stability of mezhep as a concept by looking at Ottoman-Hanafi relations, which produced a notably less flexible process of jurisprudence than elsewhere (2005). Peters’ model suggests a juridical algorithm, in which a judge can tick through a checklist of interpretive tasks to arrive at a proper conclusion (assuming adequate knowledge).

children’s choir and a local music ensemble, Salsabil, specializing in Ottoman classical repertoire; a quiz and an auction; food and drink from local vendors, as well as a member of the mosque association wearing a fez and a large, drawn-on mustache, serving tea from a massive samovar marked “Alperen Ocakları”⁶; and tours of the mosque as well.

On quieter days, other kinds of visiting take place too. The aforementioned booklet includes a photograph of Turkish Deputy Prime Minister, Bekir Bozdağ, holding his hands at chest-level while praying a dua in front of graves in the courtyard in January 2013 (17). Such a practice is commonplace at Şehitlik and yet it would not be so across the Muslim world (whatever that may mean) geographically or historically. As a handbook on funerals distributed by the Turkish Diyanet explains: “For a time, the Prophet prohibited visiting graves [kabir ziyareti] in the period when people continued their pre-Islamic habits like boasting of their deceased ancestors, but later he conceded on this. In a hadith it is decreed: ‘I had forbidden you from visiting graves. Henceforth you may visit graves.’ (Sahih Muslim, ‘Jana’iz,’ 106)” (Diyanet 2008:59). The same manual then continues: “Religious Etiquette in Visiting [Graves]” (Ziyaret Adabi), including directions on proper (and improper) utterances; then a section, “Surahs and Duas To Be Recited While Visiting a Graves” (60-61). Among other things, visitors should greet the deceased aloud (al-salamu ‘alaikum, yā ahla l’kubūr, peace be upon you, O People of the Dead) (ibid.). The deceased may not speak back, but the graves themselves act as an inscription-system that elicits utterances from visitors as though they were conversing.⁷

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⁶ As discussed in the Pathway of Chapter 2 (and in this chapter), the Alperen Ocakları, a Turkish nationalist group that, of significance for musicology, has close connections with mehter (janissary band) music.

⁷ The idea of an inscription system here comes from Friedrich Kittler’s Aufschreibesystem, a “writing-down system” or “discourse network,” a term Kittler explores in a book of the same name, Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900. Tantalizingly, Kittler begins with the same conundrum by way of Faust: how to communicate with spirits (Geist), or more precisely, how might a spirit speak (1985:11). Epitaphs may well constitute the
The instructions are simple: *ruhuna fatiha* (“fatiha to his/her soul”). Or implicitly, *recite* surah al-*fatiha* to (or for) the soul of the deceased. Other epitaphs whisper fragments of stories from more recent migrations: Şenol Senman, “fatiha to his soul, died in a traffic accident, b. 1967 – d. 1968.” Emine Yağız, born November 12, 1974, died 33 days later. Eyüp Öztürk, *fatiha* to his soul, born August 1973, died February 1975. Or Canan Çınar, “our beloved daughter” who “closed her eyes without having opened them to the world,” April 8, 1984, *fatiha* to her soul.

In exceptional cases, however, the inscription-system of epitaphs is not just responsorial. The voices of the dead themselves are carved into stone—simultaneously fossilized and enlivened—as in the case of the epigraph of the cemetery’s founder, Hafiz Schükri (Hafiz Şükrü) and his wife, Frau Nuriha Schükri:

[In Arabic:] He [God] is the Everlasting One. [In Ottoman:] With a deep sorrow at the time of his death, the most beautiful of […] Imam Şükri Efendi reached the garden of paradise. *Fatiha* to the soul of the deceased, who reestablished, resurrected and glorified this cemetery while he was the imam of the embassy and who passed away in Berlin. [Continuing in German:] Here in steadfast faith in God rests my beloved husband, the spiritual head of the Turkish Embassy and founder of the Muhammadan cemetery, HAFIZ SCHÜKRI. Born in Unijeh [Ünye] 1871. Died in Berlin in 1924. [On a connected stone base, the text continues in German:] Followed by his wife, NURIHA SCHÜKRI, née Schulz. 20.10.1876, died 21.12.1930.8

Here a third-person account (Imam Şükri Efendi) gives way to a first-person account—“my beloved husband”—transforming an omniscient and formal narrative in Ottoman

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into a deeply personal, almost vocal statement by Nuriha Schükri. Implicit in all this, of course, is a tacit audience: visitors to the grave. From the information we have, it is clear that Hafız Şükrü and Nuriha invested considerable energies to revitalize the cemetery, making their posthumous haunting (via gravestone) all the more poignant.

These interactions during visitation are substantial, if not always visibly or audibly two-sided. Unsurprisingly then, these fall into the jurisdiction—the place where the law speaks, etymologically—of Islamic law, which again is not entirely uniform across time and place. Different mezheps interpreting the oral hadith traditions about the Prophet’s visiting graves differently. Hanafis, the predominant mezhep among Turkish Sunnis, have extra obligations in such visits:

In visiting a grave there is a proper etiquette [âdâb]. While entering the graveyard, by reflecting on one’s own fate, one should be in a state of deep humility and should pronounce a selam greeting on the deceased like the Most Gracious Messenger did. According to the Hanafis, one should remain standing by the side of the grave and recite a dua prayer and it should be known that one should not step or sit on graves. This dua of the Prophet should be recited: ‘Selam to you, oh you who rest in these graves, may God grant peace to us and to you. You went before us, we will follow in your footsteps. (Kandemir 2013:497)

Kandemir makes this even more emphatic based on gradations of actions: “According to most Islamic scholars, the Most Gracious Messenger’s visiting of graves is recommended [sünnet], while for Hanafis it is strongly recommended [müekked sünnet], and for some it is even obligatory [vâcip]” (ibid.). This pro-visitation attitude among Hanafi Sunnis extends to women as well, who are encouraged to visit graves, following the example of the Prophet’s wife, ‘Ā´isha, with two principle caveats: first, that they control their voices and refrain from excessive lamenting; and second, that they go only with other women.9

Visitation as a pathway highlights how a destination—the place one goes to visit—exerts a kind of gravitational pull. Many pathways are all drawn to the same end. In this case, had I walked through Tempelhofer Freiheit, I might have literally been walking along runways, the roar of jets from recent years displaced by the insect-like buzz of remote-controlled planes, the occasional ring of bicycle bells and maybe a weekend drum circle. Cutting south from Kreuzberg, I would pass through Hasenheide park where I would have likely heard birdsong mixed with several quiet offers for drugs. On a bus, I might well have been surrounded by young teens chattering noisily en route to the local swimming pool—just beyond the eastern wall of the larger cemetery behind the mosque. But visiting also means a kind of halting along a pathway. One striking aspect of the larger cemetery is the wide variety of benches and chairs flanking graves, along with bright-colored flowers and (often) handcrafted grave markers. These benches and chairs, simple as they may be, offer a material reminder of the abstractions of Islamic law: one should stop and stand (durmak) at the side of the grave to recite to and on behalf of departed souls. The prohibition on sitting on graves is suggestive: a visit to the dead is more than just dropping off flowers, it means to stop and stay, and perhaps to sit—just not on a grave. To leave means to plan to come again. A visit is about pause, reflection and re-visiting. And eventually, it means following those who have already passed this way—who have already passed on and carried to their final resting place.

10 Depending where I started, I might have also passed by the commemorative plaque to Hatun Sürücü, just south of Tempelhof Park on Oberlandstrasse. After exiting a bus, she was shot three times by her brother in an “honor killing” for having left her arranged marriage (Ewing 2008:151ff.). Yearly memorials are still held streetside at the same bus stop (Schnedelbach 2014) and a newly-constructed bridge to Tempelhof Freiheit is being named in her honor (Langer 2013). Visiting the dead, even in tragedy, becomes a pathway.
4.2 The Mosque is a Medium, II: Sound Ecologies of Graves and Courtyards

"Every soul will taste death. Then to Us you will be returned."
— Qur’an 29:57

"Like the Eyüp Sultan mosque in Istanbul and the Hacı Bayram mosque in Ankara, Şehitlik mosque in Berlin is a site of revered by all Muslims. Many of our fellow citizens or Muslims have their weddings and circumcision festivities and recitation here....One of the issues our mosque increasingly encounters with its long-term constituency is providing funeral services here. Nearly every weekday, 1-2 funeral prayer services are held here.
— Şehitlik Turkish Islamic Association of Neukölln, Berlin

"Our fellow citizens, wherever they may be, may call this toll-free telephone number to receive help with funeral arrangements: HELLO 188 FUNERAL [ALO 188 CENAZE]
— A Guide to Funeral Services, Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs

“How did you know the deceased to be?,” the imam asked. “We knew him to be good,” the crowd replied, nearly in unison, as they stood in rows in the courtyard of Berlin’s Şehitlik mosque bathing in the noontime sun. The imam repeated the question twice more, the congregation repeated the same answer. “Do you willingly rescind any claims on him?” “Let them be rescinded,” came the reply, again almost as a single voice. The imam then turned around and began the formal funeral prayers for my former oud teacher, Nuri Karademirli on August 14, 2013. I last saw—and heard—Nuri Karademirli late in Ramadan 2012. On August 11, he played a concert on oud along with nayzen Kudsi Ergüner and percussionist Hamdi Akatay at the Rotes Rathaus (Red City Hall) near Berlin’s famed Alexanderplatz. Their concert, billed as Klangfarben—a word that appeared frequently in Karademirli’s musical projects—was part of an annual series of

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2 Diyanet 2008:4.
music and cultural events, *The Nights of Ramadan* (Die Nächte des Ramadan). A certain cognitive dissonance pervaded the event: the musicians, looking sharp in their concert blacks, performed a set programmed by Karademirli and billed as an exploration of “the multifaceted sonic world of concert music of Anatolian, Persian and Arab cultures [*Kulturraum*],” all under the watchful eyes of a massive painting of Otto von Bismarck at the Congress of Berlin, hanging on the striking salmon-colored walls of the Great Ballroom. But context aside, the music was powerful. Upon arrival in Berlin, I had the good musical fortune to have studied oud with Nuri Hoca at his music school, the Berlin Turkish Music Conservatory, in Kreuzberg, located just down the hill from Şehitlik mosque and Tempelhof Park. He was a lively figure in the local music scene, bringing tremendous—if at times perhaps excessive—energy to rehearsals and performances alike. While he had his critics, no one in the Turkish music community doubted his enormous musical skill, which was on full display with Ergüner and Akatay.

Almost exactly one year later, on August 7, 2013—the last day of Ramadan—Nuri Hoca suffered a fatal heart attack. The Conservatory posted the following bilingual announcement: “Funeral [*Beisetzung*] of Nuri Karademirli. The great *ud* master [*Büyük Üd ustasi*] Nuri Karademirli’s body [*naas*] will be laid to rest on August 14, 2013 (Thursday) at 12:00 German time at Berlin’s Şehitlik Mosque following the midday prayers [*öğlen Namazına mütakip*].” A more streamlined German announcement accompanied it, followed by the address of the mosque on Columbiadamm, listed by its formal name as a German civic institution: “the DITIB-Şehitlik Turkish Islamic

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4 Anton van Werner’s 1881 painting, *The Congress of Berlin*.
Community in Neukölln (Registered Association).” Much to my chagrin, at the time I was far from Berlin—in the United States. But friends, fellow students, and newscasters recounted a large gathering—everyone I spoke with commented on how many people attended—of family, friends and musicians in the courtyard of the mosque. Despite the crowds, one fellow student described the service as “quite silent.” She further described how “most of the female students of Nuri were crying [while] the men were rather quietly waiting further away.” At the front of the mosque courtyard, just outside the mosque entrance, lay the body, shrouded in a white kefen, then placed in a casket draped with a deep-green throw embroidered with a verse from the Qur’an: “Every soul will taste death. Then to Us you will be returned” (59:27). The service, which was held in the courtyard as is customary at Şehitlik, included a eulogy by the popular Berlin-based singer Mario Rispo, a former student and collaborator of Karademirli’s: “We have lost a master who used his soul like an instrument and his instrument like his soul.” Consul General Ahmet Başar Sen then offered a more formal eulogy, followed by the funeral liturgy, led by the Berlin Attaché for Religious Affairs, Imam Bilal Öztürk. In near silence, the funeral procession then headed out the gates of the courtyard and around behind the mosque, with burial taking place in a plot set apart from the larger cemetery for Muslims.

In the previous chapter, I considered sonic aspects of death and ritual from inside a “courtyard mosque” in Berlin; here I shift perspectives to consider how an acoustics of death emerges outside of Şehitlik mosque. But while courtyards are important parts of mosque complexes in Ottoman and Turkish history, this courtyard is unusual: it contains,

7 http://ha-ber.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=23506, accessed February 2, 2014, no longer available. But other attendees confirm Rispo’s comments, as well as in other online news articles from local German-Turkish sources: e.g., Metropol FM 2013.
or rather was built all around, a cemetery. Islamic funerary rites, or cenaze, which take place in this courtyard, sit at a rich intersection of sound, ecology and public space. As a set of sonic practices, the cenaze (especially at Şehitlik) entails a dynamic set of interactions that include not only call-and-response participation, as described above, but also a precise code about how loud certain kinds of sounds should be—in other words, for whose ears they are intended. As an ecological practice, the cenaze necessitates an engagement with the outside world through the prayer (which Hanafi Sunnis do not hold inside the mosque) and especially burial, which reconnects congregants with the earth itself, serving as a reminder of a larger-scale cosmic connection attendant in the mosque itself. In an urban setting like Şehitlik, the sonic environment is not simply an idyllic wooded space, but rather a (relatively) small plot of land sandwiched between a major road and a former airport, both of which have been known to generate considerable sound. Finally, the cenaze realigns the mosque’s relationship with a broader public, as it opens up mosque spaces to those who might not otherwise enter them, creating a semi-public space—neither fully public nor counterpublic, two terms I discuss below—that has close connections to the sensory and natural environment around it. Most discussions of public sound and space in Islam naturally gravitate to the ezan (call to prayer) or other amplified sounds made audible beyond the confines of the mosque space itself (cf. Hirschkind 2006, Larkin 2008 and 2014, Eisenberg 2013). But at Şehitlik, where (as in all of Germany) a public call to prayer is effectively prohibited, clear-cut distinctions between public and private are eroded through sound as amplification is used only within the courtyard (but not beyond) except for key events that are emphatically public, like the mosque’s Sommerfest. More substantively, funerals themselves create a complex passage
between public and private. And finally, in this funerary ecology, the dead themselves become an important (potential) group of listeners that again fits poorly within standard frameworks of a public—instead they act as a mosque *Publikum*, an audience.

**The Life of the Grave: Berzah and Beyond**

A curious thing happened after the Battle of Badr, fought in 624 CE—just two years into the *hijri* Islamic calendar. Muhammad had led his army to victory over the Quraysh who possessed Mecca and he and his followers were in the process of burying the dead from the opposing army, when the following interaction took place:

When the burial had been completed, the Holy Prophet stood over the pit and, calling the names of the principal ones whose bodies had been lowered into the pit, exclaimed, “Have ye found true that which your Lord did promise you? What my Lord promised me, that verily have I found to be true. Woe unto this people! You have rejected me, your Prophet! You cast me forth, and others gave me refuge; you fought against me, and others came to my help.” On this, Umar submitted, “Messenger of Allah, do you speak to the dead?” “Yea, verily,” replied the Holy Prophet, “for now they well know that the promise of their Lord has fully come to pass.” (Khan 1980:120-121)

This account draws on a number of *hadith* traditions but in almost every one of those *hadiths*, the sonic interaction with the dead goes even further. For example, al-Bukhari has three different accounts of this event. In one, narrated by Ibn Shihab, when Muhammad is asked if he was speaking to the dead, he responded, “You do not hear what I am saying better than they” (5:59:360). The dead hear better than the living, at least in this instance. In another, narrated by Ibn ‘Umar, the Prophet’s answer is slightly augmented: “You do not hear better than they do *but they cannot reply*” (2:23:452, emphasis added). The dead can hear but simply are unable to generate sound themselves. Finally, in a third version, narrated by Abu Talha, the prophet gives the same response but a parenthetical explanation is given: “(Qatada said, ‘Allah brought them to life
(again) to let them hear him, to reprimand them and slight them and take revenge over them and caused them to feel remorseful and regretful.)” (5:59:314). Thus the dead generally are unable to hear but could in this special circumstance.8

In Sahih Muslim, two other significant elements are added: first, the dead bodies of the non-Muslim armies were left out for three days; and second, Muhammad addressed the deceased one by one by name (e.g., O, Abu Jahl bin Hisham!). In this account, both ‘Umar’s question and the Prophet’s answer expand slightly but in important ways:

“‘Umar listened to the words of Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) and said: Allah's Messenger, how do they listen and respond to you? They are dead and their bodies have decayed. Thereupon he (the Holy Prophet) said: By Him in Whose Hand is my life, what I am saying to them, even you cannot hear more distinctly than they, but they lack the power to reply” (40:6869). The entire account is made more emphatic: for ‘Umar, the passing of time and decaying of flesh (presumably a process he could smell) made this act even more incredible—as if he could imagine a freshly dead corpse hearing, but not one whose body has begun decaying. And Muhammad’s speech is intensified with his oath, suggesting he too understood how hard it might be for ‘Umar (or others) to believe his claim.

These and related hadith accounts are vigorously debated even today—part of a much broader discourse in Islam of the “life of the grave” (kabir hayati, berzah hayat or berzah alemi).9 The central question this discourse, like the question posed by the imam to funeral congregants about the life of the deceased, is that of quality of living—how one does (now) live or will after death. For many authors and clerics, hearing is one part of

8 Several ayāt from the Qur’an similarly intimate the possibility that the dead generally do not hear nor can they be made to hear by humans—but “Allah makes anyone He wills hear” (35:22; also 27:80).

9 Kabir means “grave” while berzah, a term I discuss at more length later, means (among many other things) “isthmus, threshold, limbo.” For an example of contemporary Turkish-Sunni publishing on this topic, cf. İştihadî 2010.
the life of the grave; for others of a more Salafist persuasion, such ideas constitute polytheistic *shirk*. Much as there exists a centuries-old debate about *samā‘*, or the permissibility and effects of listening to certain sounds (which I discuss in the Epilogue), a parallel debate emerges about the listening dead. As suggested in the previous Pathway section, many of these debates are driven by *mezhep* schools of Islamic legal thought.

Thus Hadis Yayınları published in 2012 a book, Do the Dead Hear According to the Great Hanafi Scholars? (*Büyük Hanefi Alimlerine Göre Ölüler İşit mi?*), which draws on the writings of Muhammad Nāṣir ad-Dīn al-Albānī (El-Elbâñî) and of Nu‘mān al-Ālūsī to argue that the dead do *not* hear (El-Elbâñî 2012). On the other side of the debate stands Mehmet Ali Demirbaş, a prolific author of *fetvas* for *Türkiye* newspaper and on his own website, where he has numerous *fetva*-style (question-answer) posts on topics like: “Every dead believer and non-believer hears,” “Are Salafists blind and deaf?,” “The spirit doesn’t die, the dead hear” and “The life of the dead and their torment.”10

Taking a middle-ground position, Mustafa Karataş, a professor at Istanbul University’s *İlahiyat Fakültesi* (School of Religion), suggests that the sensory world of the dead is comparable to but not identical to our own.11 A pair of question/answer *fetvas* highlight his position:

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11 Another intriguing question related to the acoustics of the life of the grave—how the dead *sound*—also arises in Karataş. As with many *fetva* volumes, the questions he receives often reveal as much as his answers, highlighting the distance between lived experience/belief and formal theology. For example, one questioner shares a lengthy anecdote about visiting graves as a child to recite the Qur’an as a child to recite the Qur'an on behalf of deceased relatives. On one occasion, the following took place: “I had my hands open and had wished peace on all their souls. As I was leaving the graveyard I heard three abrupt clapping sounds [*kesik kesik üç alkış sesi*] from my uncle’s grave. I was so afraid that I didn’t even notice my leg getting torn up by barbed wire….I know that the dead couldn’t do this. But this is also not a product of my imagination. What do you think this could have been?” (2012:348) Karataş’s answer is fairly dismissive, saying among other things, “It’s unthinkable [*düşünmülemez*] that the dead could make clapping sounds.” But the question suggests otherwise: whether or not the dead can clap, it *is* thinkable by a devout Muslim, as proven by the letter.
Question: In the life that comes after death, are the dead in a state of deep sleep? Or when we visit them in a cemetery can they see us and hear us?

Answer: During cemetery visits, they can sense us [hisseedebilirler]. It is for us to learn a lesson from their state and prepare ourselves for death. Death is a sleeping state [uyku hâlidir]. Some people will sleep soundly, others will sleep fitfully. (2012:344)

Karataş reiterates this verbiage in response to a related question, “It’s said, ‘The dead see those who are washing them [in preparation for burial].’ Is this true? After people die, do their souls see the things we do in this world?” His answer is to the point:

“Hissedebilirler,” he writes—they can sense us (351).

These exchanges echo points made centuries earlier by al-Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabī, as recounted by Salman Bashier in his broader examination of barzakh, or berzah. Al-Ghazālī suggests a dream-like quality of sensory perception for the deceased: “You witness how a sleeper in his sleep sees a snake that bites him, at which point you hear him cry, see the sweat break out on his forehead, and see him roll over from his place....You, on the other hand, will find everything outwardly quiet, no snake wriggles round the man. The snake only exists within his imagination [as divine punishment], but there is nothing to be seen in your sphere” (in Bashier 2004: 81-82). Ibn ‘Arabī describes sensory perception in our lifetimes as “the state of wakefulness,” with the sleeplike state of barzakh opening up new ways of sensing. In barzakh (i.e., after death) a person perceives things “as sensory things,” including events one would have considered “rationally impossible” according to mortal sensory capacity. These events take on a dimension of presence, or being (wujūd), particular to the liminal state or barzakh, just beyond death. Ibn ‘Arabī sums up these sensory differences with a metaphor of place:
“After all, the homesteads of sensation are diverse, so the properties are diverse” (in Bashier 2004:82).\(^{12}\)

Certain components of contemporary burial rites in Turkish Berlin (and in Turkey generally), especially the practice of *telkin* exhortation, which I discuss below, suggest some answers to this question of whether the dead can hear. But before that, what would be the implications of the dead hearing? Authors like Mark Smith (2004, 2007) and Hillel Schwartz (2011) have taken up the challenge of historical listening, often as a willful imaginary, in which hearing the past is a process of archival historiography coupled with an imaginary conjuring of sounds that were never recorded and are often only implicit in those documents that do exist. But these accounts largely occupy themselves with listening in the west, disregarding the ways in which western hearing has always been bound up with other non-western practices. Listening at a site like Şehitlik, where Islamic mosque and cemetery are brought into close proximity with Tempelhof—in all its different permutations (parade grounds, airfield, airport, park)—offers a chance to rethink some of these interconnected ways of listening. Assuming that it is at least *possible* according to Islamic (and especially Hanafi Sunni theological) sources that the deceased in an Islamic cemetery could be listening, what would the history of Şehitlik sound like from the ground up, listening along with the dead buried there? Taking the notion of *şehitlik* itself broadly, the deceased then become *şahits*, witnesses of a sonic past.

**Turks Return to Berlin: On Being a Şahit**

\(^{12}\) Cf. Halevi 2007 for even earlier instances of these debates, including questions of sound.
Long before it became a mosque, Şehitlik was a cemetery—and from its very beginnings, sound, death and hallowed ground mingled. Some of the most important figures in establishing Şehitlik would have also been its best trained listeners: Giritli ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi, Hafız Şükrü and his wife, Nuriha Schükri. Another group of prominent şehits are implicated in the complex history—sonic and otherwise—of Berlin in the first half of the 20th century. These figures include Mehmed Talât Paşa, Cemal Azmi Bey, and Bahâeddin Şakir, held key positions in the government of the Ottoman Empire during World War I and have the dubious distinction of being key organizers of the Armenian Genocide as well. In addition, Mustafa Çokay (also written Şoqay, Çokaev Çokayoğlu), a Kazak Turk and pan-Turkestan freedom fighter who later joined the Nazis to fight the Soviets, is also buried in the funeral. These figures were all part of a sizable group of Turks (understood broadly here to include Çokay as well) who made Berlin their home long before the 1961 labor agreement, establishing institutions like the Şehitlik cemetery and participating in the sonic life of Berlin—even in their (sometimes violent) deaths.

Listening with these figures yields rich insight into history generally, but also into the particular soundworlds they would have been listening for; listening, whatever its relationship to a more general sense of hearing, entails particular attentiveness, and in several instances, we know or at least can hazard educated guesses about what kinds of sounds might have draw the attention of certain deceased listeners. The first permanent Ottoman ambassador to Prussia, Giritli ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi (“Giritli” or “Giridi” mean “one from Crete”), passed away on October 29, 1798 while still in Berlin. His original burial space was down the hill near today’s Urbanstrasse on a plot of land given by the king (just a 10-minute walk from Nuri Karademirli’s conservatory), but would be moved in
1866 to their current location in a plot of land, then part of the Garnisonfriedhof (Garrison Cemetery), in order to expand military barracks (DITIB-Şehitlik 2012a).\textsuperscript{13} A diplomat, poet, and Sufi, ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi had special training in a variety of fields that would have nudged him towards certain kinds of listening in his posthumous resting place(s). First of all, his diplomatic career and his writings suggest that he was constantly engaged in encounters between Ottoman and western European cultures, as evidenced by his correspondence with Orientalist Friedrich von Diez (Kuran 1963) or his magnum opus, Muhayyelât-i Leünn-i Ilâhi, which brought together a number of literary conventions from contemporary Europe and older Arab and Turkish literature (cf. Tietze 1948), prompting Turkish writer Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar to describe the work as almost being “the tale of Faust for our past [esktı, Ottoman] culture” (1982:26).\textsuperscript{14} This kind of cultural/literary intinerary of in-betweenness, as well as the author’s poetic sensibilities, can be seen from the opening words of Giritli ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi’s text:

The one who tells this beautiful tale
Composing it in new melodies,
With these astonishing, beautiful words
Twisting, turning, decorated it so.

\begin{tabular}{ll}
Sühan-perdâz-i în şirin-fesâne & Çûnîn-zed nağmehâ-yi nev-terâne \[1ex]
Çûnîn-gerd nakş-i misâl-i kühen. (1999:1) & Berârende-i în acâyib sûhan
\end{tabular}

Clearly, he is deeply concerned with the poetics of sound in the work, an important recurring motif in the text is the idea of a holy pathway, the seyr-u süluk, that a Sufi initiate travels along—and in several places, including the second of three dreams that

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{13}] The DITIB-Şehitlik website also gives the following information: “On December 19, 1866, the remains of the deceased were buried in the current cemetery after a religious ceremony. Sultan Abdüllaziz had a monument erected to their memory” (DITIB-Şehitlik, “Die Geschichte des Friedhofs”). The monument remains today in the main courtyard. Akkaya notes that as part of this transition, in which it was officially named “Mezâristan-ı İslami” in the presence of Ottoman ambassador, Aristaki Bey, a wall was built around the complex, with a small watchman’s house (bekçi evi) and masjid inside.

