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The Ethical Substance of Salvation: Materiality and Religious Rejection of the World in a London Mosque

Abstract

Materiality has been largely left out of the study of Muslim life in Europe, and limited to an etic rather than emic approach. In this paper, I analyse a conservative London mosque community (the East London Mosque) that depends on the material—what I term "ethical substance"—to reinforce its ascetic rejection of the world. Drawing from five months of ethnographic research in this mosque, I examine three aspects of materiality—clothing, the mosque building, and technology—in order to explore how the community negotiates its position in the city at hand, as well as more broadly vis-à-vis modernity. The mosque emerges as a site of discursive-material tension where ethics and locale intersect, and where intention (*niyya*) matters more than the constitution of objects. It elucidates European modernity as broader than liberal democratic ideals (i.e. in a community stressing a returns towards, rather than away from, tradition).

Keywords: Islam; Europe; Mosque; Materiality; Modernity.

Introduction

> People find happiness through acquisition and material goods. The believer, on the other hand, finds happiness in genuine worship, connection with otherworldliness, connection with Allah. When we want something, we should only give it value on how long it will last—true, everlasting happiness is the other world, hereafter. Wouldn't you rather have that? In this *dunya* [world], every happiness, whether nice clothes, designer bags, jewelry, all of this is simple, temporary. You're going to leave all of this behind.
>
> (Shiekh P., The East London Mosque)

THE FEW STUDIES that engage materiality in relation to Muslim communities in Europe center on discourse over visible symbols

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at the national level, where sociopolitical climates have resulted in significant minority-majority clashes. This etic method arises from scholars asking: "What objects can we study as symbols important for the civic sphere, as they generate controversy, or for social theory as they tap into existing debates important to us?" However, privileging discourse as both research site and communicatory mechanism has led to the oversystematization and abstraction of objects. And it has, in turn, largely neglected materiality as a strong instrumental force in the everyday lives of Muslim communities, even those that adhere to a vision of rejecting worldly life. Weber [1946] identified two tendencies of world abnegation in his treatise on religion: asceticism ("tam[ing]" the world), and mysticism ("fleeing from" the world). While he articulated the development of these divergent religious rejections vis-à-vis various life spheres—the political, economic, aesthetic, erotic and intellectual—materiality remains notably absent from his analysis [Weber 1946]. In this paper, I argue that only by looking at objects in an emic way can we gain entry into the often-neglected realm of practical activity and routine cultural classifications that determine how religious communities negotiate their location within both traditions of piety and modernity.

This paper aims to make sense of a contemporary, conservative London mosque community that depends on the material to reinforce its rejection of the world. I examine what I term the *ethical substance* of the East London Mosque (ELM) community to ask not "what's the matter *with* Islam?," but "what's the matter *of* Islam?" This requires an analytical shift towards the emic and the micro-level, where both leadership of the mosque and everyday mosque-goers think about and utilize the material to achieve salvation. It further entails reorienting discussion from aspects of Muslims' material lives important to mainstream civil society to those important to the religious communities, themselves. For instance, the average Muslim woman at the East London Mosque does not consider whether or not to wear a headscarf; this goes without saying. Instead, she considers how and where to don it, which scarf to wear, and how to combine it with an entire assemble so as to assert and maintain her religious identity. Similarly, spiritual leaders do not consider whether the mosque represents a threat to European civil society. They rather deliberate over what activities the mosque can accommodate, how it should engage with mainstream society, and its expansion in a restricted urban setting.

The sociology of religion is moving towards a more serious and complex engagement with materiality, which entails moving beyond the study of symbolic struggles. For example, in his study of Eastern

Orthodox Converts, Winchester [2017] conceptualizes material artifacts as "plot devices" in narratives of religious identity. Castelli [2012] analyses the religious mobilization of materiality in the political protests against the war in Iraq by Catholic activists. And Kaell [2014] explores Holy Land pilgrimages by American Christians who want to physically experience "where Jesus walked" as a creative mass market.

Despite such burgeoning and promising research fields, scholarship on materiality and Islam in Europe remains stuck in an intellectual rut of studying the symbolism of the headscarf and the purpose-built mosque for European state projects and cultures. Among the most ongoing cultural debates of Europe, scholars over the past two decades have asked: How does Muslim women's covering interact with enlightenment ideals and contemporary feminism [Bartkowski and Read 2003; Moruzzi 1994]? How does the (partial) banning of headscarves relate to legal norms of human rights and equality [Wiles 2007; Vakulenko 2007]? And how do controversies on worn religious symbols demonstrate crises of national identity and/or sovereignty [Auslander 2000]? Discussions on the headscarf overwhelmingly concern the tensions between religious freedom and secular public spheres [Shadid and Van Koningsveld 2005]. Koopmans [2005] argues that the headscarf signals the continuing "contested citizenship" of Muslims, who have achieved legal, but not cultural, integration as they remain excluded from mainstream understandings of national and European identity. The headscarf has thus become a means of measuring supposedly competing loyalties—religious, ethnic and national—among a growing Muslim minority populace across the continent.

Similarly, the purpose-built mosque appears in both popular discourse and academic literature as a symbol of Islam's perceived incongruence with Europe. According to the line of research interrogating such claims, conflict is shaped by exclusive national understandings of secularism [Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg 2003], and may arise from assumed otherness and resistance to permanence [Jonker 2005]. In Switzerland, this resulted in a minaret ban by popular referendum in 2009, spurred by interlinked fears of Islam and declining sentiments of national belonging [Gole 2011; Cheng 2015]. Contestation also relates to the aesthetics of a proposed building or the perception that planning does not sufficiently engage broader society alongside of Muslims [see Gale 2005 on Birmingham, UK; Becker 2017]. The idea of the mega-mosque as not only exclusive to Muslims, but antagonistic to Christianity has proliferated in Germany, France, Belgium and the UK. Across the continent, the public visibility of Islam has proved a

central concern of mainstream populaces [Bowen 2007; Gole 2011]. Akin to the headscarf, purpose-built mosques are material objects that provoke deep controversy, read through the eyes of mainstream societies that view Islam as potentially in conflict with the values undergirding post-Enlightenment Europe [Richardson 2004; Bowen 2007; Meer and Modood 2009].

Academic discourse on Islam in Europe thus centers on the symbolic message of objects—how they signal not only values, but also hierarchies of values and thereby identities in plural societies. Muslim communities on the ground, however, perceive the material as a medium tied more closely to pragmatics: focusing on how things are ethically oriented and used in everyday life in order to foster piety. I observed this tendency towards pragmatics across the eight mosques in the UK and Germany where I undertook ethnographic research and/or carried out interviews from 2013-2018. Many of my interlocutors within the subject of this paper—the ELM mosque community—discussed objects primarily vis-à-vis the subject's intentions (*niyya*), which were deemed *halal* (acceptable) if and when utilized to achieve pious ends.