\item[\textsuperscript{14}] The work acknowledges its debt to Lâmi’s İbretnümâ and 1001 Nights in its opening pages (Giridi ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi 1999:1), which has attracted considerable—perhaps too much—attention from some scholars who have reduced it to being derivative of such works. It is often heralded for its influence on the Tanzimat Era literature of the 19th century Ottoman Empire (cf. Tietze 1948, Alacatlı 1999).
\end{itemize}
structure the work—these pathways are passages through cities. This standing interest in
dreams (the sensory state closest to that of life in the grave), in cities, in sound and
poetry, all prime ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi to be a careful listener.

His death on October 29, 1798, and the events surrounding it, like so many, was
a sonically complex affair—as was the procession to the gravesite. The news of his death
traveled slowly because of language barriers: a servant at the ambassador’s residence
communicated “with signs and forceful arm movements” that ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi had died
(Çelik 2008:251). Word of his death “spread like wildfire” (ibid.) through the city, with
thousands gathering on November 1 for the funeral procession to the aforementioned
burial ground to the south of the main city area:

The body of the Turkish ambassador Ali Aziz Efendi who passed away here was buried
on Tuesday around midday according to Turkish tradition, with the burial taking place
promptly in accordance with Muslim rules....In adherence to these rules, a flat parcel of
land was bought for the body of Ali Aziz Efendi near Hallesches Tor but before the
Rollberger Hills in Tempelhof, where a stone grave was hastily built. The casket, which
was made of wood and wrapped with a decorated cloth, was carried to the grave site on
a green carriage pulled by six horses....Two of his servants, on the right and left side of
the cart, held small sticks of burning incense. Other servants of the deceased followed
behind the carriage on foot, while his son and his translator, along with other people
from his circle, followed in two more carriages. Since the minister, called an imam,
returned to his homeland shortly after the arrival of the ambassador, the son of Ali Aziz
Efendi had to recite the required prayers, while the casket was being lowered into the
ground. After the embroidered cloth was taken from the casket, the body was interred,
-facing toward Mecca facing the direction of the grave of the Prophet. As he ['Ali ‘Aziz
Efendi] is well-known, a small dome will be erected over his grave. On the way back
[into the city proper], the son of the deceased threw gold coins to the crowds alongside
the road, as was prescribed by the Prophet. (in Çelik 2008:252-253)15

Despite some inaccuracies about Islam (e.g., Muhammad’s grave is in Medina; the
distribution of gold coins or other money is not a Muslim tradition), this early journalistic
account offers an important account of the first Turkish funeral in Berlin. Besides the

15 Other key descriptions of these events can be found in Achmed Schmiede’s collection of documentary
sources on Giritli ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi (1990), as well as his brief overview of events (1988), which also
recounts, among other things, a strange incident in which the grave was vandalized just a year after ‘Aziz
information given here, much of which is sensorily evocative (the green carriage, burning incense, recitation of prayers, throwing coins to crowds of people—still gathered after the burial), Çelik also supplied two other intriguing tidbits of sonic information. First, he notes that, according to a headline from the Berlinische Nachrichten, “thousands in Germany wept for the deceased ambassador” (250) and that years later, a “silent monument” was erected over ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi’s grave as a testament (şahid) of friendship between the two countries. Both of these details implicitly suggest the kind of sound that might have accompanied the procession due to mourning—so much so that the memorial becomes silent (stumm, sessiz) by comparison.16 Şehitlik’s website today points out how much has changed since: “The possibilities of transport back home were not possible then. Today, Şehitlik Mosque offers that with its funeral office [Bestattungsfirma]” (Şehitlik n.d.). In both cases, death entails particular routes of passage.

A century later, the cemetery had been relocated and fallen into disrepair, and the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse. While Giritli ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi had been the first permanent ambassador, Hafiz Şükrü, the embassy imam, would be the last Ottoman official in Berlin. As his title (hafiz) indicates, he had memorized the entire Qur’an and was presumably skilled with languages as an imam deployed to a foreign embassy and well-versed in burial rites himself by virtue of his clerical duties. As I discuss briefly in Chapter 1, memorization of the Qur’an is a process of sounding and listening, especially for young children, who often memorize much (or sometimes in the

16 Special thanks to Feyzullah Yeşilkaya who first made me aware of Giritli ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi with his presentation at the Kreuzberg Museum, January 28, 2012, as part of the Lange Nacht der Museen and the exhibition, ortsgespräche. stadt - migration - geschichte: vom halleschen zum frankfurter tor (Kreuzberg Museum). Yeşilkaya’s presentation highlighted ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi’s routes through the city, as well.
past, all) of the Qur’an aurally/orally. His epitaph, as cited above, highlights a number of facts about his life: he reestablished the Şehitlik cemetery and also glorified it. (This task seems to have been a joint one with his wife, Nuriha Schükri, who continued caring for the graveyard until 1930, after which her sister continued on until 1960.) In 1921, the cemetery was also expanded by 700 m², after a significant influx of Ottoman soldiers who, having been transported to Germany during World War I, died from their wounds (ibid.).

Perhaps the best-known figure in Şehitlik’s history was buried here during Hafız Şükrü’s time in Berlin. Mehmed Talât Paşa (or simply Talat Paşa), a former Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire during World War I and key figure in the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki) he fled to Berlin on a German submarine (along with Bahâeddin Şakir and Cemal Azmi Bey, among others) just before the Ottoman defeat by the Allies (Böer, et al. 2002:195). Sentenced to death in absentia by a court-martial for his activities during the war, including the deportation and mass killing of Armenians, he struggled to find quiet in his initial stay on Alexanderplatz, eventually moving further west to Charlottenburg (196). He attempted to organize Muslims in Berlin after the closure of the Turkish Society (Türk Kulübü) shortly after the war, forming a Middle Eastern Society (Şark Kulübü) with leaders of local communities from Egypt, Syria, and India, among others. He was killed on March 15, 1921, just across from the State Music Conservatory (Staatliche akademische Hochschule) (Böer, et al: 2002:201, Derogy 1990xxi, 84-85, Şükrüoğlu 2010).17 He would be buried at Şehitlik then repatriated to

17 It seems unlikely that Talat Paşa’s killing would have connected in any way with the Conservatory, though it was a critical time for that institution, as it was incorporating the new Musical Instrument Collection and Phonogramm-Archiv, overseen by Curt Sachs and Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, discussed
Turkey in 1943 at the height of World War II (DITIB-Şehitlik 2012a:5). A year later, the same group of assassins shot Bahâddin Şakir and Cemal Azmi Bey just outside the famed Ufa-Palast Theater at the Zoo Station as a movie was letting out (Derogy 1990:158). As each of their newly refurbished gravestones in the Şehitlik cemetery recounts in modern Turkish, Ottoman, and German: “Member of the Committee of Union and Progress. Born in Istanbul 1974/in Arap (Malatya) 1866 [respectively]. Made şahit [martyr, witness] by Armenian terrorists 1922. Al-Fatiha to his soul.” In German, the headstones simply say “killed by [ermordet... durch] Armenian terrorists”; in both the 2012 DITIB-Şehitlik report, “Berlin İnşaat Projesi,” and the 2014 activities report (both in Turkish), the language is again clear: their assassinations are considered şehitlik.

Şükrü Efendi would have been the imam for the funeral of these şahits and his wife, Nuriha, followed by her sister, would have then taken care of their burial sites in the years that followed. As a native German speaker, Nuriha (Schulz) Schükri would have been particularly attuned to the political developments that rocked Weimar: leftist uprisings and hyperinflations after the war; the creative (and often decadent) surge of the mid-‘20s (die goldenen Zwanziger) in music, cinema, visual arts, and science; and the beginnings of the financial collapse that would bring Adolf Hitler to power. She may well have met Mustafa Çokay, a Kazakh Turk (“a great Turkic nationalist,” Cihangir 2000:15) and final şahit of particular note who moved to Berlin in 1929 to continue organizing his

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18 Much simpler headstones were used previously, as seen in a photograph in the 2012 building report: “Merhum [deceased] Bahaettin Şakir. Doğumu 1878, Ölümü 1922” (5), written in modern Turkish.
resistance to the Soviet Union (10). He would be imprisoned in June 1941 then recruited by Nazi forces to start a Turkic legion to fight the Soviets, only to die a few months later on December 27, 1941, in a Berlin hospital from either typhoid or Nazi poisoning that wrought its course while he was on a train to Berlin-Spandau (Hidraliyev 2001:132ff.). His funeral was held six days later on Friday, January 2 after the Friday prayers and he was buried at Şehitlik: “Large crowds turned out for his funeral service [cenaze töreni], and in accordance with the last wishes of the deceased, permission was granted for political speeches to be delivered” (148). Whether one considers these more traditional şahits—those who died within the context of geopolitical struggle and war—to be particularly good listeners, they certainly would have had good ears for the political. The sounds of politics, şahit witnessing, and death would mark so much of the century for Şehitlik and its neighbors.

**Listening with a Post-Mortem Publikum**

*Publikum*: an audience, a listening public. From their aural vantage point in the dark earth of the cemetery, what kind of *Publikum* might these special listeners and political witness-martyrs have heard over the years, especially in the half past-century with the return of Turks *back to Berlin*? For example, what might the sounds of

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19 He and his wife, Maria, fled from the Soviet Union to Istanbul to Paris in the early 1920s, and had traveled to Berlin at least by 1927, if not earlier (Çokayeva 2000:25).

20 Three days later—the ninth day after his passing—a memorial service would be held at the Humboldt Club (*Humboldt Kulübü*), once again full of people. The program included “a Turkic [Türkistanlı] hoca reciting the Qur’an in aşere style” followed by political speeches (Hidraliyev 2001:148). On the 40th day after Çokay’s death, another memorial service was held, this time in Paris, organized by his wife, Maria (149). In 1996, Kazakhstan unsuccessfully petitioned for the remains of Çokay, with hopes of transferring him to be buried next to the renowned Sufi teacher, Ahmed Yasawi, in the city of Turkestan (150).

21 This question is, of course, a playful rejoinder to the question so often asked—even today—of people with Turkish roots, including third-generation immigrants whose parents were born and raised in Germany:
neighboring Tempelhof Field been? Before it became an airport—let alone a Nazi Weltflughafen, or “world airport”—it had long been a site of important religious and sonic practice, first under the auspices of the Order of the Knights Templar and then later under the Prussian king, from whom it served as a parade ground for wedding processions and military reviews that were “directed by cannonfire and put on a show of might and power” (Demps and Paeschke 1998:9). By the late 19th century the field became a popular site for experiments in flight (replete with tragic explosions). Then during the Weimar years construction began on an airport there, opening on October 8, 1923.\textsuperscript{22} The airport expanded considerably during National Socialist years, based on plans by architect Ernst Sagebiel, a construction project that must have resonated through the neighborhood. Other sonically-rich events included May Day parades in the mid-1930s (master-minded by Nazi architect Albert Speer), airshows, and the construction of planes, including the invention of the “Jericho trumpet” sirens on Stuka dive bombers, which intentionally augmented the sonic capacities of these aircraft (Demps and Paeschke 1998:46-49; cf. also Schmitz 1997:86-90, Dittrich 2005). The airport was not just a runway either; planes were manufactured on site in two in-house factories (Seguin 2008).

As early as September 1940, Tempelhof became a prime target for ongoing (if mostly unsuccessful) Allied bombing campaigns, culminating when Soviet forces entered the building and used explosives to enter a vault full of films—allegedly of aerial photography—which then burned for days on end because of the celluloid. (Today

\textsuperscript{22} For further details on parades, early aviation experiments and the establishment of the airport, cf. Schmitz 1997 and Demps and Paeschke 1998.)
“dropping metal doorframes” are all that remains, Seguin 2008.) The airport also has a large network of air raid shelter, suggesting yet another aspect of the sounds it would have produced (and its occupants would have heard) in the later phases of the war. After the fall of Berlin, the airport sat in the postwar American Sector and was quickly turned into a military airport, which would become even more famous during the Berlin Airlift (1948-1949), as American and British forces subverted a Soviet blockade of the city with tons of food and delivered daily by plane. Tempelhof became ground zero for this operation, which entailed not only the sound of planes but also a siren system that would sound prior to every landing plane’s approach (at its peak, once every 90 seconds). As the Cold War progressed, the airport served a complex set of military and commercial functions, many of which—helicopter flights to monitor the Berlin Wall, a massive radar operation for “listening to Eastern Europe” (Brady 2008), and annual open houses (ibid.)—would have entailed sonically rich activity beyond the ongoing noise of flights.

For pilots, the approach to Tempelhof was an exercise in what Karin Bijsterveld has called “sonic skills” (2014), carefully trained ways of knowing (or coming to know) the world and navigating it through sound. In this case, the navigation was literal. The division of Germany by Allied forces included narrow flight paths, or “corridors,” from West Germany into Berlin. Pilots would chart their course based on a set of radio beacons (transmitting signals from Fulda, Darmstadt, Berlin-Frohnau, etc.) which would guide them through the proper corridors at carefully coordinated times (Miller 2008:73-74). One Airlift pilot, Sam Myers, recalls the process of approaching Tempelhof as follows:

About halfway down the corridor (i.e., from West Germany to West Berlin), I tuned in Tempelhof radio range. I heard a steady hum, meaning that I was flying down the centerline of the corridor. Had I been right, of course, I would have heard a strong N in Morse code; left, of course, an A of dots and dashes. The approach to Tempelhof Airfield was above a cemetery flanked by five-story apartment buildings. I initiated my approach at two thousand feet and was picked up by the Berlin area GCA [ground-controlled approach radar system]. ‘Baker Forty-Two [the plane’s name], Tempelhof GCA, turn left to heading 337....Advise when passing Tempelhof Range and when over Wedding Beacon. Over.’ The CGA controller’s radio transmission was crisp and to the point. (18)

Once closer to Tempelhof, radio communication would again begin, directing the pilot over the cemetery to an appropriate runway. Within 15 minutes, the plane would be unloaded and the pilot would be off again.

More generally, the noise of flights itself must have been considerable, as pilots regularly recount flying in between buildings to land planes at Tempelhof Field. The noise of flights in and out of airports is a well-documented phenomenon and one that still proved able to mobilize hundreds of demonstrators on several occasions during my stay.

*24 The politics of airspace and noise in Berlin extend beyond Tempelhof, continuing to the present. Tegel Airport, in the district of Reinickendorf, was likewise a former Prussian military site, used in this case as an artillery firing range and later as an early test site for rocket testing—the sounds of which were audible through half the the city (Nebel 1972:98). During the Cold War, it was developed by the French as a commercial airport to relieve pressure on Tempelhof—even though West Berlin was a “dead-end” for flights and only French, British and American national airliners were allowed into the city. The noise is a daytime constant in the districts of Wedding and Reinickendorf, as I observed on many occasions during various trips to Wedding. On a related note, the area adjacent to Schöneberg Airport, just to the southeast of the city, has been named the site for the new Berlin-Brandenburg International Airport—named after West Berlin mayor, Willy Brandt—which has been delayed for years because of disputes over noise, among other things. In response to vigorous protests against airplane noise *(Fluglärm)*, Berlin and surrounding Brandenburg had agreed to install noise-proof windows for the airport’s neighbors—then failed to procure the right glass for the project. (Other delays also came from problems with security, electrical wiring, and other issues of infrastructure.) A recent sampling of news on the topic includes: Réthy 2013, Bombsch 2014, Neumann 2014, Fahrun and Mallwitz 2014, and Kurpjuweit 2014. Several independent websites have been set up, including: Infoplatform Fluglärm BER (Information Platform on Airplane Noise, [www.flugaermb.de](http://www.flugaermb.de)), Berlin Gegen Fluglärm (Berlin Against Airplane Noise, [www.berlin-gegen-fluglaerm.de](http://www.berlin-gegen-fluglaerm.de)), a *Berliner Morgenpost* interactive feature, “Diese Flüge kreuzen Ihren Kiez” (These Flights Cut Across Your Neighborhood, [flugroutenradar.morgenpost.de](http://flugroutenradar.morgenpost.de)), and even a page on Berlin’s municipal website, Lärm durch Flugverkehr (Noise from Air Traffic, [http://www.berlin.de/umwelt/aufgaben/laerm-flugbetrieb.html](http://www.berlin.de/umwelt/aufgaben/laerm-flugbetrieb.html)). But the political valence of noise is complex, as several older West Berliners have lamented the closure of Tempelhof and plans for the Berlin-Brandenburg airport, explaining to me that it represents a concession to the communist East at the expense of memorializing West Berlin properly. For them, the price of airplane noise is worth preserving cultural memory.*
as they protested the new Berlin airport because of its Fluglärm, or airplane noise—
always doing so with a remarkable sense of subdued vigor, protesting noise through their
numbers gathered much more so than with loud chants or other hallmarks of protest. The
airport only overlapped briefly with the new Şehitlik Mosque: the mosque opened in
2004 and the airport closed in 2008. But it would have been a constant sonic
companion—at least during daytime hours—for the dead, their visitors, and any Muslim
praying in the small masjid built on the cemetery plot. Since that time, it has been turned
into a massive park—called Tempelhofer Freiheit, suggesting both an open-air space and
also, literally, freedom, an intriguing political gesture given the airport’s history of being
militarized—that buzzes with model airplanes instead of passenger airliners, as wind-
powered skateboards and bicycles cruise down its runways (cf. Jost 2011). Louder events
occasionally take place there—concerts, exhibitions, and formal public gatherings—but
singing-around-barbecues or drum circles are far more commonplace. Ironically, a
mosque—so often feared in Europe as a potentially hostile sonic force in a
neighborhood—and its cemetery (in tandem with neighboring, non-Muslim cemeteries,
to be sure), seem to be fostering a contagious sense of quietude and contemplative
listening in and around Tempelhof.25

At the same time, the mosque is not (and has not always been) entirely a place of
quiet. The construction of a mosque and the surrounding complex, ongoing since 1994
(with mosque construction from 1999-2004) entails considerable sound as well. The
mosque’s construction was a collaboration between Turkish and German-Turkish

25 Although not a loud sound, one of the most mysterious sounds in the vicinity of Tempelhof is a low hum
that some residents claim to hear. Sound artist Seth Cluett was asked to investigate and did so by making a
series of field recordings, making particular use of geophones, microphones buried in the ground. He did
indeed find a hum that seemed to be emanating from one of the radar towers (Cluett 2009, 2014). For more
companies. Architect Hilmi Şenalp from Istanbul designed the mosque, which, according to the mosque’s own description, not only reflects but is an example of Ottoman architecture—both classical and early styles:

In its current form, Şehitlik Mosque features the characteristic hallmarks of Ottoman architecture of the 16th and 17th century. In addition, countless Seljuk motifs can be recognized in the forms, ornaments and stone edging [Umbrangungen der Steine]. Another connection to Seljuk architecture is visible in the widely-used blue-turquoise color....The main dome has a diameter of 12 meters (c. 39 feet) and sits on an octagonal girder. The total height from outside is 21.1 meters (c. 69 feet). On the outside facade of the mosque are two large bird houses, which represent an additional characteristic of Ottoman mosques. (DITIB-Şehitlik 2012b)

The express notion that the mosque represents something Ottoman underscores much in the communal life of the mosque, ranging from their weekly Ottoman language courses to the presence of a mehteran (janissary) band at public events to the architectural vision of the whole “mosque complex,” or külliye. The mosque proper was the second of three parts in a larger külliye complex that will include: a mosque, a gasilhane or washroom for the deceased, a large reception hall (çok maksatlı salon), an exhibition hall, a sports hall, a center for cultural dialogue, a book store, administrative offices, a cafeteria, a library, a guesthouse, a rooftop terrace, and a fountain (DITIB-Şehitlik 2012a).

Like most mosques which are currently renovating or expanding—which probably includes roughly half of the mosques I visited on a somewhat regular basis—work would continue through much of the week with an audible break during prayers. It was not uncommon at such mosques to see workers come in to clean up and pray with the congregation then return to construction. Unsurprisingly mosques are considered holy places to Muslims; but so too is mosque-construction, as discussed in a recent DITIB hutbe sermon. I discuss the sonic aspects of these sermons below but the content of a recent hutbe, delivered on May 30, 2014, addresses the sanctity of building mosques by
first situating mosques at the intersection of a sacred cosmos (to which this earth belongs) and human communities:

The building of a house of prayer on this earth with the intent of worshiping is as old as human history. Mosques are sacred places where Muslims, standing row after row with the same faith and reverence, worship God, learn their religion, and share their feelings with one another. The word mosque, *camî*, has a meaning of gathering, bringing together, and uniting. Built mosques [*Moscheebauten*] are symbols of oneness and solidarity, which can bring together [*cem edebilen*] men and women, poor and rich, young and old, any and all believers from all walks of life, shoulder to shoulder. Symbolically this means that on account of their being God’s houses, mosques enable people to become guests [*misafir, Gaste*] of God even in this world. (DITIB 2014c, 2014d).  

These sermons are read in DITIB mosques throughout Germany, as is evident from later references that enumerate the progress being made with the ongoing construction project in Köln, the headquarters of DITIB. That mosque (and presumably Şehitlik too) serves as “a beautiful sign of the fact that we will remain in Germany, that Islam is a part of Germany, that in Germany, different kinds of religious places of worship can be built” (ibid.). Once again, the idea of visiting is crucial (if implicit) here: having outlasted the experience of being “Guestworkers” in Germany, Turkish Muslims in DITIB can point to mosques as proof of permanent residence in a lasting sense. Yet at the same time, to be a guest in God’s house—to stand with fellow Muslims and pray, shoulder to shoulder—is an exalted station in this terrestrial realm. By extension, those interred in that *terra*—in Şehitlik cemetery—become special guest listeners. They are the mosque’s *Publikum*.

**Discursive and Sonic Publics**

In the very recent history of the dead at Şehitlik, the action has come to them, so to speak. In 2011, new headstones were put in place for Bahâddin Şakir and Cemal Azmi

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26 DITIB posts both the German and Turkish language versions of the Friday sermons (*hutbe, Freitagspredigt*) and I have drawn on both for this translation.
Bey, as described above. The following year, in April 2012, a commemorative gathering was held to mark the 90th year since they were killed. As the texts from the grave markers above suggest, the mosque as an institution takes great pride in them. The president of the mosque association, Ender Çetin, explained, “The graves were intentionally renewed, in order to show that in this period there were on both sides massacres and also many Muslim victims, which is easily forgotten” (Kalarickal and Bax 2012). Tessa Hoffmann of the Arbeitsgruppe Anerkennung (AGA, the Working Group for Acknowledgment) led a quiet vigil (Mahnwache) across the street from the mosque, handing out leaflets against the “Cult of Attackers.” As I mention in the Introduction, protests in front of mosques are not altogether uncommon in Berlin, nor are demonstrations that make calculated uses of noise or quiet. But the fact that these protesters stood across a busy street in quiet protest suggests a distinctive public engagement with sound at the mosque, moving in both directions: sound from the mosque; and sound from the environment (including protesters) that passes into the courtyard, if not the mosque proper. Building on the notion of a deceased Publikum, what kind of public-through-sound do these sonic entanglements produce?

Since the English-language publication of Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989, originally published in German in 1962), the question of publics and their role in sociopolitical life has played a central role in scholarly attempts to triangulate between private spaces, state actions, and institutional actors. While Habermas’s work focused on the bourgeois West, subsequent critiques by Nancy Fraser (1990), Gerard Hauser (1999), and Michael Warner (2002), among others, have pointed to lacunae and assumptions—including the lack of sonic interchange and
utterance, noted by both Fraser and Hauser with regards to voices, power, and rhetoric—that limit the applicability of Habermas’s ideas. The importance of such public spaces and activities, however, was hardly a novel observation with regards to Islamic and Turkish culture. The central place of coffeeshops in Ottoman history was acknowledged long before Habermas (Hattox 1985, Sajdi 2007, Leezenberg 2012), a community setting that retains—along with mosques, for some scholars—central importance in the social life of diasporic Berlin (Ceylan 2006). More recently, Charles Hirschkind has argued for an explicitly “counterpublic” role for certain Islamic congregations—a role he ascribes to certain Egyptian religious institutions and spaces by way of their sonic practices, or their participation in “an ethical soundscape,” in which other discourses compete with rationalist/scientistic discourse to engender ethical behavior in Muslim listeners through sound, ranging from amplified ezans to the circulation of cassette sermons (2006). The unfolding of public space at Şehitlik mosque is very much part of the same cultural conversation, yet it articulates its connections to and resistance of a broader public space in different ways—at once, more rooted in the sonic ecology of the mosque-cemetery complex, and also more ambivalent in its relationship to a broader Berlin public which it strategically embraces and distances itself from through different activities, ranging from Friday prayers to public festivals to funeral services.

Philip Bohlman frames the history of building mosques in Germany in acoustic terms, highlighting an expectation of “containment” of liturgical sound (especially of the call to prayer) to interior spaces:

Mosques, orientalised and hidden, have a history of several centuries in Germany, but prior to the rebuilding and reunification of Germany after the Second World War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, mosques were not thought to threaten public spaces. The threat to Germany’s public spaces has assumed two forms, both of them aesthetic, at least on their surfaces. First, mosques should not disturb the skyline of Germany cities....Second, the
use of the call-to-prayer, *adhān*, projected into the spaces around a mosque, is claimed to disrupt and Islamicise the German soundscape. If Muslims make sound when praying, reciting and worshipping, it should be contained. The aesthetic dimensions of the *adhān* are even more complicated by the fact that it is normally sounded from the minarets, the tallest parts of the mosque structure. (Bohlman 2013:215)

Şehitlik does “disturb” the Berlin skyline with minarets, and given its Ottoman propensities, one could argue that it is self-orientalizing—leveraging certain cultural tropes through architecture and other activities as though they were representative, as though the architecture of state-sanctioned mosques in the Ottoman Empire indeed represented the massive span of cultures living within the Ottoman state. But it does fit Bohlman’s sonic description well, by not publicly reciting/broadcasting a call to prayer, which Ender Çetin said was a voluntary act—being as far from residential areas as it is, Şehitlik had some degree of choice but not without running the risk of creating conflict with neighbors (2013). Scholars like Andrew Eisenberg (2013) and Brian Larkin (2008) have posited Islamic architecture in Africa and its sonic components as parts of an “apparatus” and an “infrastructure,” respectively, highlighting (like Bohlman) the rich and complex connection between mosques, religious sound, and the surrounding city. Şehitlik Mosque is no exception, as mosque leaders have decided not to press local authorities on the issue of a public call to prayer despite co-existing with a major traffic thoroughfare and the noise of the Tempelhof Airport until its 2008 closure (Çetin 2013).