To assert the interrelation, rather than assumed dichotomy, between religious ideas and physical artifacts, I bring Weber's [1946] concept of religious abnegation of the world into dialogue with discussions of materiality drawn from contemporary sociologist Brian Turner and contemporary anthropologist Webb Keane. Turner [2008, 2016] argues that embodiment helps us to see beyond religion as simply belief to the intertwined repercussions of its material engagement in everyday life by religious adherents. Along similar lines, Keane [2007] argues that the material is constituted not merely by physical artefacts but in fact extensions and reflections of the subject in the ways that they are used in everyday life. Both scholars stress the importance of everyday religious doings as an understudied field showing how belief and objects interact.

The following analysis is largely based on five months of ethnographic research at the East London Mosque, as well as, to a lesser extent, research in the mosque archives, two years of virtually participating in the mosque community through social media and discourse analysis of weekly mosque sermons. I examine the two material forms dominating mainstream discussions over Islam and belonging in Europe (mosques and clothing) from the point of view of mosque constituents. And I further elucidate the key role of technology—arguably the most modern of material forms—as an active force in their lives. Social scientific study has tended to perceive technology as disrupting traditional forms of religious authority [Turner 2007]. In a compilation on religion and the

question of materiality, technology is analysed as escapism, a response to disenchantment [Houtman and Aupers 2010] or a tool for New Age experiences [Zandbergen 2010]. Engagement with technology at the East London Mosque runs counter to these cases as, together with mosque space and clothing, it carries, spreads and authenticates a specific message of abnegating the world.

"Born To Die": Religious Revivalists at the East London Mosque

Typologizing migrant/post-migrant Muslim communities in Europe is difficult, given that culturally-rooted religious traditions, Islamic schools of legal thought and the influence of leadership combine, and at times conflict, with one another. The UK is home to a great diversity of Muslim communities, largely as a result of post-colonial migration in the mid-20th century from today's India, Pakistan and Bangladesh [Modood 2013]. *Islams* in plural rather than an Islam in singular characterize the social landscape, inclusive of diverse individuals and groups. Many mosque communities, rooted in different schools of thought, can thus be characterized as "conservative" [El Fadl 2001]. A particular type of Weberian [1946: 326] conservatism is, however, practiced by the East London Mosque, which is predominantly Bangladeshi but also increasingly caters to a local Somali populace: *active ascetism*,[1] which entails "keeping down and overcoming creatural wickedness in the actor's own nature… it enhances the concentration of the firmly established God-willed and active redemptory accomplishments." The ELM community preaches a religion of salvation based on an "ethics of brotherliness" between and "suffering common to all believers," explicitly clashing with the order of the surrounding world [Weber, 1946: 329-330]. Modernity, Western society, Europe, Great Britain and London become terms contrasted with the idealized Islamic existence strived for by constituents of this mosque. While difficult to quantify to what extent this mosque represents Muslim communities writ large in the UK today, this type of ascetic Islam is on the rise in numerous Muslim majority countries (e.g. Bangladesh, Pakistan) that were once part of the British Empire and enduringly linked to the United Kingdom [Griffiths and Hasan 2015].

[1] I analytically employ the concept of asceticism in the vein of Weber and not in relation to Sufism (although ELM is historically influenced by the South Asia-rooted Deobandi school of thought, which uniquely combines Sufi practice with a Sunni emphasis on sharia and hadith science) [Bowen 2016].

The discourse of the mosque, from daily conversation to weekly Friday sermons, paints the mainstream as dark and devious. The emulation of the Prophet Muhammad is seen as ideal, and the afterlife as in fact "real life," with "this life a prison for the believer." This orientation towards an idyllic past and flawless future can be witnessed in discussions of the economic, political and intellectual spheres spanning everyday conversation and sermons. There is a constant articulation of the insignificance of worldly life—"this world is a bridge, so pass over it but do not build on it"—politics ("I don't do it") and distrust of economic gain (with dire economic circumstances proof of piety). Such discourse is, however, preached in a mosque receiving donations through an iPhone app and television fundraisers; watched on projection screens that descend from the ceiling of the women's building to maintain gender separation; and accessible to the larger public through recorded weekly YouTube videos that show men wearing varied "Islamic" garb. That is, striving for the ultimate immateriality of paradise occurs through constant material engagement in the mosque.

Making Sense of Materiality in a London Mosque

The etic accounts of materiality dominant in the social sciences cannot account for the ambivalent relationship with earthly matter at this conservative London mosque. Instead, they prioritize mainstream perceptions of Islam. By portraying Islam as "displaced" from Muslim governance and lands, they accept the notion of Islam—and Muslims—as essentially outsiders of, if not threatening to, European modernity. This can, as noted above, be seen in recent work on mosques, highlighting conflict with publics throughout Europe, both framed by and framing perceptions of Islam [Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg 2003; Jonker 2005; Bowen 2007; Gole 2011; Cheng 2015]. Questioning the belonging of Islam has similarly proliferated in relation to the headscarf, which continues to spur discomfort among mainstream European populaces and political regimes spanning left to right [Ozyurek 2005, 2015]. Both debates, on the purpose-built mosque and the headscarf, center on the contentious visibility of Islam as foreign to, and even endangering, European identity. And they therefore make sense of material aspects of Muslim life in relation to the liberal politics of modernity with which they are assumed to clash [Asad 2003; Arkoun 2006].

The unquestionable dearth of intellectual exploration of what occurs inside of Muslim communities signals an opportunity through which to enrich our understandings of Islam in Europe, by breaching the invisible, albeit hardened, boundary between mainstream society and Muslims that we too have internalized in the sociological discipline. If one actively engages with these communities (as through the ethical turn in anthropology), it becomes immediately apparent that concurrent with othering, another striking trend marks the everyday life of Muslims in Western Europe today [Fassin 2014; Fadil and Fernando 2015]. A refocus on spirituality in the second and third generations of Muslim-majority groups cutting across educational and economic lines has led to a prioritization of their religious identities above ethnic or national ties [Peek 2005; Ajrouch and Jamal 2007; Jouili 2015]. These "revivalist" movements are part, rather than the antithesis, of modern Western European social life, complicating notions of contemporary secular states as religion-free or even religion-lite [Jouili 2015]. As argued by Taylor [2007], modernity has instead forged abundant alternatives concerning how to live a spectrum of religious, a-religious and agnostic lives.

In this paper, I analyze the role of materiality for migrant/post-migrant Muslims who not only prioritize their religious identities, but the afterlife far above life on earth, while being physically rooted in the British capital. Work that follows Weberian [1946, 2002] understandings of asceticism has tended to evaluate its effects on norms and values. For instance, Johnson [1964] finds that Protestants attending fundamentalist churches have a significantly higher likelihood of being Republicans than those who do not, across all US geographical locales. Cochran [2012] identifies "non-ascetic behaviors," such as premarital sex, to be impacted to a greater extent than other types of deviance by higher levels of religiosity in Midwestern America. And in their study of contemporary Islam, Ozdalga [2000] and Gulay [2007] note the effects of worldly asceticism in the Gülen movement to instigate activist tendencies among adherents.

A seeming paradox lies in a clearly articulated vision of abnegating the world undergirded by worldly material engagement, as does a "return to the time of the Prophet Muhammad" lived within the confines of 21st century London. This includes moments of conflict at the East London Mosque: i.e. when expanding a mosque complex to include schools, gymnasium and social spaces; determining how to dress oneself in public and private; or holding cell phones that spout, in place of ringtones, the call to prayer. Objects, as all aspects of life, at once extend from and extend religious ideals, with my interlocutors noting the acceptability of

watching Muslim YouTube videos, googling hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and buying new halal clothing [Keane 2005]. Objects engaged as ethical substance contribute to the creation and sustenance of a meaningful path towards salvation within the modern world.

The idea of the material as full of meaning is by no means novel to the social sciences. Foundational sociological sources showed the interdependency of religious belief, practice and materiality. Perhaps the most renowned of such accounts is Weber's iconic theorization of wealth-accumulating Calvinists. In his late work, Durkheim's [(1912) 1995] subjects portray their totems as tattoos, material forms inscribed onto the body of the individual to represent or recall tradition, unity and spirituality. The relationship between the individual and the material has been further developed in the post-structuralist tradition of Saussure, Levi-Strauss and, later, Bourdieu. Bourdieu [1977] focuses on spatial ordering of the individual as reflecting broader societal ordering (e.g. in relation to class or gender), embodying social structure, "habitual ways of being" or *habitus* [Miller 2005: 6]. According to Bourdieu [1977], objects condition individuals in their placement and action in the world, at once containing, constraining and reproducing social relations. For my interlocutors at the East London Mosque, diverse material forms are utilized to motivate and support being a "Muslim-first," or "only Muslim" in contemporary Western Europe [DeHanas 2016].

In theorizing the role of materiality at the micro level, I draw from the work of sociologist Bryan Turner [2008, 2016] and anthropologist Webb Keane. Keane [2003, 2007], who grapples with the interaction of material force and meaning in Calvinist missionary sects in Southeast Asia, explores the regulation of materiality in the name of the idealized human subject as soul, ascending the object-filled and objectifying world. Turner [2008] perceives material engagement, specifically that of embodiment, as a nexus where individuality and power relations in the modern world collide. I similarly emphasize the ways in which the subject and the object interact, with the object not only supporting, but extending a specific interpretation of Islam in the development of the pious subject as part of a larger lived theological project. I thus move beyond the taken-for-granted nature of the object as full of meaning to "what things make possible" for the religious subject [Keane 2005]. These deeply interdependent subject/object interactions allow for "patterns of physical accomplishment" to develop—moving

believers[2] towards the hereafter through piety-proving material expressions, whether ethical substance in a particular form of dressing that facilitates prayer; the capacity to raise funds creating gender-separation in the physical structure of the mosque; or engagement with the *ummah* through the internet, transcending national borders in the name of "an ethics of brotherhood" [Weber 1946: 329]. Like Keane [2003] and Turner [2016], I stress that objects cannot simply be divorced from the subjects who employ them. Rather than opposing the subject, through their strict regulation as ethical substance in the ELM community, they extend from and into subjects, at once encapsulating, contributing to and authenticating their religious identities [Keane 2006; Turner 2008]. The value of these objects is found in their capacity to align with, if not explicitly espouse, community values for the faithful subject. Matter comes to embody, express and contend with the discursive vision of this Muslim community, encouraging detachment from worldly life. And yet these same objects at times contend with religious values, connected with a conflicted temporal relationship—living within modernity while reviving a salvation-earning Islam that strives to replicate early Islamic life.

Methods

The analytical subject of this paper directly relates to my central methodology of ethnographic research. Only through daily engagement with the mosque community can one witness the determinant role that objects play in everyday life. Observation is key, with media coverage of the mosque drawing on the discourse of its leadership; and interviews similarly prizing discursive reflection. Materiality as ethical substance can be seen on the level of practices—moving beyond discourses on symbolism, fetish and icon to the lived everyday world of believers. I selected the East London Mosque for my research as the largest capital city mosque in the UK; one regularly covered in and consulted by the media, as well as engaged in active self-presentation for public view, i.e. through Open Days at the mosque, a regularly-updated website, YouTube videos and active social media accounts. This research was part of a larger project on representative mosques in cities across Western Europe. I spent five

[2] My use of the term "believers" is a pragmatic choice, in order to make this text legible to a broad social science audience. "Believer" (*mu'min*) is widely used in Islamic texts. However, I am at the same time aware of its limitations and critique that "believer" is a Christian-centric term. It is here vital to emphasize that "belief" in Islam, or rather having faith, is always deeply intertwined with religious practice.

months conducting ethnographic research at this mosque, during three discrete periods: winter 2014, summer 2016. This included daily visits to the mosque where I participated in prayers, informal conversations, celebrations, tours and mosque Open Days. I also regularly engaged with mosque constituents in other venues throughout East London including homes, restaurants, cafes and shopping malls. The second period of on-site research included three weeks of Ramadan, the annual month of fasting. In these research periods and far beyond (from January 2014 to the present), I have observed deep engagement with materiality inside of this mosque and through virtual forums: a Facebook page, a YouTube channel, television appearances and WhatsApp groups that facilitate my continued, if virtual, encounters with the community over time. My data consists of detailed fieldnotes, written after each day at the mosque and time spent with women from the mosque outside of it.

The mosque community, while still majority Bangladeshi and located in a neighborhood where one-third of the UK's total Bangladeshi populace lives, also serves a growing number of Somali adherents as well as a significant convert group. Almost the entire Bangladeshi community migrated from a single region, Sylhet, in the post-colonial period [Bowen 2016]. While maintaining a Bangladeshi majority, and increasingly serving other growing local populaces, ELM is neither representative of, nor a glaring exception among, British mosques in terms of the Islam that it preaches, which span various spectrums—from socially conservative to progressive, some serving specific ethnic minorities and others diverse constituencies.

I initially approached the mosque in winter 2014 and spoke with leadership both in the umbrella East London Mosque Centre and in the Maryam Centre (for women). My own identity as a woman resulted in the majority of my observation and participation to be exclusively with women. Most of what I observed of men was on screens in the women's section, where we watched weekly Friday sermons and events with male speakers, as well as the area surrounding the mosque and rare encounters with the male relatives of my female interlocutors. I attended the mosque each day during my research period, approaching various female constituents to discuss their experiences. I was also approached by female constituents out of curiosity or discomfort and, at times, with an offering to help me learn more about Islam. With Deobandi and Maududian roots (see below for further explanation), this is a proselytizing community, which certainly helped me to gain entrance into their everyday lives.