Beyond the question of architectural sound, the mosque has a particularly open and public profile. As the flagship mosque in Berlin of the German-Turkish organization, DITIB (*Diyanet İşleri Türk-İslam Birliği*), the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs, the mosque plays an important role for Sunni Muslims in the city. The organization’s history in Germany began in 1982 in Berlin, as a transnational affiliate of the Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Bakanlığı*), the state arm that
oversees religious activities in Turkey, dating back to the Kemalist reforms of the early Turkish Republic. Although DITIB’s was formally organized as a nationwide institution in Cologne in 1984, a Berlin branch existed since 1982, a discrepancy that remains visible today, as the DITIB office in Berlin-Kreuzberg (on Wiener Str.) has a large sign over the entrance stating, “Founded in 1982,” while the DITIB website gives Cologne—the current headquarters of DITIB—as the originary location of the group, which is housed in a large complex of offices next to the Central Mosque (Merkez Camii, Zentralmoschee), a major architectural project over much of the past decade.27

Whatever the case, for years DITIB had a reputation of being too Turkish, for example, by having imams trained in Turkey who knew almost no German and by virtue of their formalized relationship with the Turkish Directorate.28 In more recent years, however, DITIB has made active efforts to reach out to a German-speaking audience, and I found Şehitlik Mosque to be one of the most institutionally bilingual Muslim organizations in the city. It has a German-language website and an administrative board with a sizable contingent of German-born Turks who expressed their comfort in speaking either German or Turkish. Even their liturgical practice is multilingual, as the imam’s Friday hutbe sermon is read in Turkish and German—generally beginning with or including a passage from the Quran. These sermons are uniform across DITIB mosques

27 Aysun Yaşar lays out a chronology of the competing founding narratives in her book, noting that from DITIB’s website alone one can see reference to Lütfi Şentürk as the president of DITIB from 1980 to 1983—presumably in Berlin—while the organization as a whole was allegedly founded in 1984. She dates the Berlin community’s formal founding to January 12, 1982 (with confirmation from the city on March 24, 1982). The community in Köln does the same on July 5, 1984 (with confirmation on January 25, 1985). However, Yaşar’s account is occupied primarily with the question of dates and organizational structure, rather than with ethnographic details.

in Germany and can be accessed from the DITIB mosque, pointing to some of the ways
in which digital transformations are affecting liturgy.

As I write this paragraph early on a Friday morning in Cambridge, Massachusetts,
I can readily access the *hutbe* sermon that was delivered just a few hours ago in hundreds
of DITIB congregations across Germany. Since 2011, these weekly sermons are available
without interruption and numbered accordingly, so that today’s sermon is archived as
“The 167th Friday Sermon: The Importance of Religious and Ethical Education” (*Din ve
Ahlak Eğitiminin Önemi* in Turkish, 2014a), or simply “The Importance of Religious
Education” (*Die Bedeutung religiöser Erziehung* in German, 2014b). While different
mosques handle their Friday gatherings differently, a typical Friday at Şehitlik might
include a *vaaz* sermon, given seated at the *kursi* before prayers begin, while the *hutbe* is
part of the formal liturgical practice and is pronounced by the imam. DITIB *hutbe*
sermons typically begin with an excerpt of the Quran, and this one is no exception: “Say
‘Are those who know equal to those who do not know?’ Only they will remember [who
are] people of understanding” (39:9). Based on my experience attending Friday prayers at
Şehitlik, I imagine the imam standing on the *minber* staircase on the right side of the
front of the congregation. Women might be gathered upstairs—arguably the best place to
view the *hutbe* from—but were most likely gathered in the basement where the entire
service was simulcast. The imam would then read the quranic surah, give its translation in
Turkish, and read the Turkish-language sermon, then begin again from the surah, now
giving its German translation, followed by the German translation.

The text of the *hutbe* sermon, even when encountered solely through the website,
strongly suggests its own performativity, as well as the deep orality of Islam more
generally, a recurring theme through so much of my research activities. For example, four of the five paragraphs of the sermon begins with a salutation to the audience of believers: 

*Muhterem Müminler* (esteemed believers), *Kıyımetli Kardeşlerim* (precious brothers/sisters), *Aziz Müminler* (beloved believers), and *Değerli kardeşlerim* (dear brothers/sister). This repeated invocation of the audience is commonplace in other *hutbe* I have heard—but many of those are orations without (visibly) written text. In other words, this rhetorical practice has been codified and literally scripted in a way that allows DITIB to ensure uniformity of teaching throughout its mosques. The German version uses the adjective “Verehrte” (esteemed) in every instance, alternating in addressing “believers” [Gläubige] and *Geschwister* [brothers/sisters], suggesting a relative paucity of such formulaic invocations, at least within the working German vocabularies of DITIB clerics. These salutory reminders of the spokenness of the text resonate with much of the Quran itself. Indeed, the verse from the Qur’an (al-Zumar, 39:9) is one of many examples of imperatives to the hearer of the verse to speak in turn: “Say (*qūl*) ‘Are those who know...’” Furthermore the entire sermon concludes with a telling of a *hadith*, or orally transmitted accounts about the prophet’s life, collected in Tirmidhi’s *al-Jami‘ al-Sahih*.

This online archive of *hutbe* sermons provides a rich trove for analysis—as text, as theology, as transnational discourse and as translation. But I am more interested in how they sound and how they are listened to. Based on past experience, I presume that today’s *hutbe* was broadcast to and heard in a number of places throughout the Şehitlik Mosque complex: in the mosque itself (i.e., the men’s prayer space), in the designated prayer area for women downstairs, in the administrator’s office, in the bookstore, in the cafe, and of particular interest to me, into the *musalla* courtyard. This widespread
broadcast allows the entire complex to remain in motion through the earliest parts of Friday gatherings, prior to namaz proper: people drink tea in the cafe, browse in the bookstore, or stand outside talking. Even during namaz, people (particularly men) often remain outside, sometimes to pray outside on days when the mosque is quite full, and other times to wait until after prayers for a funeral service to begin—a ritual sequence that happens “almost every week,” according to Çetin, the mosque association president.

**Funeral Services: Courtyard Ventriloquism**

An Islamic funeral service, or cenaze, at Şehitlik offers a striking contrast both to the deployment of sound during congregational prayers there and also to the voicing of death as found in commemorations of Ashura at İmam Rıza. (Of course, funeral services are also held there, which are quite similar to what I describe here. But the Ashura ceremonies are just that—commemorations, not actual funerals.) While these funeral ceremonies are multifaceted rituals, their protocol-bound use of sound creates a striking quality to them—one that is again mediated by both architecture and more modern sound technologies, as the ceremony takes place outside the mosque in the courtyard but with sound technologies intended to be used acoustically while the imam is still inside with (some) congregants outside. The result is a highly practical yet acoustically despatialized moment of schizophrenia during the sermon, recitation and prayers of the funeral.

Most Fridays, one or more caskets sits outside the main entrance to the mosque during the midday congregational prayers. While the prayers take place, mourners assemble outside in the courtyard. Some go in and pray, but many remain outside (even during winter), consoling the family, conversing quietly, and perhaps drinking tea.
During the farz, or theologically required, liturgical cycles of the prayers, many participate while standing outside. Once the sunnah portion of the prayers comes, which is strongly suggested but not obligatory, many exercise their right not to pray them, once again gathering with family and fellow mourners. This fluid religiosity is even more pronounced in funerals with larger numbers of ethnic Germans, who are often present during the prayers but not performing them. Some families bring small photographs of the deceased, which circulate among attendees during this time.

After the prayer service is complete, congregants spill out of the mosque. Many leave, but many also stay to join in the special cenaze ceremony to follow. They line up in the same saf rows as in prayers, still facing Mecca and the casket (which lies perpendicular to their rows), awaiting the imam, who emerges not long after them. The imam wears a headset during the prayers with the obvious aim of having his voice carry clearly throughout the congregation (as discussed in Chapter Three). During prayers, his voice is broadcast acoustically into the courtyard. That is, his voice is heard but the source of it is not visible, at least from the courtyard. Occasionally this is a matter of interest to congregants, as when a visiting hatip delivers the Friday sermon or leads the prayers. But for the most part, it is simply the natural order of things—the imam recites the texts for prayers, and congregants hear his voice, albeit transmitted via amplification.

Of course, to amplify a sound signal requires loudspeakers, loudspeakers must be placed somewhere, and the placement of loudspeakers leads to different audible outcomes. Since the loudspeakers remain in place constantly, they are built into the architecture of the building—along the facade of the buildings adjacent to the mosque (e.g., the bookstore, the main office, the cafe). This choice is in fact hardly a choice,
given architectural, acoustic and weather constraints. Loudspeakers could not feasibly be set up evenly in the courtyard, even if such a configuration would distribute sound signals more evenly—they would have no stable power supply or shelter from elements. And frankly, such distribution is hardly a concern during prayers themselves—for all the discussion of the voice beyond its capacity to mean something (cf. Chapter 1, Dolar 2006, et al.), congregants seem to have no qualms about this solution. They understand the imam’s voice which is adequate for their purposes. As a musicologist, I heard a fascinating ventriloquism—a schizophonic disconnect between the source of sound I was hearing and the directionality of the sound itself.\(^{29}\) The imam stands in front of me, but I hear his voice from the loudspeakers mounted on the courtyard wall to my right.

For most attendees, this particular acoustical configuration mattered little. Only when semantic comprehension was lost did it present a more substantial problem, as when Ahmet Başar Şen was delivering his funeral address for Nuri Karademirli. He had almost completed the entire address when he was instructed by someone standing near him to hold the microphone closer to his mouth. By the time he did so, he had all but completed his eulogy—the only thing fully amplified was his exhortation to the family of the deceased and those gathered to be patient and steadfast.\(^{30}\) In contrast, the imam, who is outfit with a clip-on microphone, more adeptly pronounces his ritual utterances. Nothing surprising, in other words: the microphone is an sound instrument that, like

\(^{29}\)For the relevant musicological literature on schizophrenia, cf. Schafer 1977, Feld 1994 and 1996, Miller 2009, and more provocatively, Connor 2000. In all cases, concerns of presence and ownership—especially of one’s own voice or other sound-making objects/abilities—play a critical role, suggesting a good fit within Islamic legal discourse about the legitimacy of certain voices during certain parts of funeral services. Indeed, insofar as Schafer sees “schizophrenia” not as conveying “aberration” but rather “drama” (1977:273), I find the term suitable in this case. I may have perceived more purely sonic drama than others but bidding farewell to the dead seems to entail an inherent drama.

\(^{30}\)This particular part of the funeral can be seen at 1:57, Bizim Alem Mazagin 2013.
musical instruments or the voice, can be trained to produce certain results. Yet like the double-mapping of sonic space in the Caferi mosque, where electrical amplification was overlaid on top of existing room acoustics, so too we hear a similar but more drastic remapping of sound here: a trained reciter like an imam is more vocally and physically dexterous but the constraints of space and environment—the total sonic ecology of the courtyard—sets a greater challenge for him, for Minister Şen, or others. So much of the natural world resists resonance—outdoor sounds are swallowed up into the ether, almost literally. In considering the aural lives of the dead, who are almost always interred outdoors, it seems appropriate to keep in mind the acoustic obstacles it creates for certain rituals—for the passage of sound itself.

In thinking about what courtyards do, these remapped acoustics also point to the kind of semi-public role that characterizes so much of Şehitlik, but especially its courtyard. Once in the courtyard, a whole new acoustical environment comes into play. Traffic sounds—cars, car stereos, bicycle bells—can all be heard. In the past, airplanes would have been heard. If more verbally agitated protesters came to the mosque than the AGA Armenian group, it would take relatively little to disturb a funeral service. The courtyard is porous, for better and for worse. And while most mosques—especially in Berlin—do not have active cemeteries within their courtyards, this liminal, remapped acoustic space offers a suitable reminder of the liminal spaces at play in a funeral: between life and death, public and private, built and natural environments.

Funeral Liturgy and Courtyard Whispers
The prayers for cenaze, or funeral services—like all communal prayers in Islam—entail particular guidelines for sound and voice and in doing so further this sense of liminality. For example, in a handbook published by the Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, DITİB’s Turkish umbrella organization, entitled A Guide for Funeral Services (Cenaze Hizmetleri Rehberi), distributed free of charge in the bookstore at Şehitlik, the following description is given of the prayers pronounced by the imam and congregation for the deceased, which I quote at length:

The congregation which gathers for cenaze (funeral) prayers forms rows facing the qiblah [in the direction of Mecca], with the marble stone for the bier [musalla taştı] placed in front of the funeral congregation. After forming rows in this order, the intention to perform funeral prayers is stated [niyet edilir]...The steps after the statement of intent for prayers can be summarized as follows: The imam performs tekbir, saying “Allahu akbar,” clasping his hands [across the belly] as in congregational prayers. The congregation clasps their hands while silently [literally “secretly,” gizlice] performing tekbir. Following this tekbir, both the imam and the congregation recite silently [içlerinden...okumak]. “Sübhâneke” including the phrase “ve celle senâüke” [wa jalla thanâ‘uka, “praising you is great”]. Then the imam says aloud [açıktan] “Allahu akbar” without raising his hands. The congregation also recites tekbir silently [gizlice] without raising their hands. After this everyone silently [içlerinden] recites the dua prayers, “Allahümme salli” and “Allahümme bârik.” Once again tekbir, or “Allahüekber,” is recited in the same way. After this tekbir, the dua invocation of the cenaze is recited, with a statement of intent to the deceased [ölüve] and to other believers. Because the cenaze prayers essentially consist of a dua invocation, it is not mandatory that these dua prayers be recited in Arabic. Those who want to may recite them in Arabic in this way, and other dua prayers may be done with similar meaning. Just as those who are unable to do both [recite prayers in Arabic and their own language] may recite the meanings of these duas in their own language, duas may be performed for the deceased in their own language. After this dua a tekbir is performed, saying “Allahüekber,” and then—first to the left side, then to the right—the imam pronounces a greeting out loud [yüksek sesle...selam verir], and the congregation does so in a low voice [alçak sesle]. The namaz prayer is then complete. (Diyanet 2008:33-34)

This lengthy passage highlights the sonocentricity of cenaze prayers, extending well beyond simply prescribing a liturgical sequence or a semantic utterance. Here sound matters in critical ways for the propriety of the ceremony—and in so doing, the thresholds of the voice are highlighted, again, as a liminal state of sound: ritual phrases may be recited aloud, in a low voice, and silently (whether içlerinden or gizlice). In
addition, the instructions call for a flexible state of bilingualism, which includes not only the comments about performing prayers in a certain language, but more subtly intimates issues of pronunciation—for example, the transliteration of the phrase *ve celle senăüke* as compared to the “proper” Arabic prayer, *wa jalla thanā’uka*. These explicitly sonic prescriptions are then spatialized in important ways: bier in the front, the imam leading the congregation, and the congregation behind him. In other passages, the same manual specifies that men stand in front of boys who are in turn in front of women (46). This spatialization of sound is then inflected with institutional and gender power dynamics, with a singular locus of sound at the front of the congregation (the imam), with a much more subdued soundspace behind him. Leor Halevi suggests that the quieting (if not outright silencing) of women and their mourning practices has long been a part of institutionalized Islamic rituals of death (Halevi 2007: 114-141). At the same time, this description makes clear why a microphone would be beneficial: the imam is again reciting with his back to the congregation, but unlike in the mosque, his voice does not have the acoustic advantage of the *qiblah* prayer niche. In addition to all of this, the congregants are flanked closely by graves. The abundant language in Islam, from the Qur’an onward, encouraging believers to reflect on the state of the dead is all but impossible to avoid.

The narrow pathway that cuts between the two clusters of graves at Şehitlik is just wide enough for a funeral procession to move through, with two rows of people bearing a casket on their shoulders. The cemetery extends nearly to the wall of the mosque space itself, leaving only a narrow walkway there as well. (This small space between the cemetery and mosque entrance is the usual location for the *musalla taşi*, or
funerary stone.) As congregants arrange themselves for funeral prayers in the courtyard, they only stand on paved areas and consequently for larger congregations at funerals—not to mention other public gatherings like *Sommerfest*, described below—sound is channeled into certain spaces. For a listener standing on those walkways, that channeling of sound is perhaps not so noticeable, except in terms of distance from the imam or other speaker leading or addressing the congregation. However, the sound from *within* the actual cemetery space must be a rather extraordinary, if subtle, form of surround sound, as congregants gather and whisper their liturgies.

As described above, an important component of the entire funeral process is the notion of *şehitlik*—martyrdom and witnessing. On the one hand, the deceased becomes a
şahit, one who passed away while in a foreign place, in gurban.  

On the other hand, the congregation is also asked to testify through responsorials during the funeral liturgy and dua prayers graveside about the spiritual state of the believer, so far as it was known. Thus before starting the formal cenaze prayer the imam would typically ask the congregation the question that opens this chapter: “How did you know the deceased to be?” The usual answer from the congregation is: “We knew him/her to be good.” This exchange takes place three times in rapid succession, after which the imam asks, “Do you willingly rescind any claims on him?” “Let them be rescinded,” the congregation typically responds. In the duas offered graveside, I have on multiple occasions heard an imam note that the congregation has come as şahits to attest to the fact that the deceased was a believer and a Muslim. This attestation raises a striking question: whose ears is it for? Presumably God and the angels—whom I discuss in the Conclusion—have adequately documented the deceased’s life. Presumably it benefits congregants and perhaps it is obliquely addressed to the dead—a reminder of their community and the broader ecology of living and dead encompassed by faith, or din.

In many funerals, the dead are addressed more overtly. As the preceding Pathway section indicated, hadith traditions specify particular behavior while in a cemetery, including the pronouncement of greetings upon the dead. In many places, reciting the Qur’an (especially surah 36, Yā Sīn) in the presence of graves is understood to confer posthumous benefits on the deceased, though not necessarily through their hearing. But funerals, particularly among the Hanafi and Shafi’i mezheps, often also include a telkin,

31 There are multiple kinds of şahit, most of which are dependent more on the state of one’s life and heart (i.e., a şahit as witness), than on the circumstances of one’s death (i.e., şahit as martyr).

32 Stories and online videos informally circulate about what happens when someone answers these questions in the negative but I have never seen it in person.
an hortatory statement to the dead. In particular, the Diyanet advocates the practice of 

\textit{telkin}, a recitation pronounced by the imam, addressed \textit{to the deceased} at the graveside after the body has been lowered into the ground. The practice is notable for (at least) two reasons. First, it is yet another instance where sonic practices distinguish Islamic pathways—in this case, as the Diyanet handbook makes explicit, the practice is forbidden by some other mezheps, but some Hanafi scholars have put forth the argument that it is permissible. The argument is framed here as a folk tradition that has not been ruled unlawful by the Hanafi school:

Some Islamic jurists [\textit{alimler}] have said that \textit{telkin} should only take place in the case of a the sick on their death bed, but it is not lawful [\textit{meşru}] after burial. But some Hanafi jurists have suggested that there is not a clear ruling [\textit{açık bir hüküm}] on this topic, nor is it prohibited to recommend the pronouncing of \textit{telkin} after death....It is seen as lawful by a part of the Hanafi jurists that \textit{telkin} be pronounced at the graveside of one who died after reaching the age of accountability.... \textit{Telkin}, which does not appear in oral \textit{hadith} sources but is performed widely in popular practice [\textit{halk nezdinde}] can be uttered to a Muslim in the grave with the following words... (52-53)

A typical \textit{telkin} text is given in transliterated Arabic. The \textit{telkin} is addressed directly to the deceased, suggesting in response to the opening debate that the dead do in fact hear. establishes a lineage through the mother.\textsuperscript{33} Furthermore, the \textit{telkin} prayer itself, after addressing the deceased, begins with the imperative “remember” (using a verb meaning also “to perform zikr”) and injunctions to say “la ilaha illallah” repeatedly. The result thus resembles an exhortation to the deceased to perform \textit{zikr}, posthumously uttering these key phrases from the \textit{şehadet} testimony of faith. In Halil Günenç’s treatment of the \textit{telkin} for Shafi’i’s (which includes many Sunni Kurds living in Turkey), he emphasizes the vocal quality (“address the deceased with a clear voice [\textit{açık bir dil}]”) and gives an Arabic text that follows closely with the Diyanet manual above. He says very little about

\textsuperscript{33} For more on both the matrilineal aspects of this pronouncement and the question of the listening dead, cf. Sorularla İslamiyet 2006.
the legitimacy of the practice: “It’s written in a book called Ravda as follows:

‘Concerning telkin, there exists a hadith which is probable, but however weak it may be, it is corroborated by many other hadiths. In addition, it has been performed by Muslims for centuries” (1998:212-213). 34 Caferi Shi’a, Alevi, and Cerrahi Sufis all take an even more emphatically positive view of telkin, with a spectrum of different (i.e., more extended) utterances to the dead. 35

Negotiating Death

The mosque maintains a regular funeral service team, which includes members of the staff, like the salesman in the bookstore. The bookstore, it should be noted, is an important hub for readers from around the city interested in Islamic literature in Turkish or German. Its holdings include material well beyond the scope of Sunni Islam: I have found books on Caferi theology (ilmihal), Sufi practice and poetry, Ottoman and Turkish history, German public schools, and even Alevism/Alevi-Bektashism, though these books are often not restocked. As I have visited other mosques, including those with no DITIB affiliation, I have been directed to the DITIB bookstore on multiple occasions in response to queries about book recommendations. Like bookstores in Turkey, it was not uncommon in my Friday visits to have a group of older men sitting around the register, drinking tea and conversing before or after prayers.

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On one such occasion, just after a funeral for a man whose body was to be flown back to Turkey for burial—and so the ceremony was shorter, with no burial—I stopped inside to inquire about literature on funeral services there. I was given the manual cited from above as a gift (which the Diyanet specifies, noting that it may not be sold) as well as brochures on *Cenazefonu*, DITIB’s “funeral transportation assistance service.” I was familiar with the service, as I had frequently noticed a small gray van emblazoned with DITIB’s logo—the letters DITIB constructed into a miniature Brandenburg Gate, with a red crescent moon circumscribing it from beneath. It sat parked in front of Şehitlik most days and was used as a hearse to bring the deceased to the mosque, where they would be washed and prepared for burial, a process the bookseller described to me. He had helped with the preparation for the funeral that day, as well as several others who worked at the mosque in some function. Unprompted, he explained some of the logistics of getting bodies back to Turkey (as they were doing that day) and further mentioned the challenges of finding cemetery space in the city. The cemetery in the courtyard had filled up years ago, and the space behind the mosque—which is part of a larger municipal cemetery designated for Muslims—was quickly running out. The Gatow Muslim Cemetery, founded in 1988 in Berlin-Spandau, the northwesternmost district of the city, was also running out of room.36 When I asked whether I might come and observe the washing and preparation sometime, he suddenly bristled: No, that was not possible, he responded, with intense (and sudden) animation. Wondering whether I had been misunderstood, I asked again, clarifying that I had no intention of participating in the washing, but rather was interested in seeing it as a religious ritual for my research. A heated debate then opened

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up—with me watching from the sidelines. Two of those gathered for tea argued on my behalf, suggesting that it was perfectly fine for a person who wanted to deepen their understanding and knowledge of Islam to come and observe. The storekeeper was adamant, however: it was no place for anyone besides the family and the staff of the mosque. I still felt quite welcome in the bookstore, but I had encountered a space of resistance, in which the mosque complex shifted from being a public space—for prayers, funerals, buying books, drinking tea, or even taking a tour—to one of sacred privacy. Furthermore, as Charles Hirschkind discusses, the construction of the bounds of privacy comes through a kind of reasoned argumentation, a pious debate, in many senses.

The entire funeral process swings between these public, private, and counterpublic positions. As such, I suggest that it becomes a semi-public practice, meaning not merely that it is in part public and in part private, but that it is a constant negotiation between these extremes. Granted, most of the time mosque employees are not being peppered with ethnographic inquiries, but as a quick online search of newspaper articles, TV programs, and other media confirms, the mosque is in a state of perpetual remediation, being transformed and represented through photography, video and words—not to mention the more casual documentation made by tourists (Turkish, German and otherwise) on hand-held devices that may never circulate (openly) online. Yet to simply call mosques “counterpublic” sites as Hirschkind does (following Michael Warner) would mischaracterize Şehitlik, as it actively strives to bring the public into its spaces, through “Long Nights of Open Mosques,” public Bayram (Eid) festivals, daily tours, and even just the presence of semi-public institutions like a clearly-marked cafe, a bookstore, and classes, with signage in both Turkish and in German.
Congregational Festivals and New Ottoman Acoustics?

This sense of carefully-balanced tension between openness and concealment—of being semi-public—is reinforced when these funeral services are contrasted with the annual Ramadanfest. Here a stage is set up in precisely the same location as caskets are set on Fridays—squarely in front of the mosque entrance from the courtyard. But here, loudspeakers are brought in and set-up to flank the stage, with monitors for performers (spoken word performers, a band) as well. In other words, a perfectly mundane setup for a public, amplified performance. Here there is no religious dissimulation, no need to acknowledge that other rituals take place in the same space. For these two days, a sound system is put in place to allow sound to function in the most straightforward, comprehensible way possible. Again, no one would expect the same setup to be put in place for weekly prayers and funeral services. Instead, congregants are expected to adapt—to learn to realign their perception of their sensory environment in the name of devotional efficacy.

Significantly, this Ramadanfest, like so many of the activities described here, can be understood again as an integral part of the mosque’s semi-public status as well as its place within a larger ecology of Islamic congregations that straddle public-private spaces through sound. In addition to this festival, the mosque also participates in the “Long Night of Religions” [Lange Nacht der Religionen], held in August, as well as the “Day of Open Mosques” [Tag der Offenen Moscheen], held since 1997 on October 3rd, German Unity Day [Tag der deutschen Einheit]. These “long night” and “open door” events are staples of Berlin public life, with similar events put on throughout the city for museums,
science (*Wissenschaften*), government, and gardens. Şehitlik regularly participates in these events, extending the following invitation to guests for the event in August 2013:

“Observe prayers with a tour afterwards. At the end, we invite you to ask questions and enjoy Turkish tea.”

The announcement includes the following “special instructions”:

“We ask people to leave their shoes outside and to wear clean socks.” The imagery of an open door is a powerful reminder here of the transition through various spaces that such a visit entails for attendees: passage into the courtyard gates then up into the mosque proper as well. While the event is open to the public it is not held in a public space.