Results: Halal/Haram Regulation of Materiality

On the invisible border between Stepney Green and Tower Hamlets, I follow winding steps to an event hall holding a Muslim women's event. The room bustles with life, young women I have seen at the East London Mosque removing their modest outer layers of clothing to reveal sparkling evening gowns, the space ornately decorated, and folding tables piled high with scarves on sale. Melia (38), a long-term convert among my closest interlocutors in the mosque, refuses to remove her headscarf despite her daughter's pleas. Followed by a virtual drumroll ("da-da-da-DAH"), in a community that largely forbids music, a young woman takes the stage:

> Allah created all so you worship him. If you put your finger into the ocean and take it out, is like if you compare the life of this world to the hereafter [...] there is almost nothing on your finger. Indeed it is forever, that is what you are waiting for—the world is of course a prison. Ibn Khadr discussed worldly life as a prison for the believer [...] Ibn Khadr said "no luxury in the world can be compared to *Jannah* [heaven] and no suffering in this world could be compared to hellfire." This is the first verse of the Qur'an and was the warning to the Quraysh, warning of hellfire. If you want this world to become your prison, believe in paradise.

Whereas Bourdieu's [1990] concept of *habitus* entails an unconscious interplay of individual action and interaction with structure, the East London Mosque encourages a conscious praxis that ascends the required religious practices, in the quest for paradise. Salvation is sought through a praxis of the self, a process of not only self-becoming but self-recovery in preparation for the afterlife [Giddens 1991; Ricœur 1965]. This "self-recovery" entails what Philosopher Paul Ricœur [1965: 14] articulates as "reflection [...] upon that act of existing, which we display in effort and desire." It calls for a consistent, reflexive mapping of belief and awareness onto hope-filled action. Quoting a book by Hamzah Yusuf, Shiekh P., a mosque leader, explains: "It's like silverware: one may polish it with a few hard strokes and then put it down; or one may gently polish it regularly so that its shimmer is maintained" [Yusuf 2004: 154].

The women's group that I attend each week signals this process by increasingly spending time at the gender-divided mosque and covering their bodies (from the headscarf to *chador* or *niqab*, both full-body coverings, with face—*chador*—or only eyes—*niqab*—exposed), both with the aims of erecting social boundaries to men and asserting the centrality of Islam in their lives. In parallel, they decrease contact

with the mainstream over time. Daily action either contributes to one's closeness to God, or (as a sin) retracts from it. The goal is to regularly and consecutively multiply action for the sake of God and salvation through this praxis. This entails normalization of living first and foremost as a Muslim for God, a constant effort that eventually results in "not hav[ing] to think about it" (whether "it" is praying, covering or repenting). While one inherently errs as a human being, this semi-linear process minimizes mistakes, paving the way to the life that matters, above and beyond London or England, Europe or earth.

This process, however, relies on the surrounding material world and thus on London and England, Europe in its modern form. Werbner [2005] argues that two contrasting, hegemonic public spheres have thus emerged among Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the UK: one hybrid (a reflexive British South Asian culture) and the other espousing a purist vision of Islam. While arguably reductive, at the East London Mosque strict regulation of the material, as the self, ensues in the life of religious adherents motivated by a purist vision, with action delineated along a single *halal* (allowed)/*haram* (forbidden) boundary. This discerns all worldly acts as either oriented towards, or inherently opposed to, the divine. Although the *halal* and the *haram* in fact theologically lie on a spectrum (1. *fard* – "compulsory, duty"; 2. *mustahabb* – "recommended"; 3. *mubah* – "morally neutral, permissible"; 4. *makruh* –"hated" and 5. *haram* – "sinful, forbidden") determining the moral underpinnings of human activities, the operationalization of these concepts in the lived experiences of this mosque community does not [El Fadl 2001: 97, 300]. Instead, a deep line is drawn between the *halal*, understood as not only allowed but pure Islamic belief/practice and the *haram*, forbidden, inherently non-Islamic, in material life. The fierce determination of both leadership and regular adherents at the mosque to discern the *halal* (allowed) from the *haram* (forbidden) prevails in all aspects of life, such that it at once motivates and divides [Al-Qaradawi 1994]. However, the seeming precision of such division in fact gives way to a complex moral-social-material universe of religious practice.

The theological underpinnings of the ELM community are impossible to condense into a single tradition, drawing specifically from: 1) the Deobandi movement; 2) Syed Abul Ala Maududi; 3) Wahhabism; 4) Salafism and, to a lesser extent, 5) Sufism, particularly the work of Imam Mawlud. Theological influences span both time and continents,

espousing what I term a purist theology.[3] Leadership and active community members historically belonged to the Deobandi movement (which emerged as a response to British colonialism at the end of the 19th century, calling for asceticism in its specific combination of the Hanafi legal school and Sufi *tariqah*—path to the "ultimate truth"), and the Jamaat-e-Islami, an early Islamist organization founded by Syed Abul Ala Maududi in 1941 [Reetz 2007]. Yet they have also increasingly become linked to Wahhabism through deepening Saudi Arabian influences. This includes training of their main imam and financial support for mosque building in, as well as celebrated visitors from, Saudi Arabia [Bowen 2016]. At the same time, Al-Qaradawi, a conservative Egyptian Salafi Islamic scholar, is a key influence of ELM's head imam, Abdul Qayum [Bowen 2016]. Finally, leaders at ELM explicitly engage the writings of Sufi Imam Mawlud's Matarat al-Qulub in workshops, translated and commented upon by Hamza Yusuf [Moosa 2015]. This kind of theological diversity combines schools of thought assumed to be not only different, but inherently incompatible (especially Wahhabism and Sufism), revealing a modern project of fusion and "translocality" [Salvatore 2016]. This purist theology ascends taken-for-granted boundaries inside of Islam in order to solidify new boundaries that demarcate Islam as a separate sociocultural space from both ethnonational cultures and the British mainstream.

During its early development, the East London Mosque was the London hub for the Jamaat-e-Islami movement, founded by Syed Abul Ala Maududi. The legacy of this influence continues to shape the lived theology—that is "enactment of significance"—within the mosque [DuBose 2014]. While increasingly divorced for many, but certainly not all, of its attendants from South Asian politics, Maududian ideology consistently emerges in the discourses that define the mosque. This includes the dominance of Islam in all aspects of life and the mark of absolute obedience discerning a "true" Muslim from a "cultural" Muslim (colloquially referenced as a "non-Muslim"). Such discernment between pure Islam and the "non-Islam" lived by most Muslims is a marked aspect of Maududi's theological treatise, claiming that only 0.001% of Muslims understand Islam [Nasr 1996]. So too is the notion

[3] I have done my best not to replicate essentializing categories that designate some Muslims as "good" and others as "bad" (e.g. fundamentalist). I use the term "purist" here because this mosque community in both its official and colloquial discourse seeks to purify itself of corrosive worldly influences—a theologically-rooted response that has emerged in other contexts of marginality, including within many post-colonial Muslim-majority states.

of incompatibility between Islam and Western civilization, while not between Islam and modernity per se. In daily life, the ELM community appears to struggle with Maududi's stance that Western society directly clashes with religious piety. This struggle emerges specifically in the interactions between what is preached (a total divide from mainstream society) and the ways in which various mundane objects are intentionally utilized to build and support religious devotion.

The *halal/haram* boundary is closely linked at ELM to a person's approach to *dunya* [the world]. Love of the *dunya* draws on another theological concept in Islam, *wasatiyyah* (moderation), advising a "middle path." This instructs believers not to focus exclusively on the here and now, but remain cognizant of the hereafter [Kamali 2015; El Fadl 2006]. Leadership at the East London Mosque encourages not *wasatiyyah*, a middle path, but an exclusive focus on the hereafter. This in fact counters the principle of *wasatiyyah*, dividing rather than balancing. Instead, it reflects the omnipotence of the *halal/haram* boundary at ELM, with attachment to the *dunya haram,* an "illness of the heart" (Sheikh P., male mosque teacher). "Love of the world is a disease if you want it for its own sake, just for the sake of owning. If the *dunya* they own is not a benefit to them, they are not helping others, not using for *halal*, using for *haram* things and it leads to harm." Thus, the intentionality of one's relation to the *dunya*—the material world—matters.

This complex, not simply oppositional, relationship between the *halal/haram* boundary and the *dunya* helps to explain the ambiguous role of materiality in the lives of these believers. There is a difference between partaking in the world in order to become a better Muslim and "wanting the *dunya*, coveting the world," "liv[ing] so you can worship Subhanahu wa taʿalah" versus facilitating "time and energy spent on the *dunya*, not the hereafter, because of lack of certainty, lack of faith" (Sheikh P.). During a weekend workshop with Sheikh P., a young girl recites a chapter of the Qur'an and an emotional reflection on death. She holds a microphone to her lips, bending her small head forward while rhythmically bellowing:

> If anyone is dealing with a disease and the doctor says you have only one month to live, he repents, changes life, repents! But it has no effect when Allah says in the Qur'an that you will die! Allah doesn't care what place you are from, worship him —verse 26! Everyone on this earth will perish, only Allah will remain! Angel Jibreel asks the Prophet Muhammad for permission to die! Jibreel said, "Allah cannot wait to meet you!" Prophet Muhammad said, "Do what you have to do, take out my soul!" Did death let him out? "Prepare yourself before you come to me! Prepare yourself before you come to me!" Out of dust you are created and to dust you will be returned!

Obviously moved, an older woman shakes her head in disbelief, now cradling the microphone at her mouth. "I am at a loss for words. *Dunya* is nothing, *dunya* is nothing," she repeats in sync with dozens of nodding heads in the audience, sitting in front of a clothed table with Islamic children's books for sale.

The Space of the Mosque: Expanding in East London

East London is the beating heart of a multicultural city, with Jewish bagel shops remaining on the "curry avenue" of Brick Lane, artisan restaurants abutting internet cafes advertising calls to Bangladesh, greasy spoon diners and the Whitechapel Art Gallery. What a local police officer calls the "beating spiritual heart" of the Bangladeshi community, The East London Mosque (ELM), stands high above the other brown-brick buildings on Whitechapel Avenue. It is a typical building for the East End of London, brick and mortar, albeit with a small dome and two small minarets suggesting something more. It does not stand in isolation, or on the outskirts of the city; as an architectural construction, it almost integrates into the urban landscape. Being not only central but integral to this slice of Tower Hamlets, it melds fluidly into the city's surroundings. While only three decades old, the East London Mosque appears on Whitechapel Road as if it has always been, a meeting place for local Muslims and also many who come from outside of the Tower Hamlets neighborhood. Each day, its *adhan* (call to prayer) can be heard throughout the neighborhood.

The religious edifice of the East London Mosque is not devoid of meaning, instead increasingly reflecting a specific vision of Islam that emphasizes divisions between this world and the hereafter. This is operationalized in everyday life as divisions between the Muslim community (seen as the *halal*) and the mainstream (site of the *haram*). The continuous physical expansion of the mosque, now far more than a spiritual center (with four interconnected buildings) aims to meet the community's diverse needs, including a separate women's building (the Maryam Centre), schools, a female-only gym and library. The East London Mosque is located within a Bangladeshi-majority neighborhood, where many establishments cater to the pious. Numerous restaurants on Whitechapel Avenue have gender-divided areas, are closed during the daylight hours of Ramadan and serve only *halal* meat. Stores sell headscarves, *abayas* (long, robe-like dresses), alcohol-free perfumes and gelatin-free candies to the beat of Qur'anic verse.

The expectation that individuals focus their lives entirely on salvation comes to fruition in the spatial model of this mosque. Expanding and designating mosque space is a way to enact a world view in material form: devotion to God determining movement of the individual through space, delimiting options for consumption (whether food or goods) and limiting engagement with non-Muslims. It creates a sanctuary for the devout inside of London, while distanced from their *haram* surroundings. As my interlocutors articulate, the everyday engagement with the space of the mosque serves the purpose of putting the individual on the "right" or "straight" path, collecting spiritual rewards, thereby increasing chances of salvation. Within the Maryam Centre, gym, school and exhibition space accompany the main prayer room for women. Pristine bathrooms and open spaces for socializing reinforce the opportunity to spend time inside of the mosque walls.

In autumn 2015, a large plastic banner hangs high on the façade of the main ELM building. "Community Exhibition. Hajj: The Fifth Pillar" it reads in capital letters. Tucked inside a small room in the Maryam Centre, the exhibit outlines one of the five pillars of Islam. A diagram shows the steps of the pilgrimage, three headless mannequins donning the clothing to be worn by pilgrims and a three-dimensional diorama of the *Al-Masjid al-Haram* (the Holy Mosque at Mecca) and its immediate surroundings. One of the hanging Qur'anic quotes reads: "The Reward for an accepted Hajj is nothing less than paradise." The exhibition can be booked for tours, but does not remain open to the public during other times. Its focus—seeking to impart the basic precepts of pious practice—and its location deep within the mosque—hard to find unless familiar with the internal layout of the building—is a spatial expression of the inward-facing Islam espoused by the community.[4]

At the end of winter, Qur'an reading and recitation teacher Amaya (31) suggests a group of women visit the Aziziye Mosque in the neighboring Hackney borough of London. The mosque is opulent both inside and out—even its external walls are decorated in ornate blue turquoise tiling. "Distraction" Melia comments, shaking her head. As men pray below, women sit beside us on the rich auburn carpets of the balcony, and I observe lace curtains hanging from the railing to obstruct our view. Melia, beside me, speaks fondly of ELM, an ideal mosque, and of Satan, here trying to steer us off the right path. During our Qur'anic study group

[4] As part of a growing trend among mosques in Europe, where Islamic institutions are tasked with demonstrating their transparency to the broader public in a securitised atmosphere, the East London Mosque opens to the public a handful of times each year.

later that afternoon, born Muslims and converts alike praise the simplicity of the East London Mosque. Two years later, during a Qur'an class, Salman (26), a teacher at ELM, re-evokes this moment, describing the disappointing magnificence of Istanbul's historic mosques. "The blue mosque is said to be why a mosque should not be built—thinking wrong, exemplifying power. The Mehmets were very naughty". While expansive and remarkably clean, the inside of the East London Mosque is largely without decoration—resulting not from lack of resources, but an aversion towards "distraction" and coveting the world.