The semi-public state of these “open door” events and the Ramadanfest contrast with other mosques that lack the courtyard space available at Şehitlik for such a (literal) conversation and ritual exchange. For example, the Kadiri Tekke Mosque (Tekke-i Kadiriyye Mescidi), established in 2003 and also located in Neukölln, has a fairly sizeable mosque complex but without a proper courtyard. Instead their mosque is a “courtyard mosque” that sits back off the street, accessible only through a long driveway. (This distinction between a mosque with a courtyard and a “courtyard mosque” is crucial in terms of the real estate and architecture of Berlin mosques, as well as their engagement within larger sonic public spheres.) While they too participate in some of the “open door” events, inviting guests to their small patio-teahouse just outside their mosque doors for singing of ilahi hymns, they also host a summer festival. However, in order to facilitate the gathering crowds, their festival is held in full public view (and audition) on Hermannplatz, two U-Bahn stops away. In 2012, they scheduled their public festival for the same weekend in May as the “Carnival of Cultures.” The event included traditional

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37 *Lange Nacht der Religion* (n.d.).
food vendors, raffles, singing of ilahis, drinking tea, and communal conversation. However, the event took place literally at the opening of a major U-Bahn stop (Hermannplatz, at the intersection of two subway lines). As such, the event was undeniably public and although not officially part of the Carnival events, it stood at the starting point of the parade route for the festival, affording it even greater prominence visually andaurally.

One of the principal markers of engagement with a larger Berlin public sphere seems to be the use of German language. For example, at Friday prayers at Şehitlik, the sermon is read in both Turkish and German, following the recitation of a passage from the Qur’an in Arabic. This sermon is prescribed by DITIB and can be found posted in both languages on the DITIB German website. This linguistic triangulation is not limited to prayers. Şehitlik Mosque leads tours daily in both German and Turkish, and these tours are an important part of their community outreach efforts during their post-Ramadan Sommerfest. As another example, at the Kadiri festival on Hermannplatz, a Turkish-speaking MC stood up to announce the raffle winners. Before doing so, he greeted the audience, selâmiün aleyküm, and then listed a number of individuals and companies who had helped in sponsoring or volunteering for the event. Accompanying him was a young translator, who then took the mic. However, rather than translating any of the foregoing list of thank-yous into German, he began a fairly detailed explanation of the phrase “selâmiün aleyküm,” clarifying its meaning (“peace be upon you,” or “Möge der Frieden mit Euch”) and emphasizing why it should not be considered offensive or evangelizing to non-Muslims who are addressed by Muslim friends in this way. From there, the soundsystem was put to use simply to communicate who would win which prizes. But
this “teaching moment” suggests several things a recognition on the part of these congregations understand that their audience is no longer exclusively Turkish, as ethnic converts, third-generation children, and curious observers join in listening. It also suggests a discourse that is utterly multilingual—or “multiaccentual,” to draw on Vološinov (by way of Eisenberg 2013). This linguistic richness is a simple matter of fact for many youth in these congregations: one group at the Kadiri congregation told me that they generally speak quite a bit of German with each other but slip back and forth without much thought “except when Ekrem Hoca [the mosque’s imam] is present, because he doesn’t know German as well.” Other young people report a similar kind of code-switching, generally accommodating whomever may be listening. Whether such linguistic sensitivity is a matter of engagement in the public sphere or simply post-migrant habits, the articulation of Islamic practice today requires a rich blend of linguistic fluency and savvy awareness of where the bounds of public and private may lie at any given moment.

At Şehitlik’s Sommerfest, several sonocentric activities draw a wide public into the courtyard and mosque. Their advertisements show a number of musical performances, including performed poetry by youth in a group called I-Slam, which taps piously into a rich Turkish-Berliner tradition of rap and spoken word performance. For the past several years, Ensemble Salsabil has also performed. The group bills themselves as performers of “classical Oriental music” (in English), specifying their repertoire specialties as follows (in German):

Ensemble Salsabil from Berlin...specializes in Middle Eastern music [orientalische Musik] generally and especially in Ottoman art music [Kunstmusik]. Besides secular music from the Ottoman court [Sultanshof] stands a particular emphasis on the music of Turkish-Islamic mystical traditions of Sufi or tasawwuf music. Thus Salsabil performs, for example, so-called ayins, which serve as musical accompaniment for the ritual of

Elsewhere on their website they further elaborate on their musical and cultural aims, which seem especially well suited for outreach to a public that includes but also extends beyond regular mosque-goers through its deployment of language, writing in German with considerable contextual information:

Ensemble Salsabil was founded in 1995 with the goal of cultivating *pflegen* classical Eastern *orientalische* maqam music, especially *tasawwuf* music (mystical Islamic music) and to introduce it to a larger public in the West. Of particular interest for Salsabil is the Ottoman Empire as a culturally prestigious *kulturell hochstehend*, religiously tolerant multicultural state *Vielvölkerstaat* with a rich musical heritage....The dialogue with other cultures is reflected not only in the repertoire [which includes works by Jewish and Christian composers, in addition to Muslims], but also in the instrumentation *Besetzungen* of the ensemble as well as collaborations with orchestras and musicians from other cultures. (Ensemble Salsabil, n.d., “Salsabil”)

The ensemble consists of a vocalist and instrumentalists on ney, kanun, ud, violin, drums (three different players on different hand/frame drums), and one member who specializes in *Derwischtanz*, or “whirling.” The players themselves include people of Turkish and German background, and in addition to the events listed on their website—concerts ranging from a Beethoven Marathon at the famed Konzerthaus on the Gendarmenmarkt (November 2012) to a commemorative concert for Rumi (December 2011), as well as for the Sommerfest (August 2013) and a Long Night of Tolerance (April 2013), both at Şehitlik—members of the group told me that they also play a number of smaller, more private events, including *mevlits*, musical gatherings hosted by the family of a deceased person on the seventh, 40th or 52nd day after the passing. Once again, death becomes an important occasion for sonic activity and the commemoration of life. More broadly, the

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38 The idea of “Orient” in German is a complex term that might be better rendered as “Middle Eastern” but I opt for “Eastern” here to signify something a bit broader with some of the eurocentrism of the term still intact.
group’s Ottoman-centric rhetoric is striking, not only for their generous interpretation of that empire as a culturally “high” (hochstehend), religiously tolerant space, but also for a strong embrace of Ottoman culture. The rhetoric here defies easy characterization: it is simultaneously orientalizing, imagining a monolithic empire that cultivated mystical Sufi music and Derwischtanz, while also putting the Ottoman Empire on a pedestal for its progressive politics of cultural tolerance of minorities. Similarly, the celebration of Ottoman culture veers toward the territory of Neo-Ottomanism (cf. Onar 2009, Potuoğlu-Cook 2006, Murinson 2006), and yet such a posture seems somehow less potent in Berlin than it might in Istanbul since the 2013 Gezi Park protests.

Even still, the rhetoric of Salsabil comes across as both nostalgic for the Ottoman and relatively facile in its construction of multicultural identities, even while attributing such qualities to the Ottoman Empire. In contrast, assertions about identity and music on the Berlin Conservatory for Turkish Music, founded by Nuri and Halime Karademirli—incidentally located just down the hill from Tempelhof Field and near the original burial site of the Ottoman diplomat, Giritli ‘Ali ‘Aziz Efendi—have somewhat more nuance:

The Conservatory was founded in August 1998 [and] serves to promote Turkish and Eastern [orientalische] music culture in Berlin....The Conservatory for Turkish Music seeks to build a bridge of cultural identity with all kinds of sounds in the context of “musical language.” The heart of these sounds knows no race, skin color or gender. With it, hearts will be enriched with a colorful view of Eastern music....The Conservatory for Turkish music offers the acquisition of Eastern music in the context of a highly qualified faculty. The aim is for people of Turkish heritage living in Germany to create a viable cultural space that otherwise would only be possible in the lands of their heritage. At the same time, since the arrival of “guest workers,” multiple generations have grown up, whose roots are buried further and further in the past. A curtain such that cultural identity can no longer—or can only with difficulty—be recognized. Furthermore, of no less importance, the necessity of adaptation emerges, the particular development of different cultures by means of collaborative playing of Western music, with the practice [Ausbübung] of German students and the practice of Eastern music by Turkish students. With sounds of new perspectives and colors, people of both cultures can build a communal bridge. (BTMK, n.d., “Konservatorium”)
In some ways, this mission statement creates a similar air of cultural fixity as that of Salsabil. After all, the images of a “bridge” between two cultures necessitates two static endpoints of that bridge, and the deracination of music is perhaps an act of cultural privilege. However, the statement also places musical practice in the cultural present, undercutting that sense of fixity: people living in Berlin are exploring their musical “neighbors” (a term used elsewhere in the statement) through collaborative performance opportunity. In other words, they are using performance and sound to interrogate difference collectively. The locus of interaction is local and presentist, not rooted in an early-music-style excavation of a musical repertoire at distant remove in time and place. Neither musical venture is inherently more valuable, but the Conservatory’s explorations of not only “high” music, but also folk music and pop music (also mentioned elsewhere in the statement) contribute to a sense of engaging the here-and-now that leaves less room for Ottoman revivalism.

But another musical group/institution in conversation with these two—by way of Şehitlik—is the Berlin Mehter Takımı, or Janissary Band, a group modeled on the Ottoman military band. Oddly enough, my first encounter with the institutional leadership of Şehitlik came through the Takım. Early in my research, I had met a young physicist named Mustafa. He, like many recent immigrants I met, had come to Berlin as a postdoctoral researcher from Istanbul—part of the continuing transnational flow between Turkey and Germany that continues today, all the more emphatically between Istanbul and Berlin. We attended a number of events together, including a concert by Brenna MacCrimmon, a Canadian who is renowned for her mastery of Turkish vocal music repertoires. We met up at the Berlin-Kreuzberg venue Tiyatrom with several
acquaintances who had loose affiliations with some of the Sufi orders in the city (Cerrahis in Berlin-Wedding and Mevlevis in Brandenburg), suggesting a certain breadth of appeal in MacCrimmon’s work.

A few weeks later, Mustafa made arrangements with a colleague from his lab to take me to a rehearsal of the Janissary Band. We met on a Sunday morning in Neukölln and traveled by U-Bahn across town northward to Wedding—arriving very near to the Cerrahi zaviye (Chapter One) and Nettelbeckplatz, where they have their annual Children’s Festival (Chapter Two, Pathway). Mustafa’s labmate, Ahmet, a native Berliner, picked us up and drove us to a small house where maybe a dozen men and boys had gathered together to play mehter music. On other nights of the week, the building would also function one of many student Vereine, or associations, where young people (mostly high school students) gather for help with schoolwork, conversation and other activities. On Wednesday nights, a mixed-gender group gathers to practice traditional Anatolian dances. And on Sunday mornings, the mehter rehearses under the direction of İsmet Yeiç. The group played through a number of songs for Mustafa and me—less rehearsing and more performing. They then stopped at noon, congregated in another room for namaz prayers, then returned to a small dining area for köfte sausages and bread. Alpaslan, one of the leaders of the ensemble and an active participant in activities at Şehitlik, gave me a guided tour afterward, showing off some of the costumes the group had custom-made for their performances: bright-colored garments and robes, large headdresses, fake weaponry, fake chainmail, and even fake moustaches. I had seen similar performances in Turkey, so I was not altogether surprised that such a group might exist in Berlin. But to sit in the middle of the room and listen in close proximity to such a
group created a totally different listening experience—one in which my entire body felt the sound of the group much more directly.

One of the men playing that morning had his young daughter sitting on his lap playing the massive, tympani-sized kös drums. I would learn a few days later that he was Ender Çetin, the aforementined president of Şehitlik Mosque—one of the most engaging interviewees I would talk with during my research. He and his wife Pınar are in many ways the face of Şehitlik, tirelessly organizing activities, giving interviews and tours, and receiving visitors to the mosque (e.g., Wierth 2012, Hastürk 2012, Amjahid 2014). They appear together in several video programs made about Şehitlik for German TV and other sources. As I was leaving the Janissary Band rehearsal, several members of the group suggested that I look them up online to learn more about their activities and upcoming performances, and to see video footage of performances. I did—and I was immediately struck by how many videos I found of the group performing in the courtyard of Şehitlik Mosque. Several of these can still be seen online, dating back as early as 2007, performing at a commemoration of the Fall of Constantinople (May 29, 2007).[^39] The date stamped on one video reaches back all the way to August 8, 2004, and depicts the group marching and playing along Columbiadamm in Neukölln in full costume, eventually arriving at Şehitlik Mosque.[^40]

In the days that followed, I told several acquaintances about my visit to the local mehter ensemble. Some were amused, some thought it was a good site for research. Others were less enthusiastic—in the most extreme cases, they told me that all mehter

[^39]: SiyunBike 2007. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBNRZJM-k04](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBNRZJM-k04)

[^40]: janitscharen 2009. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkMgbUoYbhM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkMgbUoYbhM). If the timecode on the footage is to be believed, this was in fact filmed August 8, 2004.
groups were fascists and Ottomans. Such strong language was surprising to me, at least within the context of the recent history of Germany. I asked others who knew the group, including Mustafa. They said the group was not fascists but that they did have stronger Ottoman leanings. At the time, the film *Fetih 1453*, about the conquest (or Fetih) of Constantinople, had just come out in Berlin theaters. It created quite a buzz along similar lines: its emphatic celebrations of militarism and spectacle were decried by some of my acquaintances (including those who called the mehter fascist) as also being fascist and neo-Ottoman. Before long, my online meanderings took me to sites with photos of members of the Berlin group flashing the hand-signs of the Bozkurtlar, or Gray Wolves, a far-right-wing Turkish ultra-nationalist group. And yet, the Berlin group’s website was relatively innocuous, asserting the wide range of activities the group sponsored, including bağlama music, equally stereotyped as the de facto anti-Ottoman of Turkey, even taking on revolutionary (leftist) symbolism for Alevi (see Chapter Two). Whatever the political orientations of the members of the group, the Berlin mehter ensemble makes a concerted effort to create a public image that, while deeply rooted in Ottoman culture, is not necessarily ultra-right-wing.

I lacked the time to maintain a deep ethnographic connection with the Berlin mehter ensemble, though I would occasionally run into and talk with members at events at Şehitlik. More generally, I have no intention of assessing their politics or even of tying them definitively to Şehitlik in any way, official or not. Indeed, in my last conversation with Ender Çetin about the group, he said that he had not gone for quite a while, both because of time commitment and the particular style of music direction in the group. Although I have seen members of the group helping with food preparation at the end-of-
Ramadan Sommerfest, the ensemble has not performed there in recent years. But returning to the overarching question of sonic publics, Şehitlik not just as a performance space—whether for Salsabil, the mehter, or others—but also a space in which sonic activity is inflected with and points to a swirling set of agendas and processes related to defining public space. Salsabil is using its music to awaken audiences in Berlin to high Ottoman culture. Berlin Mehter Takımı is doing so as well, but simultaneously in more extreme ways—by virtue of their politics—and yet also diffuse ways—by virtue of the variegated activities they sponsor in their rehearsal space. Nuri Karademirli, while not a regular performer at these events (not least due to his professional profile), sought to create a different notion of musical publics that included both Germans and people of Turkish background, but brought them into close and sustained dialogue through making music. I remember in my first lesson with Nuri Hoca, we discussed tuning systems. I told him that I tuned using an older style, with a major second between my second- and third-lowest strings. He asked me where I had learned that tuning, and I replied that my teacher in Boston was Armenian-American. He leaned over to me, as if about to tell a secret even though we were alone, that he also played with that tuning and that he had learned it from an old Armenian teacher in Turkey as a child. “I think it’s better,” he told me with a mischievous smile. “But you can try whatever you’d like.” These interactions slowly accrete as a kind of layering of sonic discourse. As individual statements, they may not amount to much. But over time, they construct a clearer picture of who constitutes a Berlin public and how, as well as suggesting insights into ways in which Şehitlik Mosque—as an institution, as a bundle of activities, and as a group of people—enacts a kind of (counter)public code-switching, alternately emphasizing inclusivisity with
bilingual sermons, daily tours and public festivals after Bayram (Eid), then asserting their right to exclusivity with sacred rites (e.g., funeral washings) or, in more complex ways, by having a mehter group perfor or renewing particular head stones.

**Surveillance**

I conclude with one final example of ways in which publics are defined, maintained and allowed to participate in certain ways. On repeated occasions through the years, the mosque—again, as one of the most visible Islamic sites in the city—has been subject to hate crimes of different sorts, ranging from attempts at arson to threatening letters. In response, the mosque installed a video surveillance system to monitor the premises (Çetin 2013). In fact, one of my first experiences of a funeral at Şehitlik was delivered by this surveillance system: I watched as mourners gathered and prayed communally in the courtyard, then processed with the deceased around the mosque to the areas behind the mosque where burials still take place. (The cemetery in the courtyard no longer has capacity for new burials.) I found the experience striking for several reasons. First, given the pervasive scrutiny and surveillance of Muslim communities in Berlin (dating back to the Cold War) and more generally in the West (intensified since the September 11 attacks), the impulse to self-surveillance seems strange yet also justified by the ongoing threat of vandalism and attack. Secondly, it was striking to witness a funeral without any sound. One of my first ethnographic encounters with Islamic ritual came in Montenegro while I was carrying out research on oral poetry—and as such, was (much as I am still now) quite focused on the recitation of prayers and scriptural passages that marked the ceremony. Since then, I have always thought of funeral rites as sonically rich
experiences—except when they are muted, as here. Finally, like the difference between the sounds of a mosque that is amplified or not, I found this mediation a strange incursion on and also commentary on the limits of the visuality of Ottoman-era mosque architecture. By this I mean that mosques clearly are designed with strong visual identities that in many ways facilitate viewing: a mosque has relatively few objects to obstruct view of the congregation, and likewise the courtyard is essentially an open space. To then place video cameras suggests that these older features were not (quite) able to meet the demands of contemporary Islamic practice, at least in “the West.”

Not surprisingly, this transmission of images is part of a larger media network within the mosque. As mentioned above, the muezzin, imam and hatip all wear microphones during Friday prayers, allowing for broadcast throughout the mosque complex. This facilitates a more precise knowledge of when a congregant must go pray (that is, in order to be on time for the prayers themselves) as well as the possibility described above of congregational prayers taking place in other spaces in the complex: in the courtyard, in the women’s area, and conceivably elsewhere as necessary. Perhaps this network of media flow is ultimately unremarkable—simply a sign of current technological trends. And yet it clearly changes the possibilities for seeing and hearing piously, for protecting one’s sacred space, and for sharing in congregational practices.

Finally, the scope of this mediating audiovisual network is striking given, again, the cultural impossibility (or at least perception) of broadcasting the ezan, or call to prayer more widely. While some mosques may not have full-fledged sound systems for the imam and others, it is rare today to find a mosque in Turkey without loudspeakers for the ezan. This externalizing technology has been traded in for a variety of internal-
looking (and -listening) technologies at Şehitlik. In other words, the *ezan*, a public function of the mosque that is largely taken for granted in Turkey—not unlike Christian church bells—has been eliminated in Berlin, while congregations simultaneously feel the need to protect themselves through increased mediatization. This type of mediatization does not fit neatly into a world of “public” and “counterpublic”; instead, it reflects a semi-public mindset in which the mosque refuses to relinquish its more open tendencies and larger material space, compensating for it through other self-protective measures.
Conclusion. The Heavens Over Berlin: A Media Archaeology of Angels

And surely there are indeed over you hafizina, Preservers
The Kiraman Katibin, the Honorable Recorders;
They know whatever you do.
— Qur’an 82:10-12

The second tenet of Islamic belief is believing in angels. Angels are beings created from light. They do not eat or drink and they have no male- or femaleness.
— Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs, Foundational Religious Beliefs

The human mind on its own is not able to learn about the angels. Human senses are unable to see the angels or hear their conversations….It is sufficient for us to imagine how hard it would be for a man if he could detect all the sounds that are picked up by a radio set; the result would surely make him lose his mind.
— ’Umar al-Ashqar, The World of the Noble Angels

Do no more than look! Assemble, preserve, testify! Remain spirit! Keep your distance! Stay true to your word!
— Angel Cassiel, speaking to Angel Damiel, Der Himmel über Berlin

Pia: Angels are legendary beings. I don’t know whether I believe in them or not. But how else are we to read and understand these sounds, in this hurly-burly world where nobody actually lives and everyone’s just speeding through? […]

Pantope: So you’re talking about ‘legends’ in the sense not only of mythical stories, but also that of maps?
— Michel Serres, Angels: A Modern Myth

Mathematically encoded laws of nature, then, occupy the place once held by music of the spheres. It is a higher zone, one of quasi-angelic timelessness, into which those of us equipped with the required computational expertise can momentarily escape our dull sublunar existence.
— Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, “Siren Recursions”

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1 The text continues as follows: “Allah the Exalted created beings [varlıklar] in a variety of forms. Of these, some are forms we can see, some we can’t see. Humans are unable to see some beings. This is because human eyes were not created in a state to be able to see everything; they are bounded in their ability to see [görme yeteneği sınırlıdır]” (Yazıcı, Seyfettin. 2011:11-12).

In 1987, just two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Wim Wenders completed his film, *Der Himmel über Berlin*, literally “The Heavens (or Sky) Over Berlin,” though released in English as *Wings of Desire*. The film opens with a voice-over text reciting a poem that is simultaneously being written by hand on a page. This image is then interrupted by a miniature city symphony in the spirit of Walter Ruttmann: the flow of traffic, bodies, architectures blur into and refract off one another. But unlike Ruttmann, Wenders is able to use sound as well, and indeed, the camera’s movement through space seems to travel along soundwaves—sometimes passing through building walls, hovering in the air, or eavesdropping on the car radio of a Turkish family listening to qur'anic recitation on the highway. The film’s protagonist, an angel named Damiel, is slowly revealed—visible to children but generally an imperceptible observer. His first dialogue comes as he sits with his fellow angel, Cassiel, in the front seats of a BMW in a showroom. The two compare what they have seen and heard in the past day, each drawing on records they have written in a small notebook. Cassiel reports: “Sunrise at 7:22 am. Sunset at 4:28 pm….At post office 44 [i.e., Neukölln], a man who wants to end it all today pasted rare stamps on his farewell letters, a different one on each….At the Zoo U-Bahn Station, instead of the station’s name, the conductor suddenly shouted: Tierra del Fuego!….In the hills, an old man read the *Odyssey* to a child. And the young listener stopped blinking his eyes.” Damiel responds, musing on what it would be like to human. They both revel in the thought, though Cassiel ultimately concludes: “Do no more than look! Assemble, preserve, testify! Remain spirit! Keep your distance! Stay true to your word!” Their core mission is to observe and document—not participate.
The film highlights a tension within the world of angelology more broadly: what is the function of angels? Etymologically, an angel is literally that which carries a message—*angelos* in Greek, or *malak* in Arabic. This carrying of signal typically turns the angel into a kind of divine source of sound—a godly loudspeaker, in a sense. The Islamic angel-messenger *par excellence* is Jibrail (Gabriel), who delivered the Qur’an to Muhammad, transmitting God’s word (by way of a heavenly tablet or book, which I discuss below). Angels similarly function as sound-sources in Islamic theology throughout history: at the creation, a series of angels engaged in verbal duels with the earth in order to create Adam; during Muhammad’s ascension into heaven (*mi‘raj*), they become sonic (and often acousmatic) signifiers of each subsequent level of ascent as they praise God in particular ways; and finally, at the end times, angels will employ other modes of sounding, as the angel ‘Israfil will blow a trumpet, the blast of which not only signifies the end times but as a sound itself initiates God’s judgment (cf. Kabbani 1995, Burge 2012:52-69). But beyond this signal-producing function, Islamic angels also receive and document the world around them, not unlike the account of Damiel and Cassiel, which seems to intertwine Islamic traditions about two pairs of angels: first, the two Honorable Recorders (*Kiraman Katibin*, mentioned in the Qur’an, 82:11), a pair of angels assigned to each individual to document their deeds throughout this life; and second, Harut and Marut, two angels who, according to certain *hadith* traditions, were seduced by a human woman, al-Zuhara, who thus attained the secret words needed to ascend to heaven, after which the two angels were condemned to remain on earth and question the recently deceased in their graves.
Whatever the origins of the storyline of *Der Himmel über Berlin*, its setting in Berlin, its emphasis on angels-as-recorders—that is, as entities that not only *produce* sound signals but also *receive* them—and its own mediality as a film all point to an important part of my research process: documentation, especially of pious living. How does one document religious life and ritual? What technologies of inscription—what Kittler’s aforementioned *Aufschreibesysteme*, literally systems-of-writing-down—best capture the rich interiority of such rituals? And more broadly, what is the place of such documentation in an ethnography of sound such as this? Traditional ethnography, as its name suggests, entails a writing-down (*graphein*) of human culture and experience. Yet as anthropology’s “crisis of representation” has suggested, reinforced by a broader “sensory turn” in the humanities, writable discourse and human experience are rarely coterminous. In this concluding chapter, I reflect on and critique my own ethnographic practices in term of documentary practice in terms of a media archaeology of angels. That is, I consider what it might mean for the anthropology of Islam and for media studies to view and listen to the world in resonance with an angelic perspective.

As unusual as this confluence of sensory ethnography, media archaeology, and Islamic theology may seem, it in fact emerges rather organically from my project. First and foremost, it was suggested by those I worked with in my research. In particular, İsmail Baba of the Cerrahi order of Sufis made a number of comments comparing my documentary practices to angels: for example, “You can film whatever you want here, the angels already are filming everything.” Second, it reflects the ultimate boundary-case in considering materiality, as angels (in Islam) are immaterial, composed of light, yet they interact with and constrain the material world (e.g., Jibrail squeezing Muhammad until he

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*Sohbet* January 23, 2013, as well as similar comments frequently made on other occasions.
physically transmitted the opening verses of the Qur’an to him, or ‘Israfil’s blowing a trumpet, or even more broadly, setting into motion air through the vocalization of their praises to God). The trajectory of my case studies of material Islam, proceeding from the fleshy parts of the voice to musical instruments to mosque interiors and exteriors, raises the question of what happens when the material passes into the realm of the immaterial. This passage is precisely the realm of angels in Islam. Third, I acknowledge yet again my own “counterpath” relative to pathways at play here already to highlight moments where documentary is clearly something more than a neutral practice of recording but in fact provokes certain reactions and social interactions. Along with filmmaker Jean Rouch, I would suggest that these reactions are not necessarily deviations from a non-performative state; rather, all of life is a performance, and the introduction of recording devices intervenes, initiating a different configuration of those performances. More importantly, as part of my counterpath here, I draw on a very different “native theory” than in previous pathways/chapters: media archaeology. While media archaeology exists beyond Berlin, it has deep roots there that strongly inform my reading of angels as divine sound technologies here. A media archaeology of angels explores simultaneously the ways in which media technologies (writing, radio, film) make angels comprehensible in Islam as well as some of the assumptions built into media archaeology as a larger cultural project. In doing so, this chapter thus enacts what it argues for: a blending of theory, practice, and their intersections (theory-from-practice, vice-versa) in exploring how an angelic documentary of Berlin Islam might look and sound.