Beyond the Headscarf Debates: Tailoring Salvation

The body as a site of religious expression marks diverse belief systems across time and space, from tattoos to yoga, the crucifixion of Jesus to the distinctive dress of religious leadership. In Western Europe, the Muslim's body, in general, and women's clothing, specifically, has become the primary site for contesting the role of religion in the public sphere [Moruzzi 1994; Auslander 2000; Wiles 2007; Vakulenko 2007]. At the same time, modesty, as a tenet of piety laid out in both the Qur'an and the hadith, is outwardly expressed through clothing [El Fadl 2001]. For some Muslims, clothing facilitates a religious praxis of seeking to replicate the doings of the Prophet Muhammad (the *sunnah*) and maintain sexual boundaries outside of marriage. In contemporary Europe, as in the contemporary Middle East [Mahmood 2008], many Muslim women have asserted religious garb as a response to both societal expectations and religious duty [*ibid*.; Bracke and Fadil 2012]. How, why and where to dress in specific manners thus remain contentious subjects not only in mainstream discourse about Muslim communities, but also both across and within Muslim communities.

Along Whitechapel Avenue, beside the East London Mosque, nylon *abayas* fly high into the sky with winter winds outside of shops. These businesses target the local Muslim community, offering traditional Bangladeshi dress alongside black, floor-length dresses and coats. They provide goods for women, such as those at the East London Mosque, who increasingly cover over time. Dress signals not only who one is, but who she will *become*, in the process of centering life on Islam. My interlocutors at ELM aspire to high-modesty as a material expression of the *halal*/*haram* boundary in everyday life, enlivening the body as a pious form [Turner (1996) 2008]. Amaya discusses her personal crisis of faith predating the choice to cover her hair. Upon recognizing the lack of peace in her life, she considered turning to Christianity, but needed

"clear-cut rules". "Where was the rule saying you shouldn't drink? Where was the rule about clothing? Well, it was in there, look at how Mary dressed. But it was not clear-cut enough—I needed to know, this is right and that is wrong."

The proper adornment of the self is learned at home, practised at the mosque and expected in all adult interactions in public life. Like spatial configurations, the adornment of the body at the East London Mosque is at once informing and informed by Islamic regulations. According to my interlocutors, it is a way of "reminding oneself" how to behave in public, drawing *halal* boundaries between women and men, between earthly temptations and the promise of paradise. In a world constructed around a decisive *halal/haram* boundary, women use clothing to signal their individual positioning on the right side of the line. Wearing faux-traditional attire complements discussions on emulating prophetic times. Even prepubescent girls in this community cover, donning small *abayas* as they play in the Maryam Centre. On my very first day at the mosque, a toddler in tights and gingham dress, with a neatly tied headscarf presses her face to the glass separating the main prayer room from a reading space, followed by deep belly laughs at the fog produced breath. "My nieces do this too. My sisters say 'we're going to the mosque, you need to put on your mosque gear,'" explains Nisra (24), a slight Bangladeshi woman employed in the local government. Piety is not stagnant, but rather a dynamic process expressed through bodily practices, including the normalization of covering first for the spiritual center of the mosque, and later in all public interactions; "new clothing makes possible or inhibits new practices, habits, and intentions; it invites new projects" [Keane, 2006: 193]. Such an embodied process in the larger project of salvation can be witnessed in children's "mosque gear," or women "trying out *niqabs*."

As the body in public signals piety to others and, more importantly, true submission to God, my interlocutors largely agree that one cannot achieve salvation without proper attire. I witness a young convert, recently married to a Bangladeshi man, lectured outside of the Maryam Centre by a man from the mosque community for not wearing a headscarf and a dress (with leggings) that only hits her knees. Middle-aged women intervene in young women's practices of adornment by explaining the implications of their choices. "Sister, your prayers will be invalidated by that nail polish." "Sister, your prayers do not count if your hair is exposed." These words make way to actions, a thick scarf thrown over a woman's head from behind, or tied around the waist of a local businesswoman wearing very baggy pants, but pants (rather than a skirt or

abaya) nonetheless. Such interventions are explained by women in the mosque as motivated by a responsibility to correct wrongdoings when witnessed, as called for in the Qur'an (3: 104): "And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful" and hadiths [Cook 2000]. Those who fail to fulfill expectations in adornment are perceived at best as incomplete, often as impious, as described by Samira (24), a volunteer in a women's weekly learning circle: "I have friends who dress in tights, tight clothing, *are not religious* but pray five times a day and that is nice" [emphasis added].

In private, the woman's body remains a vestibule for piety, but adheres to laxer regulations. On my first day learning the Qur'an at Amaya's home, she unpins her headscarf, uncovering her hair. As she does this, Amaya notes how some of the women, the ones who have recently "started covering," hold beauty days where they do their makeup and hair. At the women's celebration noted above, girls arrive in *niqabs*, quickly ushering themselves into the bathroom *en masse*. I enter the bathroom too, to find *niqabs* being thrown off in glee, makeup bags almost bursting with goods. For an hour, girls in sparkling mini-dresses, slits cut into gowns, backs entirely exposed, hair curled on their heads, faces painted to perfection, strut from the bathroom into the ballroom in colorful, giggling lines. Only my middle-aged interlocutor, Melia, expresses discomfort at removing her headscarf, noting the sense of security found in her now-normalized public presentation of self. It becomes clear to me in the early days of my research that women can partake in modern beauty rituals and mainstream fashion in regulated circumstances; they must not expose themselves to men outside of their families, interrupt regular practice, such as prayer, or allow their focus to stray away from God.

What modesty means, however, remains an unresolved subject within ELM as it does within and across many Muslim communities. One of the long-term volunteers, Khadija (45), explains that she does not always wear such covering clothing (standing in front of me in a long black skirt, black long-sleeved shirt that reaches below her thighs, a billowing auburn sweater and an auburn headscarf). While she always dresses herself in multiple layers at ELM, she is more relaxed when she vacations throughout Europe. Although she "remains covered, with the *hijab* [headscarf] of course" in public life, she explains her choices in terms of both intentionality (modesty) and pragmatism: "It's about being modest, isn't it? When we go out into Europe, I don't dress like this. I dress more modern.

It's not practical, is it? For a firefighter to wear a long coat? That doesn't really work, does it?"

Discussions on Islamic dress in Islam tend to center on women, yet men at the East London Mosque also employ clothing as a means to express prioritized religious identities. Gathered on the sidewalk outside of the mosque, I witness Saudi-inspired outfits of red and white scarves traditionally utilized to block the sun, prayer caps and North African *djellabas* (robes traditionally worn in the Maghreb). In low-sun London, I ask Melia why the leadership and many male constituents of the mosque choose to dress in this fashion. "They are traditional Muslim outfits… Arab, um, Muslim… traditional dress is recommended. This is also a way to show modesty." Men too represent their faith through the literal display of religious identity on their sleeves. Some wear these outfits only for prayer, highly spiritual moments of Muslim life. Many increasingly wear them throughout their everyday, unmistakably marking themselves as Muslims in the public sphere.

The idea is to maintain the body as a modest vestibule for piety, container for the soul, a *halal* form—wearing floor-length long-sleeved dresses and headscarves in which prayer can be carried out, prayer caps showing reverence to God. Again, piety is not an achievement but a process: the relation between self and the body's adornments reflecting the ascendance of Islam, including an orientation towards the afterlife, in everyday life. It is way of reminding oneself and others, resisting temptations and remaining vigilant in devotion. And it is a way of uniting a community in their submission to God. "Come forward and sit together, close the gaps. We do not want gaps between us, show it with our actions," explains a female mosque volunteer donning a neon-yellow crossing guard vest with the words "Mosque Volunteer" printed across its back on top of her *abaya*. She carefully steps between the lines of female prayer-goers at the Maryam Centre, almost all in black, who will soon bow, united in devotion, to the ground.

Finally, the body is not only displayed—by women and men, with scarves, dresses, coats and caps—but *employs* these pieces, used by and extended from the subject in acts to maintain piety in moments threatening irreverence. Women without *niqabs* pull their black gowns to cover their eyes on the occasions that they enter the main ELM centre, walking past men. Women at home throw on *niqabs* to open their front doors, as they stand at the doorstep, the threshold to public life. They remind their daughters to cover when the postman arrives, shaking their heads as they recount adolescent girls exposing their arms in front of uncles. During my first visit to her home, Amaya does not want to touch the *tafsir*

(exegesis) book she gifts me, because she is not praying due to menstruation; she cannot touch anything written in the Qur'an. She wraps her black scarf around her fingers and reaches for the text on her bookshelf, bringing it down to the coffee table. She soon revises this rule, saying "I won't touch the Arabic," but opens it at the corners of the page so that she can begin to teach me. This pragmatic and intention-based balancing act in the relation to objects, where one is guided by intention in weighing benefits (here bestowing knowledge about Islam, reaping a great deal of spiritual rewards) against harm (for Amaya, touching Qur'anic text while deemed impure by menstruation) reflects a broader prudence in the negotiated regulation of the material world.

From Smartphones to YouTube to Selfies with "Celebrities": Halal Technology

Women at the East London Mosque hold Islamically decked-out phones—from a simple drawn hamza to gem-studded calligraphy—in their hands. The leader of a weekend women's circle interrupts a discussion on the Prophet Muhammad with a ringtone replicating the call to prayer. YouTube plays a central role in the days spent at women's homes discussing Islam. We watch inspirational videos from Islamic channels, such as the Merciful Servant, narrated by deep, powerful voices, as we sip sweet *Nescafe* side by side. At times, we also watch cooking shows, seen to be harmless, if not necessary for our spiritual development. The central role that technology plays in the life of East London Mosque constituents appears at first more paradoxical than other material forms. I am immediately assured by my interlocutors that avid usage of technology does not undermine the interlinked goals of salvation, reproduction of the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and detachment from *dunya*. Technology remains *halal* dependent on one's intention, i.e. if employed for the greater goal/good of becoming a better Muslim by educating oneself on Islam or recalling the dominance of Islam in one's daily life. The Merciful Servant is *halal*, I am assured, but a soap opera with scantily clad women, such as *Desperate Housewives*, is not.

East London Mosque leadership not only recognizes, but explicitly supports the usage of smartphones with the creation of its own iPhone app. An emblem with a texting hand is encased by the words "Text ELM12 P5 to 70070 Donate at least P5 [five pounds]" on posters noting the importance of attending the Friday prayer. Like other material forms, technology can be *halal* if used in clearly regulated, pragmatic ways: for the good of the individual Muslim's and/or Muslim community's path.

It can be *halal* if it demonstrates and reinforces Islam as a comprehensive way of life.

Among the various usages of smartphone technology, that of selfies with "celebrities" regularly occurs at the East London Mosque. When a muezzin (reciter of the call to prayer) visits from the Holy city of Mecca, men line up to take photographs by his side, the flashes on their phones filling the room with a sense of paparazzi. I watch this display with other women on screens that descend from the Maryam Center's ceilings, as we chew on *halal* gummy candies and potato chips. The motivational speeches of these mosque celebrities evoke a sentimental response; they become transformed by the performance into teachers or messengers of Islam, whose positive influence can be captured by a camera lens. Men and women at this mosque increasingly opt out of mainstream media, but they do not opt out of media at all. Instead, their YouTube channels remain set to stories of the Prophet. And their celebrities serve to mediate the meaning of the mosque, as material forms of spiritual promise encapsulating not only their bodies but their souls, entertaining and inspiring in the performative moment, and photographed proof of authenticated devotion in its aftermath.

Technology, in particular, challenges an expected boundary between tradition and modernity [Asad 2003; Taylor 2007; Mahmood 2008; Jouili 2015]. Yet ELM adherents manage to make this inarguably mainstream modern material form work for them in their processes of self-recovery and orientation towards the afterlife. Social media acts as a 24-hour support group for newly practising Muslims. Reminders for the five daily prayers are programmed into cell phones. Learning materials are disseminated through WhatsApp groups. That is, these technological objects and forms become inscribed with the intentionality of, as they emerge from, their subjects to learn and live Islam.

Discussion

A religious community rejecting this world relies on a particular ethics in their "active quest for salvation," with the *halal/haram* boundary determining everyday life [Weber 1946]. An exploration of three material forms—space, clothing and technology—however, complicates the clear notion of division articulated in the discourse of this community: division from mainstream society and division from this world. Their quest entails engagement not only with discourses, but material objects

and spaces, to support a mission while on earth—what Mahmood [2008: 31] terms in her study of Egyptian women's mosque movements "the material substance of the ethical domain". According to my subjects, this substance "works" for the vision of the community when employed in a *halal* manner by each subject, despite being of and in this world, "a balancing act that invites perpetual anxiety" [Keane 2005: 3]. This again points to the natural union, rather than divide, between ideas and materiality, a relationship shaped both by pragmatics and intentionality [Turner 2008; Keane 2003]. Humans think in terms of things, words and images attached to objects. Even heaven is described by ELM's imam as akin to lushness found on earth—"indeed there are palaces built in paradise with grass."

Throughout my research at the East London Mosque, fundraising campaigns are continuously broadcast by a local television station, with mosque leadership donning traditionally Saudi-Arabian garb and bestowing blessings upon callers pledging funds. Such instances capture the three layers of materiality I have explored in this paper in a single, lucid moment where pragmatics and intentionality merge: here clothing signals not only piety, but salvation and technology is employed to expand the spatial bounds of a London mosque oriented towards the hereafter.