Media Archaeology as (Counter)Pathway
The last decade has seen a massive outpouring of scholarly literature and artwork with the self-appellation “media archaeology.” In one of the most definitive of these works, entitled *What is Media Archaeology?*, Jussi Parikka offers the following working definition for media archaeological endeavors:

Media archaeology is introduced as a way to investigate the new media cultures through insights from past new media, often with an emphasis on the forgotten, the quirky, the non-obvious apparatuses, practices and inventions. In addition, as argued in this book, it is also a way to analyse the regimes of memory and creative practices in media culture—both theoretical and artistic. Media archaeology sees media cultures as sedimented and layered, a fold of time and materiality where the past might be suddenly discovered anew, and the new technologies grow obsolete increasingly fast. (2012:2-3)

For the uninitiated, this definition of media archaeology gives a fine overview of a disparate body of works—mostly scholarly, but occasionally artistic—that examine past media practices as a way of elucidating media’s present, often burrowing into and across the “fold of time and materiality.” Other useful distillations include Wolfgang Ernst’s explanation of it as a materialization of Foucault’s text-centered archaeology (Ernst 2002) or the subtitle to Siegfried Zielinski’s book from the same year, *Archäologie der Medien: zur Tiefenzeit des technischen Hörens und Sehens*: literally, “On the Deep-Time of Technical Hearing and Seeing” or “of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means.” Both Ernst and Zielinski are important to Berlin-based constructions of media archaeology, a point to which I will return.

Parikka acknowledges that he wrote his book precisely because there is no single, clear-cut definition of what media archaeology is or which authors it encompasses (2012:1-14). Even so, one of the themes that emerges through many media archaeological writings—including Parikka’s “what is” book—is an idea that media archaeology is a

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series of paths or navigational movements through a space. For example, Parikka
describes archaeology as not merely history but as “a travelling theory, mobile concepts
and shifting institutional affiliations….Jumping aboard the travels of media archaeology,
this book is cartographic: it maps media archaeology, and, by doing so, also creates one
possible way to understand the place of media archaeology, history and media theory in
contemporary digital culture” (15). Not surprisingly, he relies on a familiar cast of
wayfinders, including Deleuze and Guattari (and their ideas of nomadology) as well as
theories by Rosi Braidotti, to highlight the possible yields of such approaches (161-162).
This book rehashes an argument he makes elsewhere about “mapping noise,” by which
he means essentially any kind of disturbance to signal (2011a). The mapping and the
noise are both mostly figurative but they call attention to a media archaeological process
steeped in a real geography—an ideal setup for ethnography, as I explore later.

If Parikka’s attempts to make media archaeology an odyssey are perhaps the most
explicit instance of media archaeology as pathway, they are not the only one. Most
famously, Friedrich Kittler, one of the earliest theorists identified with media
archaeology, used an actual voyage by boat in 2004 to explore the Amalfi coast of Italy
to verify the acoustics of Odysseus’s description of his legendary encounter with the
Sirens (and I, like Serres’s Pia in the epigraph, use the term as the sound of hearsay and
of navigation). Wolfgang Ernst took part in the expedition and describes the project, in
which singers and physical sirens were used to approximate the sonic power of Homer’s
sirens, as an archaeological recursion: “An ahistorical short-circuiting of distant time
takes place once a sound generator—the technical siren—confronts its mythological
object, the Homeric Sirens” (2014:3-8). In other words, physical passage, abetted by
technical media, allow for a chronological folding, or recursion, that sheds insight into our contemporary technological existence. Less dramatically (or literally), Erkki Huhtamo has written on media archaeology as a revival and exploration of Toposforschung, or topos study, as proposed by (yet another German) literary scholar, Ernst Robert Curtius (Huhtamo 2011). The topoi in question here are not literal places, as the name suggests; they were rhetorical mnemonics in antiquity and discursive clichés in the modern period for Curtius. Yet even still, they sit only slightly askance from Parikka’s mapping-of-theory. The study of topoi is founded on a notion of a recurring idea-as-place—a mnemonic and a meme, the observation that many of the most persistent themes in literature, history, culture, and simply speaking in general, allow (and perhaps call) for a recycling of quasi-formulaic ways of expression. Similar ideas are stashed, so to speak, in the same rhetorical place—the same topoi—allowing easy retrieval.

Strikingly, Huhtamo cites Aby Warburg’s Mnemosyne Atlas as a kind of counterpoint to Curtius’s topoi (2011:32). Warburg similarly sought to turn a humanistic discipline (art history; like philology for Curtius) into a form of cartography and topography. Warburg’s Atlas was a proto-media installation (or for Parikka, proto-archaeology) built in the late 1920s consisting of hundreds of panels on which various

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5 Wanda Strauven’s essay, “The Observer’s Dilemma: To Touch or Not to Touch,” in the same volume as Huhtamo’s essay, offers another set of interesting metaphors used by media historians and archaeologists to suggest that media themselves are, at times, readily understood by metaphors like “detour” or “sidetrack” (in the case of cinema, relative to other media). She ultimately inscribes cinema broadly within the realm of play and video games, offering a helpful example of finding precisely such detours/sidetracks in a particular medium by situating it in a different one (or at least a different discursive context). This kind of sidepath is precisely the kind of counterpath Malabou and Derrida are invested in. As explained by David Wills, the translator—so often a crucial intermediary (or medium?) in theoretical writing: “Counter path is my neologism for contre-allée, which refers to a sideroad, service or access road, or ‘alley’ that runs alongside a thoroughfare, such as one finds providing access to the buildings lining the boulevards of French cities. In this sense it is a tributary to the main road. However, as the word suggests, la contre-allée here conveys also the sense of going [aller] counter to that grain, main current, traffic, circulation, fare, way or path” (Wills in Malabou and Derrida 2004:ix; cf. also my prologue, The Opening, above).
images and other fragments of text were attached. The point was not simply the stuff itself, but how it was arranged and how one (visually or physically) moved between objects—not unlike Foucault’s mirthful reflection on Borges’s mythical “Chinese encyclopedia” and its fabulous taxonomies (1970:xv). The Warburg Institute at Cornell University, which holds Warburg’s papers, has made a partial digital version of the project based on traces and documentation of the original. Significantly (for my purposes), one navigates the online version of Warburg’s Atlas through “pathways” and “meanderings” (Warburg Institute 2013, cf. also Warburg 2008, Johnson 2012). An intriguing spur connects Warburg’s posthumous (re)mappings to contemporary Berlin, Turkish and otherwise: the TASWIR exhibition, held in the Martin-Gropius-Bau as part of the Berliner Festspiele from November 2009 to January 2010. The project was an enactment of Warburg’s Atlas project but starting not with European but rather with Islamicate visual culture, including calligraphy, geometry and miniature, and then expanding into other theoretical and artistic modes (Bruckstein Çoruh 2014 and (n.d.)).

In other realms of German media studies, Bernhard Siegert leans heavily on the idea of passage, not solely as an act of movement but also as a kind of place. He opens his 2003 book, Passage des Digitalen (Passage of the Digital), by characterizing media history and the history of science as having a spatial relationship to one another:

[T]he way it appears, the history of science and the history of media do not abut one another with their main entrances, but rather with their back courtyards [Hinterhöfe]. Thus the traffic between the history of science and of media is not one that takes place at the front door—in the form of communication which is officially and intentionally routed and carried out on institutional channels. It is typical traffic between back courtyards: tools left to their own devices or at least left unattended are secretly purloined by one side and repurposed for ends that the other side had never intended. Thus people like Saxton, Page, Sturgeon, Morse or Marconi entered the rear courtyard of Ampère, Henry, Farady or Hertz, in order to cobble together electrotechnical machines, telegraphy or radio with the stuff left lying around there unattended. (2003:11-12)
As with so many metaphors deployed in theory, Siegert’s Passage becomes particularly interesting (if perhaps a bit opportunistic) when thought of, at least for a moment, as something literal. As almost any mosque-going Muslim could attest (and I describe in Chapter 3), the Hinterhof courtyard is indeed an important site of communication, but often in institutional ways—if not always officially sanctioned or controlled (or controllable) by, say, the German government or municipality of Berlin. His notion of passage brings to mind once again the final (unfinished) project of Walter Benjamin, Das Passagen-Werk, as well as his reflections on Berlin flânerie (cf. The Opening, Introduction), both as a child and the related “A Berlin Chronicle” (1932 [1999]). In all these cases, urban architecture becomes a critical setting for generating and communicating knowledge, whether for the sciences of academia, Islam, or simply the pleasures of passage: passing through, passing by, or simply passing time.

This confluence of media theory and contemporary cultural politics is affirmed in the final pages of Siegert’s work, where he compares the controlling logics of an “Imperial chain of wireless stations” in the early 20th century with the contemporary developments in signal processing and counting. For him, the logic of circuits and of empire were, at least for purposes of communication, structured with the same logic: “The transmitters of this ‘Imperial chain’ were designed as a tube transmitter [Röhrensender] in which the Eccles Oscillator Circuit came into use, which was based on the Eccles-Jordan Principle of a double triode feeding back. The circuit was conceived of as a kind of imperial space for the emission of electromagnetic waves, and the circuit based on the logic of counting in arithmetic and on the discretely pulsing world of the computer age differ only minimally from one another….In the electronic age counting
and space are brought to pass in the from the same medium, which through a simple modification becomes either space or scribe” (2003:417). This techno-bureaucratic parceling of space similarly marks a text by Friedrich Kittler, cited earlier, “The City is a Medium”—written not long after his move to Berlin in 1993. For Kittler, cities and technical media are ordered in the same way, with networked grids, systematization of movement, and interface with the human body. Kittler mentions not only the imperialist potentialities of circuits a century ago (720) but also intimates ways in which data, addresses, and commands—all aspects shared by cities and media, he argues—can become massively destructive in the present and also shape our conceptualization of those cities (726-727).

Sirens, cartography, topos, passage, city: these all point to a recurrent, recursive connection between experiences of the urban and new media. If old new media are consistently remediated into new new media, the city may offers one of the most robust points of comparison for media, rife with remediations. Thus it seems hardly coincidental that Berlin, a city that has been divided, been destroyed, destroyed, and rebuilt so often in the past century, would become home to and the materialization of such media theory. Media archaeology is exclusively a Berlin-based phenomenon, but if any single place can be associated with media archaeology, it is Berlin, the academic home to Kittler for most of his last two decades, Ernst and Zielinski at present, and large numbers of their students. Kittler in particular remains a force today. As British writer Tom McCarthy wrote just after Kittler’s death in late 2011, reflecting on a 2004 visit to Berlin:

Kittler’s aura seemed to hover over the whole city; by the end of my stay there I wondered whether taxi drivers and Imbiss-stand operators might be protégés or associates as well. He seemed to lurk, invisible, beneath the intersection-points beneath the intersection-points between the worlds of art, philosophy and politics, his bodily presence transmuted into riffs that multiplied like echoes across exhibition catalogue essays and
club fliers and general public banter. Whenever I heard someone mention Ovid and feedback loops or Hölderlin and binary code in the same sentence, I knew that I was listening to the master’s voice piped down a hotline from the inner sanctuary at Humboldt where, like Hegel two centuries before him, he’d established his HQ. (2011)

While one might read into this comment a veiled (perhaps not even conscious) dig at the education levels of post-migrant communities—a number of my research acquaintances actually do drive cabs or work in restaurants—it raises a more substantive question, if (again) perhaps unwittingly. Where does the Berlin that loves Kittler and Ovid and Hölderlin end, and where do “immigrant neighborhoods” begin? Or less pointedly, how does Berlin fit in with itself?

McCarthy’s commentary gestures toward certain discursive fault lines that exist in the city, one that I have perhaps replicated in my research: the assumption that Wedding, Kreuzberg, and Neukölln are for immigrants (and punks, with both groups now in their second or third generations); Mitte, Prenzlauerberg, Dahlem, and Charlottenburg are serious academic centers; and most of the rest is periphery. One of the most interesting experiences I had was to (somewhat regularly) cross through these zones, “journeys from Berlin to Berlin,” as Aras Ören put it (1984). During my own research I was affiliated with Humboldt University’s Institute for European Ethnology but would try to attend Wolfgang Ernst’s weekly colloquium and other special programming (e.g., the mini-colloquium, _KITTLER_FLUSSER_mediations_ in winter 2012-2013). Ostensibly quite different, I found considerable overlap in these two different research sites—they both contribute to create a sense, however difficult to articulate, of what Berlin is. Among many possible connections—or shared courtyard spaces, to borrow from Siegert—between these two parts of the city, I found the media itself to be one of the most salient.
Or in other words, they all contribute to a larger ethnographic investigation into what media archaeology means and how it fits within Islamic contexts of Turkish Berlin.

McCarthy’s comments here intimate the easiest critiques of media archaeology: that it invests itself almost exclusively with media histories of the west, replacing canonical “great men” narratives of modernity with narratives of either the machines of those great men or with slightly-less-well-known great men. Important exceptions do exist already, dating back at least to Brinkley Messick’s 1996 book on writing and authority in Islam, which resonates well with Irene Bierman’s 1998 book on writing and architecture in Islam. More recently, Siegfried Zielinski’s series of Variantology publications, which have recently extended to include, for example, Arabic and early Islamic sciences (in Volume IV, edited with Eckhard Fürlus, 2010), likewise diverge from grand narratives of the western technological triumph. The same year as Variantology IV, Laura Marks published Enfoldment and Infinity, a more extensive treatment of Islamic visual culture that explores salient connections between classical Islamic art and new media art of the present, which she theorizes through folding, algorithms, and notions of the infinite (drawing extensively throughout on Deleuze, among others). While she subtitles her project an Islamic “genealogy” rather than archaeology, the affinities of the project with media archaeology run deep. One of Kittler’s assistants at the time of his death, Paul Feigelfeld, is currently exploring intersections of Chinese and European philosophies of math in his doctoral dissertation.6

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6 This critique extends back to Kittler, as suggested by John Durham Peters: “[Kittler] is not interested in audiences or effects, resistance or hegemony, stars or genres; he spends no time on subcultures, postcoloniality, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity or class” (2010:5). I might suggest that reorienting media archaeology to take such into account postcoloniality, gender, race, etc., entails more than just “spend[ing] time” on them; the entire project of media archaeology is liable to shift rather dramatically when, says, Greek culture is no longer taken for granted as the starting point for all archaeological investigation. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young’s outstanding essay on recursion (forthcoming), cited in the epigraph above, has
These projects complement so-called Anglo-American media studies that have long had investments in untold narratives (though often those narratives still build on canonical touchstones) as well as anthropological writing from beyond the North Atlantic that explores historical and contemporary media technologies.\(^7\)

Moving beyond these basic critiques of media archaeology’s elision of difference (cultural, racial, sexual, etc.), I am more interested in two more substantive critiques of media archaeology: first through practice, and second through metaphysics. First, many leading scholars within media archaeology have failed to acknowledge or try to account for artistic/media practice. In the case of ethnographic fieldwork, the present and recent past become the primarily temporal field, or archive, in which archaeology takes place, but these are always inextricably bound up historically.\(^8\)

Secondly, and perhaps more abstractly, despite a push by scholars like Friedrich Kittler to exorcise the spirit (Geist) from the humanities (Geisteswissenschaften), and like Wolfgang Ernst to create a “material media diagrammatics” (to use Parikka’s description, 2011b), media archaeological scholarship still is still held subtly in the thrall of metaphysics. This metaphysics emerges precisely at the moment of recursion, as

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\(^8\) Jussi Parikka’s 2012 book stands as a key exception, devoting an entire chapter to media archaeology as practice, including reviews of some artists’ work as well as conceptualizing possible trajectories for a practice-based media archaeology. To my knowledge, the work of Jesse Shapins (cf. Schwarz, Di Pauli and Shapins 2005, and Shapins and Touloumi 2013), also in/on Berlin, was the first explicit attempt to embrace art-making practice in a media archaeology context.
described by Winthrop-Young: “Mathematically encoded laws of nature, then, occupy the place once held by the place of the music of the spheres. It is a higher zone, one of quasi-angelic timelessness, into which those of us equipped with the required computational expertise can momentarily escape our dull sublunary existence” (forthcoming). Oddly, it is not necessarily the quest for natural law that instigates the metaphysicizing of media archaeology (though it contributes, as Winthrop-Young describes), but rather its search for sameness across time—sometimes across massive historical disjunctions. Ernst hopes for a temporal folding (2014, cf. Marks 2010, Deleuze 1992) that allows for a temporal warp that “short-circuits” standard historiography, particularly its (over-)reliance on the written word. Instead, the Greek alphabet, monochord or Amalfi landscape (once again, philhellenism) can all reproduce equivalent experience in a user/listener today.

Thus a monochord becomes “a sonic time machine,” because through re-enactment (i.e., pulling the monochord string), “we actually share the techno-physical insight of the relation between integer numbers and harmonic musical intervals” that Pythagoras found. Furthermore, the monochord lets us “participate at the original discovery of musicological knowledge, since—in an almost Derridean sense (expressed in his Grammatology)—the repeatable is the original” (Winthrop-Young, forthcoming). Immediately a question of the politics of sensation comes to the fore: was there really just one monochord experience to be had in ancient Greece, or would it have sounded significantly different as one of the akousmatikoi initiates on the other side of the curtain from Pythagoras? But even if we set aside the instability-inducing notions of ethnographic difference, our entire conception of what the monochord is and does is
(always!) already mediated repeatedly by the passing of time. In the case of Pythagoras, we lack any direct sources; instead (much like the Odyssey), we are left with an oral tradition transmitted to writing which in turn influenced centuries of philosophers and musicians—and yet we are somehow supposed to come to the monochord or the Sirens episode with unencumbered ears and minds? This encumbering—or hindrance, to borrow (and slightly bend) Siegert’s term (2003:9)—through media means that even if we were to hear the original sound experience of Pythagoras’s monochord, we would not even recognize it as such. The repeatable is not the original because it actually gives us access to some original; rather, it stands in for the original because experientially, it’s all we’ve got. Thus to trust that, say, the Sirens episode in the *Odyssey* is truth (cf. Ernst 2014) is not naïve; it does however show a failure to think in terms of the intervening media that have emerged in dialogue with those repetitions over time. This unwavering trust in the Historical Truth of such sources (or non-sources, in the case of Pythagoras), constitutes not merely a metaphysics, but an out-and-out faith—a far cry from the cool detachment and “passion of distance” (2014:9) of a mechanocentric narration of the universe through technology.

And yet, to borrow from Alevi poetry cited earlier, where’s the devil in all this? That is, anthropologically speaking, what Kittler and Ernst have done in intriguing (and sometimes metaphysical) ways, is to give credence to their sources—whether they be Homer or Pythagoras, if such historical figures existed, or, say, a teenager with limited formal religious knowledge speculating on the names of God. They seem intent on “driving out” the metaphysical but perhaps it has productive potential for the study of religion, a discipline which has long recognized the shortcomings of pure, cool reason:
instead, it makes fine sense in many contexts (especially ethnographic ones) to take
claims of devotion seriously and follow them to their ends. Indeed, given the right subject
matter, media theory and the metaphysical complement one another in surprising ways.

Angels offer one such point of (potential) shared interest between these two
disciplines. Laura Sangha explores a similar intersection in the context of early modern
England, arguing that “the ideas and expectations of angelology exerted a considerable
and creative influence upon the development of modern ‘science’” (2013:256-257). One
particular claim by Ernst seems fruitful in looking for potential “creative influence[s]” in
angelology: “the real archaeologists in media archaeology are the media themselves,”
measuring their own medially and deciphering “physically real signals techno-
analogically” (2014:16). In the sections that follow, I consider Ernst’s claim seriously and
(once again) take a theoretical metaphor quite literally: Winthrop-Young called Ernst’s
use of floating, unchanging natures “quasi-angelic.” The term is clearly a critique of
Ernst and media archaeology. But what if it were not philosophical critique but rather
scholarly agenda: how might one undertake an archaeology of angels? What might this
reveal about Islam or media? Or to couch the issue in Ernst’s provocative terms, what if
angels themselves conducted this archaeology? As it turns out, many of these cherubic
would-be archaeologists have long incorporated media practice in their angelic practice.

Angels and the Sonic Archaeology of Islam

A non-angelic archaeology of Islamic sound might well begin with the revelation
of the Qur’an, with its opening declaration: “Iqra!” Read, recite, proclaim—in the name
of your Lord who created humankind. The Qur’an, literally a recitation, remains today
deeply oral despite its writtenness, reanimated through regulated practices of intoning. Prayers and other sacred recitations grew out of and in tandem with this sound text—a fleshy sound corpus tied to the human voice. A rupture loomed on the horizon, however, with Muhammad’s triumphal return to Mecca. As I described at the outset, when Muhammad and his followers arrived at the city, Bilāl, the first muezzin of Islam, climbed atop the Ka’aba, the holy precinct in the city center, to pronounce the call to prayer, thus inaugurating a new acousteme.

Over the next millennium, a variety of sacred architectural forms emerged that followed Bilāl’s lead, doubling as physical structures and acoustic technologies. Minarets facilitated a wider diffusion of the call to prayer. Pulpits, prayer niches and ceiling architecture facilitated particular sonic and social configurations within mosques. Courtyards, shrines, mausoleums and cemeteries created hallowed ground through and for sonically-driven rituals. Another rupture came with the advent of electrical amplification and sound recording—the call to prayer was mechanically amplified and reproduced, circulating alongside more portable media like cassette tapes. A burgeoning digital acousteme is now unfolding as well, which I will return to later, but which should be seen not as supplanting the analog but rather as supplementing and augmenting, as seen in the media circulations discussed by Flagg Miller in his new book on Osama bin Laden’s cassette archive (forthcoming).

Angels may not readily fit into this history, not least because whatever their existence may (or may not) be, it sits beyond the realm of the senses. As Seyfettin Yazıcı writes in his overview of Islamic belief, “Allah the Exalted created beings in a variety of forms. Of these, some are forms we can see, some we cannot see. Humans are unable to
see some beings. This is because human eyes were not created in a state to be able to see everything; they are bounded in their ability to see” (2011:12) And yet recent moves in ethnography have begun to adapt to precisely this problem. For example, recent work on underwater or imaginary sound has called for transductive anthropology, or being attuned to sounds that would be inaccessible to the ears of western scholars without some kind of sensory transformation. I have never heard—or seen—an angel. But I have also never consciously heard sound at a frequency of 10 Hz. Or heard and comprehended sonar. If any approach should offer tools for (and have interest in) in such imperceptible ephemera, especially those that fall outside our audible past, it would seem to be media archaeology.

Music studies, for its part, has also occasionally taken up such themes as well, as in Michel Poizat’s book on the operatic voice, The Angel’s Cry (1992). He creates his own archaeology of angels within the context of opera—interestingly tracing a path back to Muslim Spain and the rise of castrati singers, the original angel voices for him. The history of western opera then proceeds from this cultural technique (to borrow Siegert’s term), slowly developing an operatic voice that can aspire to the sound of angels, ultimately culminating in the erasure of comprehensible singing with works like Alban Berg’s Lulu, with its blood-chilling scream, and Arnold Schoenberg’s Moses und Aron, with its troubled relationship to speech and song. At the heart of his inquiry stands the voice and the production of vocal sound: what does a voice mean and how? As I have explored in Chapter 1 on Cerrahi Sufism, this question is a tremendously important one.

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9 Cf. Helmreich 2007 (also 2009). Helmreich is referring to the need for human listeners to transduce sound technologically in order for it to be audible. The term is a technical term in communications and highlights the shift from water as the conductive medium of deep-sea listening to air, our “normal” aural medium.
for many Muslims as well, even though the particular aesthetics of voice vary considerably from western opera.\textsuperscript{10}

Outside the realm of music studies, other theorists and authors have taken angels seriously. French philosopher Michel Serres’s \textit{Angels: A Modern Myth} (1993; or in French, \textit{La légende des anges}, literally “the legend of angels”) articulates a complex worldview and theory of media by way of angels as articulated through a Socratic-like dialogue held between Pia and Pantope (literally meaning “every place”). For him, as described in the epigraph above, angels are “legendary beings,” not only the stuff of mythology but also a kind of cartographic indicator. Not only does Serres bring back cartography and the notion of movement through space, he considers that movement to be central to the entire mediality of angels. Pia remarks:

\begin{quote}
Airmail letters and electronic messages over the ether—and then you arrive in person. From letters to a presence—what a difference!...Unlike you I see something in all that ‘transmission’ of things. I see angels—which, incidentally, in case you didn’t know, comes from the ancient Greek word for messengers. Take a good look around. Air hostesses and pilots; radio messages; all the air crew just flown in from Tokyo and just about the leave for Rio; those dozen aircraft neatly lined up, wing to wing on the runway, as they wait to take off; yellow postal vans delivering parcels, packets and telegrams; staff calls over the tannoy; all these bags passing in front of us on the conveyor; endless announcements for Mr X or Miss Y recently arrived from Stockholm or Helsinki; boarding announcements for Berlin and Rome, Sydney and Durban; passengers crossing paths with each other and hurrying for taxis and shuttles while escalators move silently and endlessly up and down...like the ladder in Jacob’s dream....Don’t you see—what we have here is angels of steel, carrying angels of flesh and blood, who in turn send angel signals across angel air waves.... (1993:8)
\end{quote}

Serres, or at least his character Pia, understands the world to be full of angels: airplanes, taxis, escalators, conveyors, the tannoy (PA system), become angels of steel; air hostesses, pilots, crew, Miss Y from Stockholm, and other passengers become angels of flesh and blood, but also the thing (that is, the person) being transmitted by the angels of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{10}The connection between opera and angels has also been taken up by Michal Grover-Friedlander in parts of her 2011 book on “operatic afterlives.” As fruitful as that perspective has proven to be, I am particularly interested in how angels hear and perceive.
\end{flushright}
steel; the distinction between medium and messenger is already breaking down. By the
time we arrive at the actual “angel signals [traveling] across angel air waves” it becomes
unclear where the message, the messenger, and the recipient all come into play.

Serres modes of transmission extend well beyond even these material objects.

Later on, Pia and Pantope begin to discuss wind as a kind of medium or code:

*Pia:* “Wind is a messenger that may be good or bad, a giver or a stealer, chubby *putti* or
devils incarnate….Thanks to the wind, any of those places that you just mentioned echo
with the totality of space….One breeze bears and announces the whole universe.”

[Pantope responds about the ways in which flux breaks down into particles]

*Pia:* “At any given moment of the day, the breeze plays on your cheek, and since it
carries codes from everywhere, it’s telling you about the state of the body of the world. If
it is able to construct a universe in this way, it follows, conversely, that a universal reason
blows in tiny particles, in legions of angels as numerous as the multinational crowds
passing through our airports. Don’t forget that in Latin the words *spiritus* and *anima* refer
to wind, the breath of life, as well as to the soul.” (29-30).

Pantope then summarizes the discussion thus far, noting, “And in this way huge message-
bearing systems are created. Systems which are characterized by a circulation of
messengers—bearers of messages which can be understood” (30). This angelic
conception of human life posits movement as the status quo, where human relations are
entangled in neverending circulation and “huge message-bearing systems” in which
*messengers* and not just *messages* circulate. As with the path-based models of media
archaeology discussed, communication becomes a process of movement. From this web
of circulation and media systems, Serres proceeds to explore classical philosophical
quandaries: the good life, judgment, utopian society, love, ecology, and so on. By the end
of their dialogue, the machinic and the transcendent have merged—in the form of a
hanging lamp, for example. A philosophy of “interminglings” (257) and “mixes” (258)
comes to characterize this angelic society of movers (though not necessarily travelers, as
made poignant by the various homeless figures in the account—“the wretched of the earth” (258). Forgotten by Kittlerian machines, they stand outside history, never blending with “those who produce time” (ibid.). Underscoring this all is the inescapability of human presence, even when only doled out in traces through mediated forms.

The dialogue concludes with a final discussion of angels and the City. Angels must become flesh to have some sway over people. And oddly, the City has modeled itself on angels in an exaggerated way: “Today the City is a chattering, language-filled, puritan, message-bearing, advertisement-laden thing. It replaces reality with its representations in sound and image….the power, the capacity, the speed and the shortcomings of angels haunt this City.” Serres’s narrative imagines an airport-Baby Jesus who has taken on the flesh of modernity and who stands in opposition to the hyper-organization of the City (293-294). As such, the passing day becomes not just a day-in-the-life, but yet another instantiation of the city symphony, a day in the airport metropolis, inspired by and full of angelic messengers.

Toggling back to Islamic angelology now, I return to the secularized media archaeology proposed above. Not unlike Serres, Islam too has its own sonically rich angelic world to account for. For example, in the forgoing narrative, I began with revelation of the Qur’an. But can that revelation be understood without recourse to angelic narratives? On the most basic level, the revelation of the Qur’an itself came by means of an angelic messenger, Jibrail (or Gabriel), who transmitted the message.

Yet even this statement alone does not do justice to the encounter: Jibrail did not simply hand over the message, at least not at first. Instead, he effectively inscribed the message in a resistant Muhammad, who was unable to recite when commanded by the
Jibrail finally grabbed Muhammad and squeezed him, as though carving sonic grooves of revelation in the prophet-to-be. The events are recounted in hadith oral traditions:

[Muhammad] used to go in seclusion in the cave of Hira where he used to worship (Allah alone) continuously for many days….The angel came to him and asked him to read/recite (iqra). The Prophet replied, “I do not know how to read/recite.” The Prophet added, “The angel caught me (forcefully) and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read/recite and I replied, ‘I do not know how to read/recite.’ [The same thing happened a second time.] Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said, 'Read in the name of your Lord, who has created (all that exists), created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.” [Quran 96:1-3] Then Allah’s Messenger returned with the Inspiration and with his heart beating severely. (al-Bukhari 1:3)

To confirm this message, Muhammad and his wife, Khadija, went to visit one of her cousins, Waraqa, a blind man who had converted to Christianity and learned to write with Hebrew letters. The newly-formed media, the Qur’an, is measured by (and in turn would measure, for Muslims) the old media (Hebrew/Christian scriptures). How Waraqa’s training in writing and earlier scripture traditions translated into relevant knowledge for assessing Muhammad’s prophetic claims is not clear, but his assessment is clearly important. The question of inscription appears—albeit through absence—in another part of the forgoing hadith. The verses from the Qur’an stop at a point which is now part of a longer sentence: Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous, who taught by the pen—taught man that which he knew not” (96:3-5).

The precise ontological status of the Qur’an remains elusive in this account, particularly as it relates to the rest of Islamic practice. In her book on Islamic art, Laura Marks characterizes the Qur’an’s broader existence as an interface to God:

Islamic art could perhaps be described as a complex set of interfaces to the Qur’an, but the Qur’an is an interface to something infinitely large, indeed ungraspable, namely God. Many verses emphasize that God’s word is durable, complete, and perfect in its truth. We could say that the Qur’an itself is an index to a database that is permanent and infinite. Twice in the Qur’an this striking metaphor occurs: “Say [Prophet], ‘If the whole ocean
were ink for writing the words of my Lord, it would run dry before those words were exhausted’—even if We were to add another ocean to it.” The speech of God is more infinite than the infinite capacity of writing. *Umm al-kitāb*, the mother of the book, is what the Qur’an calls this meta-database. The perceptible artifact—the book or writing immediately before us—makes the viewer aware in some way of the relationship between the Qur’an and God. (2010:8, 10)

Marks opts not to address the question of angels, though she readily ascribes God the status of a divine (i.e., permanent and infinite) database, demarcated precisely in terms of its mediality: one infinite medium (God’s speech) is *more* infinite than another (writing).\(^{11}\) But this whole process, including the existence of *umn al-kitāb*, remains rather obscure without some set of intermediary spaces and actors. *Hadith* oral traditions clarify some of this mediation and particularly the role of angels in it:

> The created thing closest to God is the Tablet, and it is suspended from the Throne; and if God wants to reveal something, He writes on the [Preserved] Tablet [and the Tablet moves], and the Tablet goes [down] until it hits Israfil’s forehead. Israfil covers his head with his wings so that he does not raise his eyes to the majesty of God [and he looks at it]; if it is [a command] for the people of the heaven, then he hands it over [to Michael; if it is [a command] for the people of the earth, then he hands it over] to Gabriel. (al-Suyūṭī in Burge 2012:104)\(^ {12}\)

Angels are principally vocalizers in Islam—their two most prominent tasks are to deliver messages, as implied here, and also to praise God (cf. Kabbani 1995 on Muhammad’s *miraj* ascent into the heavens). In addition, they create heavenly calls to prayer, rooster calls to prompt earthly roosters (thus initiating human prayer), thunder, and the trumpet blast that will initiate the end times (cf. Burge 2012). Indeed, human acts of devotion could be seen as modeled on pious acts by angels, many of which generate sound.\(^ {13}\) But

\(^{11}\) Marks draws heavily on Deleuze’s notion of “folding,” an important resonance with my own ideas of a Deleuzian assemblage of pathways. Tugging on this thread a little more, we see that Deleuze’s folding comes mostly from his reading of Leibniz, a figure of increasing importance to media scholars recently.

\(^{12}\) Burge uses a complex system of brackets in creating a critical edition of these *hadith* traditions gathered by al-Suyūṭī. I have left them all intact and make no additional editorial marks (i.e., using my own square brackets) in these quotations from al-Suyūṭī via Burge.

\(^{13}\) This glossocentrism is not uniquely Islamic. In addition to several of these same types of angelic utterance (singing praise, delivering revelation, sonically ushering in the end times), Christianity also has a tradition of *angelologgy*, or speaking with “the tongues of angels” (cf. John Poirier 2010, especially 47-48,
this *hadith* also highlights another aspect of angelic mediality in Islam: the capacity of angels to be receivers of messages and not merely transmitters.

**Angel Documentarians**

Early in my research with the Cerrahi *zaviye* in Wedding, I broached the possibility of documenting their zikr rituals and more general cultural life. Ismail Baba responded, “You can record anything here. The angels already are.” A perception exists that Islam—so often understood monolithically and eternally-unchanging—is opposed to representative images. He was speaking of the *Kiraman Katibin*, theHonorable Recorders, a pair (or sometimes a whole group) of angels who are supposed to record the deeds and words of every individual.

Angels in Islam have a rather limited kind of agency. As a result their actions, particular in the role of Honorable Recorders, are largely determined by a set of rules. Or considered from a slightly different perspective of media archaeology, it could be described as a kind of proto-algorithm which I composite here from descriptions al-Suyūṭī gathered for his book of *hadith* oral traditions about angels:\(^{14}\)

For every individual, there are at any given time at least two Honorable Recorders, one assigned to record good deeds, the other bad deeds. (Some sources give the ratio of angels-to-person as high as 360:1, cf. 391, 403). If the person is standing or praying, the recorder of good will be on the right, the recorder of bad on the left; if walking, they will be in front of and behind the person. These two angels take shifts, alternating day and night with another pair of angels (al-Suyuti 312, 314-322, 327). In some traditions, they inhabit the person’s mouth, sitting on the teeth (either molars or canines), using the tongue as a pen and spit as ink (322, 332, 385, 389).

\(^{14}\)In some instances, these traditions conflict with one another. In such cases, I try to indicate what the range of possible outcomes might be. The enumeration of citations from al-Suyuti corresponds to the individual *hadith* in his collection, as published in Burge 2012:159-174).
If a person does something good, the angel on the right records it immediately without any input from the angel on the left (312, 319). In some accounts, this angel writes the deed ten times (327, 336, 387, 391).

If a person sins, a complex process of documentary latency begins. The angel on the left may not record the misdeed without testimony from the angel on the right (312, 319, 327). At the urging of the angel on the right (333, 336), the angel on the left “keeps the pen up” (335) for a grace period to see if the person will seek forgiveness (ranging from three hours, 334, to six hours, 335, or even seven hours, 336; or over whatever time it takes for the second angel to seek permission on three separate occasions to write down the sin, 391). If the person seeks forgiveness, nothing is written. If not, the sin is written down once (336).

If the Recorders encounter interpretive difficulties (discussed below), the act/issue in question is referred to a higher jurisdiction (in most cases, God) (328, 342, 343).

If a person is sick, distressed, or in otherwise difficult circumstances, the angels should not record actual events but record what that person would have otherwise done under normal circumstances (344-354).

Whether the Honorable Recorders note everything is disputed: some say the Recorders write all deeds and words, including the most banal of comments (e.g., “I have eaten,” 324); some say certain utterances are excluded (e.g., telling a slave to saddle a horse, 325). The status of thought and intention are likewise ambiguous, with some sources suggesting that only God knows thoughts and intents (343) with others suggesting that the Recorders can access them through other modes of sensation (“The two angels do not know about hidden things, but when a servant intends to do a good action, he gives off the fragrance of musk, so the two know that he intended to do a good action; if he intends to do a bad action, he gives off the smell of decay, so the two angels know that he was intending to do a bad action,” 387, cf. 388).15

When a person goes to sleep, the Recorder of good deeds takes the book of the Recorder of sin and for every good deed, “he wipes out ten sins in the devil’s book, and he writes them down as good deeds.” This gives rise to exhortations about accumulating good deeds just before going to bed (340).

15 The question of how much angels are able to perceive of human thought and intent is one of the central questions in angelology. Al-Ashqar, for example, cites an earlier commentary of al-Tahāwī’s ‘Aqīda, a 10th-century Hanafi theological creed, to arrive at the conclusion that “angels do record the actions of the heart,” followed by reasoning from qur'anic passages (82:12) and hadith traditions from al-Bukhari and Muslim (al-Ashqar 2002:71-72). In many Islamic rites, the intention to perform an action (niyaz) is expressed explicitly, suggesting that the act of intending is itself a ritual, often made audible. Even the phrase ins'llah, so commonly intoned in Berlin (and Turkey, etc.), “if God wills,” is both an invocation and a sonic ritual in its own right. These questions are not solely of interest to Muslim theologians either; in the Wenders film, angels’ ability to perceive thoughts is critical for their efforts and the cinematography, such as the opening montage where visual perspectives seem to shift in accordance with rules of listening, not viewing. A further example can be heard in the film’s soundtrack, as in the striking scene at the library, which hums with more acoustic energy than almost any other space, once an audience is able to tune into thought and not merely speech.
At some point, this record is taken to God: either at the end of a day/night shift, when angels ascend to heaven to give account of their recordings (342, 363); or on a weekly basis (339); or simply at the end of life (313). This account is then stored in the *Umm al-Kitab* (327) or some other more persistent form of data storage (usually in the form of some kind of book or books, 339, 340, 343). It is then a central part of that person’s encounter with God after death (375, 377-380).

This algorithmic documentary is admittedly based on a wide range of *hadith* traditions without regard for how reliable they may be theologically or for how prominently they figure in the various schools of Islam that I explore here. But even as a kind of generic Sunni exploration, the programmatic directives for each pair (or group) of Honorable Recorders suggest not only a sweeping form of documentary, but a systematic, almost computerized one. There are exceptions that demand interpretation, extended documentary training, and consultation with God, which I will return to. But the project that emerges is a strange blend of automatization, documentation, storage, and divine intervention. The result lies somewhere between a database of human actions and a mass network of otherworldly surveillance.

As with any such massive system, the exceptions where rules break down become particularly interesting. I focus briefly on three such issues here: first, the ability to perceive human existence beyond the audiovisual; second (and related), the limitations of certain *Aufschreibesysteme*, or inscription systems, to adequately notate these activities; and third, the potential for documentary practices to feedback into conversations that shed light on original practices. As may be already obvious, I highlight these points as a segue back into the realm of sensory ethnographic documentation and the challenges of ethnographic encounter—from a media archaeological perspective.

First, how do angels document that which is neither seen nor heard? The answer, given above already, is that some *hadith* traditions suggest that the Recorders can infer
through other sensory modalities what a person intends: “The two angels do not know about hidden things, but when a servant intends to do a good action, he gives off the fragrance of musk, so the two know that he intended to do a good action; if he intends to do a bad action, he gives off the smell of decay, so the two angels know that he was intending to do a bad action” (hadith 387, al-Suyuti in Burge 2012:170). In other cases, the action being documented is clear but its framing is not, as when a man riding a donkey fell and he said “I have fallen.” Both Recorders thought this moment fell within their jurisdiction (328, in Burge 162). Pessimistically, one might say that these accounts suggest that even the most massive documentary project will fail to adequately document the inner life of the soul—a critique that could be made of the anthropology of religion broadly.

This problem is compounded further by a second issue: what about things that can be perceived by the documentarian but cannot be readily documented? In one hadith, the Honorable Recorders heard an utterance of praise that they were unsure how to write down. They ascended to heaven to ask God, who—significantly, at least for theological (if not media archaeological/documentary) purposes, already knew what had happened (cf. also 379)—then responded, “Write it down just as my servant said…and I will reward him for it.” The hadith is somewhat unclear but suggests that a kind of transduction was necessary for this statement to be comprehensible by means of the media with which the angels were documenting. The particular reasons for their inability to document it are not given, but what seems clear is that certain acts, even if perceptible outside the context of documentary, resist the media onto/with which they are supposed to be documented.
Despite these shortcomings, however, a third issue offers some hope. In several cases (including the preceding example), when the Honorable Recorders are unable to carry out their documentary work, they must step outside and engage in some kind of conscious reflection about it. In both of the above cases (the donkey and the undocumentable praise), the bounds of media process demand (for better and for worse) a critical reflection on those media processes themselves. While Ernst’s call for media-as-archaeologists is richly suggestive, it hints at another (related) possibility: media-as-anthropologist. A camera or audio recorder prompts a certain kind of reaction, then continues recording as that reaction is discussed, reflected on, critiqued, and so on. For all its emphasis on pastness, media archaeology seems deeply invested in understanding our current socio-technological predicament. Ethnography and cultural anthropology, on the other hand, focus on the present that is always fleeting, always becoming just-past. A media-based practice of ethnography then offers a point of entry to both these modes of working—to an archaeological and anthropological approach.

Returning to these various strands from al-Suyuti’s collection, we can see one such felicitous connection between deep media histories and present mediations of society in the context of angels, media and the history of Islam. The development of media technologies, even when totally independent of Islam, enables angelology. That is, the existence/emergence of writing, tablets, film, radio, and digital audio/visual recording have created a language to better describe what kind of mediality they understand angels to possess. In the Qur’an and hadith sources, angels-as-documentarians employ their own (limited) powers of observation and writing in some form (though the precise location of their book is complex—some hadith suggest that the angels inhabit the mouth, using the
person’s tongue as an inkwell, implying that the record of our deeds is that which we have uttered). In more recent writings, as audiovisual technologies are invented and become familiar, theologians are turning to new(er) media as metaphors for the angels’ perceptive abilities. For example, ‘Umar al-Ashqar, in his book on angels (1992 [2002]), quoted briefly in the epigraph above, finds angels’ abilities of perception to be comparable to a radio—notably, as a technology of receiving signal rather than (or prior to) transmitting that signal. After noting, “Belief in the angels is one of the basic principles of faith,” he proceeds with the following:

The texts of the Qur’an and Sunnah speak in detail about all aspects of this subject. Whoever studies these texts will come to have a clear belief in the angels and realize that this is not an obscure topic….The only reason why the texts go into such detail is that the human mind on its own is not able to learn about the angels. Human senses are unable to see the angels or hear their conversations, but this inability is no doubt in man’s best interests, for if man could hear and see everything that is going on around him, he would not be able to survive. It is sufficient for us to imagine how hard it would be for a man if he could detect all the sounds that are picked up by a radio set; the result would surely make him lose his mind. (13)

According to al-Ashqar, it is impossible to understand how angels perceive. Yet in order to “deepen and strengthen [one’s] faith” (ibid.), it is simultaneously important to understand in detail how angels exist in the world. The development of media technologies begin to give us a sense for those angelic qualities. And in return, as suggested by Poizat and Serres, angels continue to inspire a sensory imaginary in which the constraints of current human conditions are negotiable. Angels are both media and

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16 In the “Gramophone” section of his book, Gramophone, Film, Typewriter, Friedrich Kittler includes a fascinating short story by Salomo Friedländer, entitled “Goethe Speaks Into the Phonograph” (1916). In the story, Professor Abnossah Pschorr, an enterprising phonographer, sets out to reconstitute the voice of Goethe by creating a kind of reverse-negative cast of Goethe’s mouth (from his funeral mask), then going to his house in Weimar and filtering the room noise there through the mask to capture the voice of the long-deceased poet. The premise here may well be the same as angel-recorders inhabiting one’s mouth: once our utterances have entered the world, they exist. Perhaps they went unheard but in an increasingly surveilled world, the possibility of an aural version of Bentham’s panopticon seems likely, if not already in existence.
media archaeologist, embodying their own other-worldly station while also offering us a measure of our current media.

In the case of ethnographic fieldwork, angels also become the documentarians par excellence, a point I discussed repeatedly with İsmail Baba of the Cerrahi zaviye in Berlin. On a more metaphysical level, the idea of angel-documentarians suggested that whatever documentary activities I engaged in, they should not merely get at the external forms of worship I encountered; but rather, they should somehow get at the deeper meanings of ritual. Documentary was a tool of excavation—and archaeology of the present through media and media practice. Not unlike the relationship between angels and technology, albeit in more mundane ways, my own use of media offered new ways of speaking with people about their experiences, which I explore in the next section. Such use of media brought together the study of contemporary Islam with the additional contributions of sensory ethnography—that is, documentation in an attempt to capture experience—and media archaeology—that is, the ways media shape, constrain and respond to our collective social practices.

In the media ethnographic discussions that follow, I consider some of those interactions and exchanges. In some instances (e.g., with Alevis), technology seems to encroach on the privacy of sacred space: everyone has a smartphone or a camera at hand constantly. At the same time, as I have mentioned, these technologies opened up new theological and ethnographic possibilities. In short, they facilitated different kinds of understanding, which I explore here.

Before doing so, I would make one final note on the representation of Islam. Collective wisdom in recent years seems to suggest that Islamic practice is opposed to
imagistic representations, lest Muslims accidentally fall prey to idolatry. Although the focus of my dissertation has not been to dispel this notion, I hope I have, if only inadvertently, as I have noted the variety of visual representation and self-documentation by these groups: video feeds of sermons at Imam Rıza Islamic Center, surveillance cameras and smartphone movies at Şehitlik Mosque, photographs of earlier sheikhs at the Cerrahi zaviye and the Trebbus Mevlevihane, online broadcasts of zikrs at the Rabaniyya Sufi Center, and massive murals of Imam Ali, Hacı Bektaş Veli and Pir Sultan Abdal in the cemevi. Contrary to prevailing sentiments of the past decade, which suggest iconophobia as a widespread and permanent condition in Islam, visual representations of humans—including the prophet Muhammad—have long been part of Islam (Grabar 2004, Gruber 2005) and continue to be to the present (Dabashi 2011: 227). While audiovisual documentary depictions of Islamic practice present a much less fraught appendix to debates on the meaning of representation, the congregations I spent time with tended to have highly complex attitudes about documentation and its relationship to sacred ritual or even everyday life. These attitudes are shaped not only by theological discourses about technology and documentary representation, but also by media formations that—like the people who comprise these congregations—circulate transnationally. In other words, I consider here religious tradition and theology alongside—literally mediated by—an emergent technoculture in which smartphones, Facebook, websites and more high-end technologies (high-definition video, flatscreen TVs) play an increasingly indispensable role.

Cerrahi: Pilgrimage, Edits, Angelic Documentary, Smartphone
The most extensive engagements I had regarding media came in conversation with dervishes of the Halveti-Cerrahi order and particularly Ismail Baba. In many ways, their lives—both religious and otherwise—were already suffused with recording technology but by virtue of our interactions around my own documentary practices, I was able to initiate a number of conversations about media, recording and theology—a series of themes that have since emerged in other Sufi contexts, confirming on some level their pervasiveness.

The earliest context for my own sustained engagement with these questions came through the ritualized discourse form, the sohbet. Sohbet is an improvisatory ecology of oral performative genres, in which the sheikh or baba sits with dervishes before and after a zikr (or meşk also, in Turkey) in devotional conversation. Topics are solicited from the assembly of dervishes and guests, who may ask religious questions, seek advice about life problems, relate stories or news from one’s travels (especially pilgrimages), or even share dreams (typically in writing). The sheikh then responds extensively, simultaneously addressing the specific issue at hand while also expanding to a broader range of topics, drawing on a whole arsenal of narrative techniques to hold forth: preaching, reciting Quran and hadith passages, telling stories (about early Sufi saints like Abdul Qadir al-Jilani or Nureddin Cerrahi) and traditional jokes (e.g., Nasrettin Hoca stories), dispensing advice, and teaching more generally. The term sohbet, or sometimes the more emphatic muhabbet, meaning literally a dispensing of hubb, or love, is more than a conversation—it structures evening gatherings among these Cerrahi dervishes as a kind of metaritual, not only offering discourse about rituals but also framing and disciplining them.
While some sohbets seem to generate their own momentum, as new guests come and conversational topics spontaneously arise, while others leave lulls in the conversation, at which point Ismail Baba would ask, “If anyone has questions, ask.” Unsurprisingly, I had many questions. I often held back, sensing that my questions were taking over the conversational space, and relished evenings when the sohbet continued without any input from me just as much as I enjoyed being able to ask questions freely. On some occasions, Ismail Baba (or Sheikh Mustafa Özcan in Susurluk) would ask specifically if I had any more questions, which was generous of them but also left me in the strange position of holding an entire group hostage. Of course, the answer was always an emphatic “yes!” During my first visit to Susurluk, Sheikh Mustafa Özcan caused the entire congregation of dervishes to reassemble after their zikr (which most clearly were not expecting to do) as he initiated an extended conversation with Ihsan, a German convert who had traveled with the group, and myself. He kept asking if we had any more questions and finally, as the hour approached 3 am—some eight hours after our arrival—I determined it was in the best interest of the whole group if I simply said “no,” truthful or not.

During some of the earliest such sohbets in Berlin, I asked regularly about sound, voice, beauty, music, various rituals (zikr, sema, and namaz prayers) and performance. At one point, shortly after I began studying Quranic recitation with Nizam, the imam of the group, Ismail Baba began talking to me about my experiences. He asked who had a smartphone—he would later be gifted one by the whole group—and asked them to pull up clips of various Quranic reciters, especially ‘Abdul Bāsit ‘Abdul Samad (d. 1988), the famed Egyptian reciter. On other occasions (especially after the ceremony) he would ask
to sample some recording from the group’s fledgling archive, which included footage of their annual trips to Susurluk to visit Sheikh Mustafa Özcan and the tekke which their zaviye branch affiliated with. The footage I saw was rather grainy and shaky but even still offered a clear document of the fact of their trip, including the basic unfolding of their zikr. For their trip in April 2012, the group asked Ihsan, the aforementioned German convert, who was also an accomplished filmmaker, to bring a video camera and film during their trip. He would end up recording audio from the sohbet conversations of both weekends of the trip, filming the whole zikr as well during the first weekend. (The Susurluk gathers on Saturday nights for group zikr, and includes not only dervishes living in the area there, but also a zaviye branch from the city of Bursa, about an hour away.) We discussed his approach at some length as I later prepared to film the group in Berlin: Ihsan used a DSLR camera and shot without a tripod throughout, privileging flexibility and movement while filming (including shooting from the minber staircase) to the stability of a tripod. After the trip, Ihsan prepared a DVD of the footage, along with a CD of sohbet recordings, and distributed copies throughout the group.

In addition to my early questioning about sound, I naturally asked about documentation. At the time I wasn’t sure whether I was hoping to simply record for my own analysis later, for including illustrative examples, or for a larger documentary composition. In the end, I have found all three modes of documentary to be tremendously valuable, but even prior to making recordings, the very possibility of it broached important conversations with Ismail Baba. In perhaps my second or third visit, hoping to make clear my intentions to create some kind of documentary beyond just coming and observing, I asked whether I might record in the zaviye. Ismail Baba gave an
emphatically positive response laced with important disclaimers. As I quoted above, he first told me that it made little difference what kind of documentary record I made, since the angels were recording everything. The logic of this statement (which has made to me again in various iterations over the past two years) is striking, as it suggests that the potential problem of a recording is not circulation but the very fixing of human activity. After all, an angelic documentary does not circulate very widely—although Ismail Baba would later affirm that our lives would be projected publicly in the afterlife. But it does take actions that are flexible and different every time (e.g., zikr and sohbet) and create a singular, ossified version of them. To the degree that I present media as part of this project, I would then highlight Ismail Baba’s point: that these recordings are only one such version from a particular place and time of a near infinitude of possible iterations.

In our first discussion of the topic, Ismail Baba mentioned that a news group had come to film them a few years earlier—the group unfortunately had no copy of this broadcast and could not (or opted not) recall who had come—but had then had violated the group’s trust by editing the ceremony and using voice-over. I tried to find out more about what kind of editing they meant, since Ismail Baba specifically asked that the recordings I might make not be edited. Given that the zikr ceremony runs over an hour and the entire series of rituals in the evening (usul-sohbet-zikr-more sohbet and food/tea), the request initially struck me as unreasonable. The topic came up again a few months later after seeing the product that Ihsan made, since it entailed considerable editing. Indeed, as any filmmaker knows, editing such material is both necessary to make it viewable for most audiences but also indicates a care for representation. That is, simply setting up a camera in the corner of the room and letting it run may suggest a certain kind
of objectivity, but in many ways simply renders a deeply emotive and powerful ceremony inert. Ihsan’s recording of the zikr—and the excitement the group showed for it—suggested that editing itself was not the problem, but rather (as Ismail Baba would later clarify), reordering and decontextualizing montage was, as it distorted these rituals and the intentions of the group as they performed them.

Even more strikingly, Ismail Baba explained that God edits. When I actually ended up filming the group, he engaged in an extended series of conversations (some while the camera was rolling, others not) about film. He asked my filmmaking partner, Bastian, what his impressions were of the zikr. He then reiterated that the angels were always documenting our lives—“but instead of 3D cameras, they have 4D or 5D!” More seriously, he explained that our lives would be projected publicly in the next life, showing all our deeds. He likewise explained that God edited out certain sections: when a person repents, that part of the film that was sinful (and by extension, would cause the person shame during a public screening in the afterlife) would be cut out by God.

One of the ideas that pervaded our conversations was that of visibility. Islam has a rich theology of the visible, or manifest, world, and the hidden. This is sometimes an explicit duality (zahir vs. batin, respectively) or a more general set of concepts like dönüya, referring to the material/temporal world and its manifest existence (i.e., day-to-day life), in contrast with sür, meaning “secret” or “mystery,” or even more expressly, sûrrullah, the mysteries of God. Angels’ documentary power, in transcending a three-dimensional space, reaches into this space of intention, internality and other forms of spiritual practice. In a sense, Ismail Baba was theorizing perception more broadly with these teachings—and doing so in a way that dovetails with contemporary thought in
anthropology about the possibility of representation of experience. The “sensory turn” in anthropology, in many ways a response to the so-called crisis of representation, suggested that attempts at cultivating ethnographic objectivity (however impossible such an ideal may be) in fact take anthropology farther away from effective representation, not least because of the politics of assuming that one can represent an Other. Much as Dziga Vertov argued for a Kino-Eye through which to explore the world, sensory ethnography suggests the possibility of mediation as a bringing-closer, or at least a different kind of seeing that may in itself be revealing. The kind of multidimensional spectatorship attributed to angels seems to share a common goal (if entirely different metaphysics and means) with a camera-equipped ethnographer.

No more than an hour after I first asked Ismail Baba whether I could film, I encountered the fallout of that conversation. One of the dervishes, Ali, who was part of the zakir singers, approached me just as everyone was standing up to from the sohbet discourse/conversation to move into the meydan for prayers and zikr. We walked together into the next room and he pulled out his smartphone. “Would you be willing to film the zikr?,” he asked. I was torn: I was interested in filming generally and also committed to sharing the media from that filming. But I also wanted to do so on my own terms (with my own camera and equipment) and worried that if I said yes, I might not get the chance to record in the future. As I puzzled over this, it occurred to me to ask him if he himself had received permission from Ismail Baba to film. He said he would check with Ismail Baba in between prayers and zikr but he apparently thought better of it and he never followed up. But it was a first intimation of a changing media landscape within these
communities, and highlighted the possibility that I might change current practices through my requests.

Over the course of a year, this conversation about media continued, both conceptually and also practically, as I planned to film there at some point. To recapitulate the timeline, I began attending the group’s zikrs in January 2012 and by February had begun talking about filming. Around this time, I had the various smartphone encounters: Ali’s request that I film; our watching Quranic recitation on YouTube on a phone during sohbet; and not long after that, the group pooled resources to purchase a smartphone for Ismail Baba. In April 2012, the group traveled to Susurluk, where Ihsan filmed them. And then over the ensuing months, my own plans for filming receded somewhat as I spent more time with other congregations.

After Ramadan ended in late August, we began discussing again when I might film and whether I might record audio in the meantime. We considered the possibilities of filming in early November, when I was working with some professionals in the Berlin area to record other congregations for Ashura, commemorations of the martyrdom of Hüseyin. Ismail Baba discouraged my filming then because the zakirs would avoid playing drums throughout the month of Muharram out of respect for the Ehl-i Beyt and the group more generally would perform a more restricted zikr recitation, including a sitting-only zikr during the first ten days of the month (during which Shi’a and Alevi matem ceremonies commemorate the death of Hüseyin). I greatly appreciated Ismail Baba’s thoughtfulness in considering how he would want the group represented. His comments revealed his awareness of a certain paradox relative to documentation: since any filming is a capturing—a kind of freezing—of one particular iteration, it is
necessarily complete. But once a ritual or performance has been recorded, its fixity inadvertently begins to accrue some kind of authority based on its ontological difference. It might be said that it thus transforms from an event-as-sense (Deleuze) into an event-as-truth (Badiou). In any case, Ismail Baba clearly understood that he was submitting the zaviye branch to a kind of digital mediation that would translate the pluripotentiality of the zikr, with its ever-changing nuances and ongoing repetitions-with-difference, into an ossified representation. He graciously agreed to do so, but intuitively recognized what the stakes of such reification might be and helped steer the recording toward a particular setting.

In January 2013, we finally settled into a tentative arrangement to film. I would need to rent equipment and make arrangements with a colleague, Bastian, to help. We tentatively agreed to the last Friday of the month and I began to make my plans. In the days leading up to that date, I made a point of going to the group’s teahouse (çay ocağı) in Wedding late every night to fine-tune details of the planning process with Ismail Baba. Individuals from the group and some of their associates in the neighborhood would often gather to play Okey (again, a Turkish game similar to tile rummy), drink tea, and converse. For several members of the group who drove cabs, Ismail Baba included, the teahouse also offered a place for them to wait for calls for pickups. Each driver had one or more special phones, issued by their cab company, that would indicate when they had a passenger to pickup. The system not only informed them of calls for pickup, but also allowed them to check-in at a taxi stand and then remain in a queue for passengers. They did not have to remain physically at the taxi stand, just within a certain proximity (e.g., a radius of one kilometer). They could then stop by the teahouse, have a cup of tea and
relax for a few minutes inside rather than sitting in their idling cabs, and then head to the
taxi stand as they advanced in the queue. Among other things, this created a fascinating
sonic environment within the teahouse. The usual sounds of private teahouses, which can
be found on practically every block in some neighborhoods in Wedding, Kreuzberg and
Neukölln—the clinking of spoons against tea glasses, the sound of okey chips being
spread across a table, the light din of a soccer game or other program from Turkey on a
big screen television, and lively conversation—were augmented by the buzzing and
ringtones of a dozen telephones at a table for four or five drivers sitting around a table. I
suppose it was largely an effort to humor my interests, but on many occasions, the
conversations at the teahouse turned to music when I was present, including an ongoing
series of heated discussions about the distinctions between breakdance music and hip-hop
music, and how both music genres—and they were utterly distinct for them—had
permeated Berlin during the teenage years of several of the dervishes there. On nights
when Ismail Baba was busy driving, I sometimes would not see him there at all, since I
generally had to leave before public transit connections stopped for the night. But it was
the surest bet for any kind of private conversation outside the context of the more
formalized discursive space of the weekly sohbet discussions.

If filming is always an intrusion, filming in such a small space is especially so.
The entire process was complex and depended on considerable goodwill from the entire
group of dervishes and especially Ismail Baba. He took on an active—but never
intrusive—role in the filming. Leading a zikr ceremony, as I postulate in Chapter 1, must
be a terribly complex act of listening, vocalizing, and moving one’s body—dancing, in a
broad sense of the term. But Ismail Baba took on the additional role of constantly
communicating with me—usually non-verbally—about where to position cameras, where to focus our attention, and also when to simply get out of the way. In response to Ihsan’s shooting style, I opted for a more tripod-based set of shots, often using two cameras simultaneously at different angles, in hopes of capturing something of the physical space that was unfolding there. Toward the end, during the *kiyam*, or standing, section of the *zikr* ceremony, Ismail Baba repositioned the entire ceremony to allow greater access to a stable but intimate shot. During the *kiyam* among these Cerrahi dervishes, the group divides in half, forming two rows facing one another. Dervishes have explained to me that the space between those two rows is a space set apart for the sheikh or his *vekil* (representative), and that angels may—and do—pass through there. While I saw no angels, it seemed fitting to be filming in their company down between those rows, each working on our own documentary projects.

The first Islamic ritual I ever filmed was a Nevruz celebration by Rufa’i dervishes in Prizren, Kosovo. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that I was introduced to the Berlin Cerrahi *zaviye* through an acquaintance, Samet, my Heidegger-studying friend from Istanbul whom I met in Kosovo. Shortly before filming, he, Ihsan and I huddled in a back room of the *zaviye* after the zikr to talk about how one might film the zikr. It was a helpful conversation pragmatically, but his final comments were perhaps the most significant, I thought. “If I were a sheikh,” he said, “I don’t think I would allow anyone to film any ceremonies. It’s just a distraction.” Film theorists and anthropologists have long debated similar questions about the effects of a camera in a physical (especially ritual) space, and similar debates appear to be underway in Islamic communities, creating a complex topography of sentiments. And while everyone I talked with affirmed Ismail Baba’s
decision, these competing views of the appropriateness of filming religious ritual would continue to raise questions in my work.

At the same time, as seen by the *ilahi*-gathering projects described in Chapter 1, a strong inclination toward documentation is present among many tekkes I have visited (and some mosques, though to a lesser degree). The main Cerrahi *asitane* in Istanbul has a complex media setup with multiple cameras and real-time editing of nearly every formal event that takes place in the tekke. A similar impulse seems to guide a number of sound recordings of zikr made and released in the late 1970s and ‘80s by the same Cerrahi order (then under the leadership of Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak). Broadly speaking, those recordings intended for audiences outside of Turkey are much more open about the group’s identity. Using the name of their public organization prior to 1981, the “Halveti Brotherhood ‘Association for the Preservation of the Nureddin Cerrahi Mausoleum and Masjid.’” they made two LPs while performing at a music festival in Rennes, France: *Chant des Derviches de Turquie* (Dervish Songs from Turkey) featuring a recorded zikr (Halveti 1978) and *Derviches Tourneurs de Turquie* (Whirling Dervishes of Turkey) performing the Mevlevi ayin (Halveti 1981). Both involved the expatriate Kudsi Erguner on the ney and were produced in France (Arion). During these same years, Muzaffer Efendi was traveling with increasing frequency to the United States (cf. Blann 2005a, b) and in 1980 recorded an album with an ensemble of dervishes at Vanguard Studios in New York City. The jacket of the LP, *Journey to the Lord of Power* (Halveti-Jerrahi Dervishes 1980), carries reviews from *The New York Times* and *Soho News* of live performances of the zikr, giving some sense of their public scope. The same label, Inner

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17 On the album, the name is given as “Confrérie Halvèti, Cercle ‘Nureddin Cerrahi Türbesi ve Meşçidi Koruma Derneği.’” (For bibliography, see Halveti 1978, 1981.)
Traditions, would release another recording the next year on cassette, *Calling Out to Allah* (Halveti-Jerrahi 1980; cf. Hermansen 2000:191).\(^{18}\)

In contrast, a number of albums have been recorded by individual *zakirs* (e.g., Ahmet Özhan, Sami Özer) focused on *ilahi* repertoire, including several with accompaniment from members of the Sufi music *Vakif* (endowment). The earliest such example I have found is Ahmet Özhan’s cassette *İlahiler* (“İlahis”), which has no date but based on personnel, appears to have been recorded in the late 1980s. dating back to the mid-to-late-1980s, Ahmet Özhan’s cassette *İlahiler* (n.d.). The recording sounds like an excerpt from a weekly *meşk* at Karagümrük. His trio of *Güldeste* CDs (1992, 1998, 1999), recorded during Safer Efendi’s time as the *postnişin*, or leader of the order, all include extensive *ilahi* repertoire often with similar instrumental accompaniment. Özer likewise released three recordings (all cassettes) of *ilahis* under the title, *Ya Allahum* (Oh God!), parts 1, 2 and 3. This corpus of recorded material—essentially recorded in two waves (outside of Turkey, 1978-1981; inside Turkey in the later ‘80s and ‘90s).

Strikingly, the French and American records are for the most part entire rituals (*zikr* and *ayin*) while the Turkish cassettes are still the plausible fruits of the musical efforts of the Endowment. Although this segment of media history took place in Istanbul, which is not the same as Berlin (or even Susurluk, Turkey), it holds relevance not only because it came during Muzaffer Ozak’s and Safer Dal’s time (i.e., while the hierarchy of the group was still clear, prior to the founding of the Berlin *zaviye*) but because these media practices seem to be spreading as technologies become less cost-prohibitive, like with

\(^{18}\) A version of this cassette appears to be available on YouTube, posted in 2012 by a user called Mevlana Şems (apparently also the owner of muzafferozak.com, a site rich with media and writings from Muzaffer Efendi). The dust jacket for the 1980 LP suggests that two recordings were already in production, *Calling Out to Allah* as well as *Sufi Sacred Music*. I have seen no evidence to suggest that the former was ever released, however.
smartphones in the zaviye. These constraints are precisely the places where creative media strategies emerge—i.e., how to document oneself without the high-end video suite available at larger tekkes. Media may have determined our situation, as Kittler famously wrote (1999:xxxix), but that does not mean they determine our response to that situation: Record and press an LP. Listen to a CD while driving through Berlin. Watch quranic recitation on YouTube, whether at a group sohbet or while waiting for a passenger. Or invite a news crew (or anthropologist!) into your private space. All these different strategies consume, create, repurpose and push back against audiovisual media and their attendant technologies.

**Alevism: Whose Religion?**

As I mentioned above, during the month of Muharram in November 2012, I attempted to record—and particularly film—in as many of the congregations I was working with as I could. Ashura presented an important moment in the Islamic calendar that entailed special gatherings, some of which had particularly rich sonic components (as I describe in Chapters 2 and 3). Alevis have an especially complex relationship with the media and with public visibility (cf. Sökefeld 2008), forged through years of violence against them in Turkey and a widespread practice of hiding their identities. But the civil liberties of German law afford certain protections that have given Alevis a particularly visible place in the broader diasporic community from Turkey.

As I describe in Chapters 2 and 5, I had some sense of Alevi practice in Berlin thanks to their website. Of particular interest to me was the collection of photographs that accrued there over the years. Over the past year, this collection was taken down while the
website was overhauled but it has now reappeared as a massive archive on the online photo-sharing site, flickr.com. In fact, as I look now, I see photographs of myself on the day of Ashura, November 27, 2012. I even see photographs that I myself took and shared with the cemevi, which are now posted as part of their collection, attributed to “Selahattin S.,” the regular photographer for the cemevi. I mention this not because my media work there played (or plays today) a particularly important role, but just the opposite—my media is part of a massive archive of self-documentation made by the cemevi. However, the place of different forms of media documentation has been a contested question for the Berlin Alevi community, as I found out firsthand.

Let me begin once again with smartphones. My first real memory of Hasan Doğan, one of the dedes in the Berlin Alevi Community, came during the cem at the end of the Hızır Orucu fast on February 18, 2012. I had been to the cemevi before but never for any formal ceremonies. Only a few minutes after I sat down, the cem began and within the first few minutes, someone’s phone rang and she fumbled with the phone, seemingly unable to figure out how to silence the ringer. Hasan Dede took her and the whole congregation to task for not respecting the ceremony. A month later on March 21, we met in person during the ceremonies marking Nevruz and the re-opening of the cemevi, which I describe in Chapter 2. But beyond the personal attention and teaching he gave me on that and subsequent occasions, he also helped with securing permissions for me to film during the opening of the cemevi that same evening. Whereas the cem for the Hızır fast was clearly intended for insiders, this event was just as much aimed at outsiders. Everything was done bilingually (German and Turkish), the leadership of the cemevi created a reception line just inside the doors, and several film crews were present.
I had to jostle with them for position throughout the event. Meanwhile at the cem, there was no German, no publicity (beyond an announcement on the website), and no film crews. Only Selahattin, the official photographer, could be seen with any kind of clear documentary device, even though mobile phones with video recording capacity were fairly standard by then.

My relationship with Hasan Dede continued to deepen over the summer, as we met and talked at some length about Alevism, music, the bağlama, and related issues. Months later, as the Alevi community began to prepare for Ashura, I wrote to Hasan Dede and Erdal Çağlar, another member of the community who served as both webmaster and part of the administrative council. What followed was both baffling but also telling. Çağlar wrote to say no, at least as a temporary answer until he had a chance to consult with both the administrative and religious councils. I assumed then the answer would be negative. The next day I saw Hasan Dede, who assured me that it was fine to film both in the evening sohbets which they had every night before breaking their fast as well as at the cem ceremony, so long as I provided a copy of the materials to the cemevi. The next evening I sought out Çağlar to clarify whether I had authorization from the administrative council. He told me that he still could not say for certain. The day before Ashura I still had not received a clear answer—not surprisingly, given what a large and complex organization the cemevi is—and I assumed at that point that I would not be able to film. But on the off-chance that something might change, I made arrangements for equipment and my filmmaking collaborator/cameraman, Bastian, to come anyway. He graciously offered to sit in a coffeeshop nearby and do some work while I sorted out the situation. Upon arrival, I asked around for Çağlar, and heard he would not be in until later
that evening. It was the 12th and final day of the Ashura fast and accompanying sohbets before the communal breaking of the fast, so I assumed that I had missed my chance to catch these events and would see about the cem ceremony the following day (November 27, 2012). When I entered the dergâh space where these sohbets and other smaller events took place, Hasan Dede asked me: Where is your camera? I explained my uncertainties as best I could and mentioned that my colleague was nearby. He told me to hurry and bring him. Within a few minutes, we were recording video and sound.

At the breaking-fast that followed, I had the chance to speak with Çağlar, who still did not have a clear answer from the administrative council but went ahead and gave permission to film the next day (including the preparations for the event) but with certain stipulations about seeking permission from individuals and limiting our camera movement during the ceremony itself. We negotiated places for two cameras, with a possibility for a third in a balcony above that was intended to be kept vacant. He stated emphatically and repeatedly, “This is the first time our cem has been filmed.” I expressed my gratitude and assured him that I had an outstanding crew gathered for the occasion (two camera operators besides myself plus a sound engineer).

While a few individuals made clear that they did not want to be filmed—a request we honored—the filming itself went relatively smoothly. The cemevi was packed and we had one microphone stand knocked over but we all operated from our designated locations, sending text messages throughout to coordinate shots. After some of the sohbet gatherings leading up to Ashura, one young man had frequently sought me out and told me I should go back to America. (These encounters began well before I had begun plans for filming.) He continued his antics after the cem ceremony, seeking one of the camera
operators and myself out to make his opinion about the project known in no uncertain terms. Several other attendees quickly intervened, affirming not only our right to be there but also the importance of the project.

A few days later, I met up with Çağlar to give him and the cemevi archives a copy of all the media I had from the cem—including the photographs that I now see online. The entire process, which a few friends had known about, gave rise to an ongoing project among some researchers and filmmakers in Berlin about the bağlama, including a series of interviews with local bağlama players, beginning with Kasım Yıldız, the zakir at the Ashura cem. One mediation led to another. I was unable to attend the cem for Hızır in 2013 but was present for Ashura, as I recount in Chapter 2 (attending with Kasım Yıldız, who was not acting as zakir for this year’s event). This time, a local television crew had been hired to film the ceremony. They looked both well-equipped and overmatched. The cameraman was given greater license to move around the space, which he did with considerable freedom, to the point that he had to dodge participants in the semah ritual, where men and women move in prescribed motions—sometimes described as dance—in a circle. The sound recordist struggled to keep his recording device adequately charged, but was still able to record from just in front of the bağlama players and other participants in the 12 hizmet (including sweeping, lighting candles, etc.). In short, they were granted the access I wish I had had—but they also had no idea what they were going to be filming. More significantly, recording with smartphones was not in any way discouraged, as far as I could see. Children, grandparents, and everyone in between had recording devices out. I worried that our recordings the previous year had perhaps opened up some kind of remediated Pandora’s Box, though everyone I asked said it was not
related, but rather just an inevitable change over time. One colleague even suggested it was an expression of the democratic spirit of Alevism: “Who can say who should make the rules here? In Alevism, every person must think him or herself.”

Indeed, the florescence of mediations is not just technological determinism. Certainly, new portable media make it much easier to document an event like a cem ceremony without any special equipment or setup. And yet, individuals must choose to do so. For instance, while we were filming in November 2012, I remember seeing a person on the opposite side of the room—where we had been forbidden to go lest our presence become too overwhelming—pulled out a handheld HD videocamera. I tried to find him after the ceremony in hopes of swapping footage, but to no avail. I asked Erdal Çağlar if the various councils had given permission to others to film and he said they had not but that would not necessarily prevent someone from within the community from exercising their own discretion in that way. More recently, after the November 2013 Ashura, I began to look online for videos that may have been posted of that or other events. To my genuine surprise—though the experience is growing increasingly common—I found several videos of parts of cem ceremonies on a semi-official cemevi YouTube account (with username aleviorg, like their website, alevi.org) dating back to 2011. They appear to be shot by the cem photographer, who was simultaneously taking photos and video.

For me as a researcher, the media he produced are invaluable. But the process they illustrate is equally interesting. After all, I was assured—repeatedly—that the cem had never been filmed, at least in Berlin. The unspoken subtext there was clear: it should not be filmed given its ritual significance and the mistreatment and violence Alevis have
suffered because of such rituals (cf. Stokes 1996, Tambar 2010). In some ways, I believe our filming was the first formalized, professional-grade recording at the Berlin cemevi. But earlier cems had been filmed, and certainly cems have been filmed from Turkey and the Alevi diaspora in Western Europe, as even a cursory search on YouTube demonstrates.

What interests me more than the truth(s) of that claim is the process by which knowledge is created and mediated in the Berlin Alevi community. A democratization of knowledge and power and authority does indeed make itself manifest, precisely through the mediations of media. The fact that a young man could repeatedly hector me (and later my film crew) during my research and the fact that I am able to obtain macro-level permissions to bring a camera into the cemevi in the first place seem to emerge from the same decentralized ethos. At one point, Hasan Dede gave a fairly stern reprimand to the young man who was harassing me, stating explicitly that I was welcome as a guest. But to no avail—the centripetal force of authority is simply not enough to carry the day. On the other hand, when Ismail Baba states that a zikr will be on such-and-such a day and that I will be filming, dervishes go out of their way to facilitate my efforts. Individual permission is still significant, but most simply responded as if consent was a given, since Ismail Baba had given the project his blessing.

**Caferi Shi’a: Differing Opinions and Audiovisual Disconnect**

My final examples come from interactions that were similarly dispersed over consecutive Ashura commemorations, in this case among Caferi Shi’a. The majority of my writing in Chapter 3 focuses on the İmam Rıza Islamic Center in Neukölln, where I
spent a significant amount of time during 2012 and early 2013, especially for Friday prayers and Ashura *matem* ceremonies. I found the congregation fascinating but with few exceptions, rather difficult to establish deep rapport with. In November 2013, I decided I ought to pay a visit to the other Caferi mosque in the city, İmam Cafer-i Sadık Mosque in Wedding, and so I went unannounced on one of the first nights of Muharram, hoping that they too would have a *matem* gathering. The experience could not have been more different: at İmam Rıza in Neukölln, I was immediately asked to write down my personal information, I was never allowed to schedule an interview with the imam, and on more than one occasion I was accused of some kind of impropriety. At İmam Cafer-i Sadık in Wedding, I was warmly welcomed, immediately ushered in to meet with the imam, Kerim Uçar; subsequently introduced to Syed Ali Haydar, an English-speaker (which was welcome, if not necessary) and member of the Urdu-speaking congregation that met on the third floor; and then brought into the café area for tea and introductions to members of the congregation.

The year before, I had asked for permissions to film at İmam Rıza in Neukölln and was told that I could record audio but not video, because I had previously done so surreptitiously. I was flabbergasted by the allegation and tried to refute it but to no avail. So I recorded four-channel audio, which was wonderful—a helpful documentary resource and also a stirring reminder of the power of the ceremony, which I have since “diffused,” or played-back in a multichannel soundspace. And frankly, video would have been difficult to film properly there. But given their own video apparatus for transmitting images to women on the other side of the veil, it seemed a fruitful place to explore ritual through media and a documentary Kino-Eye.
After a few days at İmam Cafer-i Sadık in Wedding, however, I decided to ask if I could film their Ashura *matem*. Imam Kerim said I could and we agreed that I would leave them a copy of the footage, much like with the Alevi *cemevi*. They too had their own camera, but not for women—since women were able to sit in the same space as men. Instead, a live feed was established with the café area for overflow. One of the difficulties of filming *matem* on Ashura is that most gatherings are held in the evening, and so I planned accordingly for such lighting, but the commemoration service held on Ashura itself takes place in the morning. In other words, I—like the film crew at the Alevi *cem* just a few days later—was scrambling to figure out lighting, shot angles, and so on. I knew the ceremony fairly well, which helped, but it was a continual improvisation. At one point, I asked the imam if I was allowed to film women during the ceremony, which he again said was not a problem. However, after filming a slow pan across the room (from the men’s side to the women’s side), one of the more senior men came and told me to stop, saying that the women “don’t like to be filmed.” This rhetoric seems common enough in other situations I have filmed in, and yet almost always seems to be articulated by men, even when I have been able to speak openly and regularly with women (which has often *not* been the case in a sustained way). In any case, much like the Alevi exchanges, it served as an important reminder of the polyphony of (literal and figurative) voices and that comprise a congregation.

After the ceremony, I sat and chatted with a few members of the congregation in the café as they watched a live broadcast of a massive *matem* at the Zeynebiye mosque in Halkalı, Istanbul—the same basic ritual but with thousands of participants. They encouraged me to go there or to İğdir, a province in eastern Turkey to which most Caferis
in Germany and in Turkey trace their family lines. I talked with people who I had taken extended shots of about permissions to use the material in my research, which everyone consented to. The experience could not have gone more smoothly, for which I was deeply grateful. But such ease of operations, after struggling for months to gain some traction in the Neukölln mosque, belies a basic principle: there are no hard and fast rules about how and why some approaches “work” in fieldwork, while others seem not to. In this case, the congregation I visited for months was quite adamant that I not film, while the congregation I dropped in on for a few days before their most holy day of the year was as open as any group I encountered.

**Conclusion: Displacements**

In May 2013, I “premiered” the diffusion of a lengthy recording from a Caferi *matem* ceremony. I played it back in a concert hall at Harvard, an experience that was just as bewildering for concert attendees there as I think it would have been for members of the Neukölln Caferi congregation to experience. I did not process the recording at all; I merely cut out some sections, trimming a two-hour-plus recording into a 30-minute “concert” piece. Because of the nature of sound diffusion, the composer/diffuser typically sits in the middle of the concert hall at a soundmixer with speakers surrounding the room. Such was the case in this instance in Harvard’s Paine Hall. As a result, some audience members were sitting literally just a few inches away from me.

The unorthodox nature of the piece left a strange quietude after the piece ended. I had not composed it, so there was no clear reason for applause for me. And as a recording of a religious ritual (which I had indicated in the program), the problem was intensified—
does one clap for a mass? Or for some other religious music? Whatever the answer
*should* be, in my case, people clapped but then a strange silence fell over the audience.
Immediately, a school colleague from Turkey turned to me and, quite loudly, asked,
“Where were these people from? Were they Azeri?” The answer to her question was:
Iğdır by way of Berlin, and yes, they consider themselves Azeri-Turks.

The question was a strange one for most of the audience, perhaps myself as well.
Why start there? The piece is more centrally “about” other issues: the unfolding of ritual,
weeping, the body, etc. But since then, the realization has sunk in that these sounds and
rituals were already *displaced*—not necessarily by force, but simply by dint of their mass
movement from one place to another. Or rather, from one location to another. Through
these rituals, place is constructed. And furthermore, the distinction between a “home” and
“the field” is no longer tenable, if it ever was. Instead these places are imaginary
constructs—we imbue them with the meanings we will (or must) ascribe to them. Thus
the Shi’a at İmam Cafer-i Sadık watch a satellite feed of “home,” meaning Istanbul, even
though they (almost) all say that their family home is Iğdır and that Caferis living in
Istanbul represent a parallel migration to their move to Germany. But even still, they
imagine “home” in a broad sense as being “there”—in Turkey, at Zeynebiye Mosque, or
perhaps in Iğdır, even for those who were born in Germany. They have constructed
places through sound and religion, and they have also constructed their own dis-places
(or perhaps better, dys-places), those sites of a no-longer, of a requisite imaginary, of
constant alterity from a home that would likely be no less alien, as many second- and
third-generation immigrants in Berlin have expressed to me.
Media technologies become a critical tool for such dis-place-making, as does Islam, the former generating a sense of modernity and circulation, the latter offering a stable base of tradition to give people roots despite these massive, near-perpetual flows of people and things around the globe. Berlin Islam is a more complex ecology of sound and ritual practice than these few ethnographic anecdotes can do justice. Nor can they simply be reduced to strata awaiting a media archaeological excavation. But these media continue to mediate, whether as smartphones for listening to Egyptian Quranic reciters or as a 32-channel sound system. And Berlin, a mediated metropolis for the past century, offers it a home.
Epilogue: God Listens to Those Who Praise Him

On occasion during my research, I have asked people—imams, Sufi teachers, dervishes, friends—about a particular phrase in the namaz prayer: sami’āllāhu li-man hamidah. “God listens to those who praise him.” How does God listen? And what constitutes praising him? The simplest answer arguably comes from the passage that begins this dissertation, al-Fatiha, the Opening of the Qur’an: “In the name of God, the compassionate and merciful, praise be to God, the Lord of the universe, the compassionate and merciful, the king of the judgment day” (1:1-4). Indeed, if a single thread runs through the different forms of Islam throughout this work, it is that of praise to God, hamd or ibadet, the ritualized acts of worship through which that praise is articulated: from the Cerrahi Sufis in Wedding and their powerful vocalizations to the virtuosic grief of an Alevi zakir recounting sadness or new life at the Kreuzberg cemevi, from the harrowing lamentsations of the Caferi Shi‘i congregations in Neukölln and Wedding to the handsomely crafted Şehitlik mosque and its relatively ancient, sonic history among Berlin congregations. If one wanted to find the unicity—the oneness—of Islam in Berlin, this aspect of sonic communion, of praising God, would be a compelling place to start (and perhaps end). Difference certainly matters, and audibly so. Nevertheless, a shared sense of din, or faith (broadly construed), could easily be understood to span all the groups I have discussed here, connecting them with a global community, or umma, of fellow believers.

But the statement in the namaz has two parts: God also listens. When I asked İsmail Baba about this phrase, I had hoped to prompt a deeper discussion of what kind of
aural experience God has. Instead he shared a story, which I repeat here from another
Cerrahi source for simplicity:

One day Hazrat ‘Ali was detained in starting out to the mosque for prayers; he had heard
the *adhan* [call to prayer] and was trying to walk there quickly but mindfully, hoping to
arrive before the congregation, led by the Prophet, finished their first *ruku* (ritual bow).
(At a certain point early in the salat [i.e., namaz] it becomes too late to join in and follow
the sequence of the congregation, in which case one has to make an individual prayer.)
Meanwhile outside the mosque, ‘Ali came up behind an old woman who was walking
very slowly ahead of him, and though he greatly desired to hurry into the mosque, out of
*adab* [moral comportment] (owing to respect for her age), he refused to scurry around her
or rudely cut in front of the old woman, and instead patiently and slowly followed behind
her until she finally passed by.

The prophet Muhammad had extended the prayers as long as possible to wait for ‘Ali but
finally had to proceed; but ‘Ali entered just in time and caught up with the congregation:

When the Prophet finally spoke the next words of the prayer, “*Sami Allahu liman hamida*”
(“Allah has heard the one who glorifies Him.”), ‘Ali arose from the *ruku* along with the
rest of the congregation and uttered an exuberant exclamation of thanks to Allah:
“*Rabbana lakal-hamd*!” (“Our Lord, all praise is for You.”) According to tradition, the
Prophet was inspired to incorporate this beautifully spontaneous cry at that point in the
prayer as a permanent responsory supplication in the salat. (Blann 2005a:239-240)

Sound, worship, (overcrowded!) pathways through the city, the body, architectural space:
this story touches on so many of the themes I have tried to distill here. But like any good
story, there are multiple versions of it: I have heard the same account told with different
characters as the mellifluous protagonist (Abu Bakr, a man named Rifā‘a who sneezes, or
simply an anonymous believer). In the canonical *hadith* traditions, hints of all these
events can be found. But in several accounts, the Prophet’s response is particularly
relevant. He asks who uttered this expression of praise (*Rabbanā lakal-hamd*) and then
states unequivocally that the utterance had received divine sanction: “I saw thirty angels
rush to write it down first” (al-Bukhari 10:194, al-Tirmidhi 2:404).

One of the historically remarkable aspects about this story is that sound
transforms ritual—it does not merely support or remain confined to it. Namaz changed to
incorporate this sounding. Such sound also carries well: angels hear it, the Prophet hears it, and presumably God hears it, though the angels still rush to share this bit of good news with him. How does that hearing work by God? In what ways does such aurality serve as an example for believers, even if God is understood to be definitively not human or human-like? And what exactly is God’s sonic relationship to those who do not praise him? Is God listening—to believers and everyone else—only some of the time? Why is it a special occasion for him to hear these praises?

In a sense, these questions have sat just below the surface of all the previous chapters, which have privileged the sounds of ritual produced by humans—an object of study better suited to ethnography than God’s hearing/listening practices. As so often happens (if sometimes in translucent ways), ritual itself supplies some answers to this question. First of all, the phrase itself makes clear that God makes sonic distinctions. Praise registers as a different kind of sound event than, say, idle speech or even other forms of prayer. I choose to translate sami’ as “listen,” to highlight the sense of God’s attentive awareness to prayerful praise. The use of the preposition “li,” to (i.e., listening to someone), further strengthens this reading. But the meaning toggles back-and-forth between “hear” and “listen.” To say that God hears those who praise him begins to push against an unseemly binary that has emerged in some scholarly discourse, in which listening and hearing are opposed to one another. In such binaries, hearing is usually understood as a basically passive state—hearers are acted upon sonically, listeners actively engage with the acoustic world around them. But the English hearing has multiple meanings beyond aural passivity, including a much more active form of registering an utterance or sound. The nominal form of a hearing—as in a legal sense
(i.e., a proceeding before a trial) or other dispute (i.e., a “fair hearing”)—suggests a kind of institutional acknowledgment of an utterance. Given the angelic interventions described above—the rush to record statements of praise—it seems fair to say that God also hears, institutionally and formally, those who praise him. He registers their praise and formally acknowledges it through his official stenographic channels: his angels.

Other rituals yield deeper insight, tapping into Arabic rather than English hermeneutics. The sonic substance of the zikr is the names and attributes of God, in particular the 99 asma ul-husna, or most beautiful names. One of these names (many of which are nominalizations of verbs), is as-Samī’, literally the one who hears. Perhaps the most famous formulation of these attributes (and an important source for several Sufi communities I worked with) comes from al-Ghazālī, who describes as-Samī’ as follows¹:

*As-Samī’*—the All-Hearing—is the one from whose perception nothing audible is removed, even if it be hidden. So He hears secrets as well as whispers, and even what is subtler and more concealed than these; “indeed He perceives the crawling of a black ant on a massive rock in the dark of night.” He hears the praise of those praising Him and rewards them, as well as the entreaties of those praying and responds to them. He hears without any auditory organs or ears, as He acts without limbs and speaks without a tongue; and His hearing is free from accidents which could befall it. When you elevate the All-Hearing above changes which happen to Him when audible sounds occur, and exalt Him above hearing by ears or by instruments and devices, you will realize that hearing, so far as He is concerned, is tantamount to an attribute by which the perfection of the qualities of things heard is disclosed. Whoever does not take care in considering this matter will [inevitably] fall into pure anthropomorphism. So be wary about it, and be precise when you consider it. (1992:83:84)

The model al-Ghazālī presents here is not straightforward—he offers an esoteric reading of how God hears “without any auditory organs or ears.” Whereas humans run the risk of

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¹ In his critical edition of al-Ghazālī’s Arabic text, Fadlou Shehadi describes al-Ghazālī’s relationship to ritual in an intriguing fashion: “Another feature of al-Ghazālī’s treatment of the Names is that he has rescued them from their traditional place in ritualistic prayer, and given them a broader religious mystical context. This once again testifies to al-Ghazālī’s commitment to the view that no religious life is complete without the mystical dimension” (1971:xxviii). Shehadi perhaps over-simplifies al-Ghazālī here, but to the degree he is correct, I hope to “rescue” these same teachings from a sound-free, deritualized context of theological scholarship and return them to a discourse on sound, ritual and the problems of articulating-in-sound God’s traits.
being changed by what they hear, God floats above the fray, still sensing the unfolding of things but without any mediation—ears, devices, instruments. God’s samā’, or existence as a listener (sema in Turkish), is deeply connected to human sounding and listening but entirely of its own kind—“such as it is,” and totally unique. As these passages from hadith traditions and al-Ghazālī indicate, this discussion has been underway for quite some time. It attempts to elucidate a mode of listening and acoustic experience that is entirely different from the one most familiar to us as humans.

On a profound level, this ongoing conversation about sound, dating back for centuries, issues a challenge to learn how to hear and listen to other voices, sounds, and entities that may not seem at all like “us.” Before there was “sound studies,” before John Cage or Murray Schafer, before the phonograph, people still learned to listen to difference. Unlike al-Ghazālī’s God, we are necessarily affected (at least to some degree) by such a listening. But my experiences in Berlin suggest that such effects may not be all bad. Ethnomusicology as a discipline is built to listen to and for such difference. At its best, it can be an exhausting process. But it suggests a way forward in thinking about sound and sonic difference that may not lend itself to immediate comprehension.

For whatever unicity or oneness it may possess through praising God or otherwise, Islam remains a rich multiplicity of sound spread out across space and time. As the hadith passages above show, from the earliest periods of Islam, these sonic qualities have pervaded and spatialized Islamic practice, often in unexpected ways. These contours, bumps and constraints are not hindrances or imperfections; instead, they are pathways through Berlin’s own unique Islamic acoustics. In response to that acoustics, I have sketched out a topography of its material manifestations, from the voice, ever teetering
between body and speech, to the physical interface of the bağlama as an instrument, to architecture, again both as an interior space and an exterior environment. As this trajectory is mapped onto the existing pathways of religion, of sound, and of broader academic discourses both within and beyond Berlin, Islam becomes a plurality of sound, the heterophony of a great city.
Glossary

Note on alphabetization: based on English alphabet order, so all diacritical variants of a letter are considered the same letter e.g., s = ş, ı = i, etc Thus aşık comes before asitane.

abi – or ağabey, literally older brother; figuratively used as a term of affection for male friends (especially if somewhat older); also used in many Muslim congregations informally for an older male figure in the community; used by the Cerrahi Sufi order (ch. 1) for all dervishes (e.g., Hasan Abi)

adap – or edep, proper comportment or religious etiquette; e.g., prescribed behavior while in presence of one’s sheikh (do not talk, do not turn back to him, kneel on feet)

adhan (see ezan)

Ahl al-Bayt (see Ehl-i Beyt)

Alevi – Alevis are a religio-ethnic group with close ties to central and eastern Anatolia; see ch. 2

‘Ali – ‘Ali ibn ‘Abi Talib, also known as Hazreti ‘Ali (blessed ‘Ali) by many Sunnis or Imam ‘Ali by Shi’a, was the nephew of the Prophet Muhammad, who married his daughter Fatima; the last of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs in Sunni Islam and the first of the Twelve Imams in Shi’a Islam and Alevism; a central figure in the Ehl-i Beyt

Anatolia – the region of Turkey in Asia (also known as Asia Minor)

Ashura – literally “tenth” (in Arabic), and specifically the 10th of Muharem, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar, on which Imam Hüseyin and his companions were killed at the Battle of Kerbala; calculated by Alevis as falling on the 12th of Muharrrem; also the name of a soup served on Ashura, consisting of 10 or 12 ingredients (for Shi’a and Alevi, respectively)

aşık – a lover; more generally a term used in more esoteric contexts (e.g., Sufism, Alevism) for a lover of God; in Alevism, it is particularly used for some bağlama players (e.g., Aşık Veysel)

asitane – central tekke of a dervish order, oversees relations with other tekkes; Cerrahi asitane is located in Karagümüşük Istanbul

Aşure (see Ashura)
baba – father; often used in Sufism (and Bektashism, when distinct from Alevism) to denote an authority figure in the congregation; in Cerrahi Sufism, refers to the designated appointee (sometimes called vekil, representative) in a zaviye branch of the order

bağlama – a long-necked lute with a resonant bowl found widely throughout Turkey, its neighboring regions, and diasporic communities in Germany and elsewhere; it has close associations with Turkish “folk” music, popular music, and Alevi liturgical music (deyiş, semah, and cem); played by zakirs in Alevi cem ceremony, it plays a central role in Alevi worship

barzakh – (see berzah)

batın – literally inside, meaning esoteric or hidden meanings associated with Sufi and Alevi teachings

bender – a round frame drum used in many Sufi zikrs (e.g., Cerrahi, Mevlevi)

berzah – literally a division or threshold (e.g., in the Qur’an, the liminal space—perhaps brackish water—where bodies of fresh and salt water meet), but especially used to refer to the time between death and resurrection and the conditions of the grave

Caferi – or Jafari, adherents of Twelver Shi’a mezhep (school, path) named after Ja‘far al-Sadiq, the sixth of the Twelve Imams; principal form of Shi’a Islam in Turkey, found predominantly in the eastern province of Iğdır

çarpma – a technique for playing the bağlama in which a finger from the plucking (usually right) hand hits the soundboard of the instrument, causing a percussive accent that also sets the strings of the instrument in motion slightly

çay ocağı – tea house, typically a private establishment run as a small club and often unlabeled; the Caferi dervishes in Berlin ran a çay ocağı in Wedding during my research, though it closed in late 2013

cem – a gathering; especially the central ritual gathering of Alevism; in the Berlin Alevi Community, cem is held 2-3 times per year in conjunction with major religious holidays (e.g., Hızır fast, Ashura)

cemevi – literally the house of cem, or communal space of worship for Alevis; in Berlin, used to describe both the place and often the community

cenaze – Islamic funeral service, typically including communal prayer, procession to the grave, and burial

Cerrahi – a Sufi order sometimes known as Halveti-Cerrahi for its connections to the Halveti order, named after pir Nureddin Cerrahi with a center (pirevi) in Istanbul’s
Karagümrük neighborhood; the Berlin branch (zaviye) of the order is affiliated with a tekke in Susurluk, Turkey, led by Sheikh Mustafa Özcan

Cerrahi, Nureddin (see Nureddin Cerrahi)

dede – grandfather; a spiritual leader in Alevi communities tasked with conducting religious ceremonies (e.g., cem); the title is inherited among ocakzade families descending from the prophet Muhammad

dergah – a general term for a Sufi sacred space or lodge (roughly equivalent in usage to tekke), also used by Alevis in Berlin to describe the room in the back courtyard where muhabbet/sohbet conversations take place

dervish – a generic term for a Sufi initiate of Persian etymology with uncertain meaning, perhaps implying a mendicant or one who is poor (similar to the Arabic term fakir, also used frequently)

deyiş – something said (from Turkish verb demek); also used for a genre of sacred poetic recitation in Alevism that figures prominently in cem ceremonies and muhabbet gatherings

dhikr (see zikr)

dünya – the world; also more specifically the manifest/visible/material world of mortality

düvaz-imam – literally the Twelve Imams, also refers to a ritual recitation accompanied by the bağlama in which all the Imams’ names are recounted in order; often sung near the end of cem or muhabbet

edep – (see adab)

Ehl-i Beyt – literally the people of the house (Arabic: ahlu l-bayt), or those who follow the household of the Prophet, especially ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Hüseyin; the term is generally understood to include Shi’a, Alevis, and most Sufis, though like many of these terms, it has historically been highly contested

ezan – (Arabic: adhan) the call to prayer, traditionally intoned from a minaret of the mosque into the neighborhood surrounding it, but not publicly recited in Germany

fakir – a poor person; in Sufi contexts, often used to mean dervish; more emphatically, a fakir al-fukarah is the poorest of the poor, another name for an enlightened being or insan-i kamil

gurbet – state of exile, displacement from home; common musical trope, often used of migration; etymologically related to “west” in Arabic
gülbenk (also gülbang) – a special invocation recited at particular points in Sufi and Alevi ceremonies; commonly consists of a series of optative statements (ola in Turkish, “May…” in English)

hac – or hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca

Hacı Bektaş Veli – 13th-century teacher and mystic who migrated from Persia to Anatolia; namesake of Bektashism, an integral part of the larger Alevi tradition

hadith – report, narrative; oral traditions about the sayings and deeds of the prophet Muhammad written down around the 9th century (CE, 3rd century Hijri); Sunni and Shi’i sources disagree about which accounts are reliable

hajj (see hac)

Hanafî – one of the four major Sunni mezheps or juridical schools; most Turkish Sunnis adhere to the Hanafî mezhеп

Hasan – older son of ‘Ali ibn ‘Abi Talib and Fatima and the successor to his father as caliph (in Sunni Islam) and imam (in Shi’i Islam)

hizmet – service, ritual serving; particularly ritual tasks performed by designated individuals (hizmetçi); in dervish orders, these designations (e.g., meydancı, the one who oversees what takes place in the meydan gathering area; or zakirbaşı, the head of the zakirs) are extremely important to the hierarchy/seniority of the group and can be seen in seating arrangements, conversational behavior, etc.

hü (also hu) – in Arabic, “He” or a shortened form of “Allahu,” the name of God; also an important esma, or name of God, recited often in Sufi zikrs

Hüseyin – younger son of ‘Ali ibn ‘Abi Talib and Fatima, the successor to his brother Hasan as imam (in Shi’i Islam); martyred at Karbala in 680 CE, the subject of Ashura lamentations and matem ceremonies

ibadet – both the act of living a devout life in Islam and a general term for religious ritual in Islam, though sometimes (especially among dervish orders) used to encompass all acts in life, highlighting a sense of constant devotion; obedience, or more literally, worship, servitude, or slavery (to the divine)

insan-ı kamil – “a perfect human,”

Jafari (see Caferi)

janazah (see cenaze)

kamil insan (see insan-ı kamil)
Karbala – site of the battle in which Imam Hüseyin was killed along with many of his family members; commemorated yearly at Ashura

kiraat – (Arabic qira‘a) a reading of the Qur’an, or more generally, a style of reading; there are traditionally ten different ways or styles of kiraat

Kiraman Katibin – angels (usually in pair) assigned to document a person’s life (i.e., record good and bad deeds)

kıyam – standing form of zikr; in Wedding, entails two rows standing facing one another

kopuz – a long-necked bowl-lute considered a predecessor of the bağlama; native to Central Asia

Kuran (see Qur’an)

kursi – a seat; also the pulpit in a mosque from which the vaiz preacher delivers a vaaz sermon, including but not limited to Fridays before congregational prayers

matem – mourning; particularly used by Alevi and Caferi Shi’a for their commemorative gatherings held during the month of Muharram in honor of Imam Hüseyin and his companions

mescit – see masjid

meşk – a rehearsal of sacred music among Sufis and in some cases includes practicing of the sema, or Mevlevi turning tradition; also may entail teaching about zikr or other aspects of religious practice

Mevlevi – Sufi tarikat named after Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, whose mausoleum is located in Konya; dispersed after the 1925 ban on Sufism in Turkey, with some sheikhs and dervishes remaining in Turkey (with Afyon becoming a major center) while others fled to Syria

Mevlit Kandili – celebrations of the birth of the prophet Muhammad

minaret – spire on top of a mosque from which the ezan is traditionally recited or, in the past century, to which loudspeakers are affixed for the broadcast of the ezan

mezhep – a place to which one goes; more commonly, a juridical school in Islam, including four major mezheps in Sunni Islam, and one or more in Shi’a Islam (known as Caferi, Imami, or Twelver Shi’a)
minber – the staircase found near the front of many mosques (almost all Ottoman/Turkish mosques; also present in many German mosques) from which the imam gives the Friday **hutbe** and other announcements for the congregation

mi’raj – (Tur: miraç) Prophet Muhammad’s miraculous ascent into heaven

mosque – a congregational house of worship for Sunni and Shi’a Muslims; a central question for German Islam is how important it is for a building to have been built with the intention of it serving as a mosque

muhabbet – love or affection; more generally an intimate conversation, especially in the context of Sufism and Alevism; used almost interchangeably with **sohbet**, though often seemed to be used to denote particularly intensive or meaningful conversations

Muhammad – the last prophet according to Islam, and the messenger of God (**rasul Allah**), born in Mecca (570 CE) and died in Medina (632 CE); revered by all the different groups I worked with

musalla – the place where prayer (**salā** is performed, i.e., the sanctuary of a mosque

namaz – (Arabic: **salā, salāh, salāt**) ritual prayer among Muslims, including a prescribed number of prostrations with particular recitations and body movements; generally to be prayed five times daily

nefes – breath; more broadly a genre of sacred, sung poetry among Alevis

niyaz – intention, preliminary ritual statement of goodwill prior to participating in a ritual

Nureddin Cerrahi – the founder of the Cerrahi branch of the Halveti Sufi tarikat in 1703; born, lived and died in Istanbul

ocak – hearth; the families of descendants of the prophet Muhammad

oud – a fretless, bent-necked lute used in Ottoman classical music and some Sufi music

pir – a holy person, especially the founder of a Sufi order

Pir Sultan Abdal – a 16\(^{\text{th}}\)-century Alevi poet from Sivas whose poetry, sung with **bağlama** accompaniment, has become an iconic part of Alevi culture

qira’ah (see **kiraat**)

Qur’an – literally a recitation or reading, also the collection of revelations given to the prophet Muhammad

salah (see **namaz**)

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saz – a generic name for a family of musical instruments with stringed, long necks, bowled bodies; the bağlama belongs to this family

secde – prostration, formalized in communal prayers in among all the different groups in this dissertation

sema – (Ar: samā’) listening; the practice of turning (“whirling”) while music is played, traditionally associated with the Mevlevi dervish order but now practiced widely among other orders as well, including Cerrahis during their meşk gatherings

semah – an Alevi ritual that is sometimes conflated with sema and likewise involves circular body movements, but typically in a much bigger circle (i.e., around the front of a room); accompanied by bağlama and a singing zakir or dede; constitutes the high point of cem ceremonies

semazen – one who performs sema

sheikh – a learned elder, or especially the leader of a Sufi tekke

Shi’a – (adjective, Shi’i) followers; a group (sometimes described as a mezhep) within Islam with emphatic allegiances to the Ehl-i Beyt; Alevi are sometimes called Shi’a in everyday speech; in Turkey, Caferis are the largest group of Shi’a

sır – secret, an important part of initiation-based “pathways” like Sufi orders and Alevism

sohbet – companionship; more generally an intimate conversation, especially in the context of Sufism and Alevism; may include both a short discourse by the sheikh or dede, as well as a question/answer session; see also muhabbet

Sufi – a practitioner of Sufism, or tasavvuf

Sunny – those who adhere to the “ways” (Sunna) of the Prophet (i.e., his words and deeds); the majority of Muslims in Turkey

tasavvuf – Sufism, a loosely related set of mystical practices spanning established orders, shrine-based worship/visitation, and “saintly” individuals (called evliya or kalender)

tekke – a gathering place for Sufis, traditionally translated as “lodge” in English

telkin – an exhortation; in particular, a talk given to the recently deceased (typically at funeral services); widely accepted practice in Turkey but controversial elsewhere

Twelve Imams – a succession of 12 religious leaders, considered to be the spiritual heirs to the prophet Muhammad; revered in Shi’ism and Alevism

ud (see oud)
usul – measure, or rule; ceremony performed at the beginning of Cerrahi gatherings with similar recitation of names as in zikr but more restrained (always kneeling, fewer repetitions)

vakıf – traditionally (e.g., in Ottoman Empire), a pious endowment funded from real estate or some other investment given by wealthy patron; in Turkish Republic, can also mean something like a non-profit; the Cerrahi asitane in Karagümrük, Istanbul is a well-known vakıf for Sufi music

yol – path; especially important for Alevis as a notion of spiritual belonging and development through “four gates and 40 stations” (dört kapı kırk makam) leading to an enlightened state as an insan-i kamil

zahir – pertaining to surface; the manifest world

zakir – one who performs zikr; more specifically, one of the designated vocalists in a Sufi order (e.g., Cerrahis) who sings ilahis during zikr

zaviye – gathering, gathering place; corner, angle; a Sufi gathering place that is typically (at least for Cerrahis) smaller than a tekke and not led by a sheikh

zikr – remembrance, recollection; the act of vocalizing sacred names and attributes (asma al-husna)
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