Abnegation of this world has become objectified at the East London Mosque. Yet utilizing mainstream material objects, regardless of strict regulation, at some level conflicts with abnegation of this world, revealing constituents as active participants in—and consumers of—modernity. These community members may seek a return to the time of the Prophet, but replicating such dress requires shopping online. They may seek to disengage from the mainstream, but raising sufficient funds occurs through an iPhone app and television campaigns. While they believe themselves to be first and foremost members of the global *ummah*, they also assert their right to British citizenship. In fact, ideas about citizenship in the post-colonial British state are the implicit backdrop to this paper. Amaya, for instance, affirms that she is unquestionably British. "If anyone ever questioned this, I would be outraged." Still, she and many of my other interlocutors describe citizenship more as a legal than cultural category, bestowing and protecting rights, whereas their ethical groundings and orientations emerge from Islam.

Although my interlocutors center on their belonging to Islam, they engage the borough of Tower Hamlets at once to cast their focus inwards (to the individual, pious self) and outwards (to the Muslim community within but also beyond the UK) throughout my research. They were, and

are, of course embedded in broader social and economic networks—working in such areas as transportation, education and legal administration. At the same time, their disengagement from political life can be witnessed at key political moments, such as the Brexit vote. I visited the mosque the day after the vote with the expectation that its constituents would be shocked or dismayed. No one mentioned the vote unless I asked and, even then, many of my interlocutors were unsure of what had happened, or why it mattered for them; "It doesn't affect us," they told me. In many ways, my interlocutors reflected the "anti-politics" discussed by Parvez [2011] vis-à-vis the burka in France—centering their sense of self and belonging in a moral community and practices, rather than a political community and practices.

In this paper, I do not endeavor to explain why such an anti-politics emerges, fostering an inward and otherworldy-focused community in East London. While I argue for the influence of specific theologies, however, these of course intersect and interact with a particular social context, one in which Muslims face deep marginalization, and even alienation, by the mainstream. This and all other mosque communities in Europe are born from or built within a secular age—with its myriad forms of dislocations and disenchantments [Taylor 2007]. Not only physical but also social location contribute to a detachment from national politics and community. And this detachment from the here and now arguably contributes to a temporal focus on both future and past.

The East London Mosque is a modern project, in the Arendtian sense of "re-establish[ing] a link with the past," of a pious people who privilege the promise of paradise [d'Entreves 2019]. It is a project of largely British citizens who see the city as an opportunity to move beyond the here and now—to the past and a projected future of paradise. Even European mosques that preach abnegation of the world remain located in, and capitalize on, modernity—including the liberal citizenship regime—in its material form. While they seek to collect not fiscal but spiritual rewards, they utilize objects, intimately linked to their subjects, to achieve this ultimate goal, centering on intention more than means to a specific end. Looking exclusively to the discourses of mosques such as ELM, which preach world abnegation, suggests minimal engagement with mainstream material forms. Yet to witness, beyond words, the materiality of their everyday lives, complicates this spoken vision of division, as ideals and material reality, intention and pragmatics, interact. For instance, messages critiquing technology are shared via an East London Mosque WhatsApp group for women:

> When TV came to my house, I forgot how to read books. When the car came to my doorstep, I forgot how to walk. When I got the mobile in my hand, I forgot how to write letters. When computer came to my house, I forgot spellings. When the AC came to my house, I stopped going under the tree for cool breeze. When I stayed in the city, I forgot the smell of mud. By dealing with banks, I forgot the value of money. With the smell of perfume, I forgot the fragrance of fresh flowers. With the coming of fast food, I forgot to cook dal and rice. Always running around, I forgot how to stop. And lastly when I got WhatsApp, I forgot how to sleep (Fatima, 31).

Conclusion

This paper has diverged from previous accounts of materiality in a religious community as symbolic or performative, instead suggesting the material as an extension of the pious subject in her multifaceted expression of worldly devotion to paradise. The purpose-built mosque provides a site at which this expression can be experienced through multiple senses —sight, hearing, touch—yet also one in which a focus on the afterlife is expressed through modern material forms.

In their evaluation of the reconstruction of public and private space in both Budapest and Berlin, Bodnar and Molnar [2009] nominalize housing developments as "transition zones," spaces/places affected by commodification and globalization, evidencing current political struggles and the various currencies they carry. Purpose-built mosques are also "transition zones" of sorts, facing deeply conflicted understandings of Islam's possible place in Europe in the enduring post-colonial period. The East London Mosque is a transition zone, in which material aspects of the modern European city and state become recast as tools for—rather than in conflict with—a purist revivalist goal by Muslim minorities grappling with myriad marginalities. The modern faces of this mosque, aimed at reconnecting with the past while striving for paradise, can be seen in the ethical substance of its constituents*:* its ever-expanding spaces of faith; bodies dressed in *halal* contemporary clothing; and communication through its many virtual interfaces. Sight beyond discourse to the material realm, beyond macro integration concerns of mainstream European society to the micro worlds of mosques in Europe, sheds new light on how Muslim communities carefully consume and partake in the project of modernity.

This account of the ethical substance of a mosque community that preaches abnegation of the world is fruitful for the social sciences in multiple ways: 1) decoupling the pure, discursive visions of religious

communities from the complex, value-laden actions of their constituents as they navigate the lived social world; 2) countering assumptions about a clash between conservative Islam/Muslims and European modernity; and 3) showing how even strict religiously-centered identities remain multiple, continuously drawing on various resources (e.g. of the *ummah*, as well as Europe, the UK and the city of London) [Modood 2013; Bowen 2016].

A mosque such as ELM reveals the ways in which modern citizens of a post-colonial European capital articulate both self and community through constant, intentional material engagement as an extension of themselves, as pious Muslims. This includes material reconsiderations and revisions of what appears strictly *haram* or *halal* in official discourse of the mosque. For instance, Khadija considers the practical implications of materiality when she asserts that a female firefighter should not dress in a *niqab*. It must be cautioned that it is anything but ahistorical for Muslims to engage with and employ new material forms. In the time of the Prophet, the leading technologies of his age were employed to spread his message (e.g. letters to neighboring rulers) [Hoover 2009]. He adapted new techniques to his cause, for instance, the use of the trench suggested by Salman at the "Battle of the Trench," or the invention of the *adhan* to call adherents to prayer [Howard 1981; Faizer 1996].

What is instead surprising about *this* case study is the lack of engagement with these historical moments of innovation and a parallel claim to return to that time by an outright rejection of all facets of mainstream society—while in fact selectively incorporating material aspects of the mainstream into everyday religious praxis. In this case, what appears on the surface as paradoxical is made sense of through an Islamic lens of "intention" (*niyya*) and its relation to *dunya*. Material objects employed in order to "climb the latter of Muslimness" or "become a better of Muslim" shift from a mundane or even profane to sacred status. That is, the *orientation* of the subject and thereby the object, as an extension of the subject, matters more than the constitution of the object, itself.

I would surmise that those who reject worldly abnegation, as in the majority of European mosque communities, would grapple with similar tensions in discursive-material tensions; various embodiments of, and negotiations with, European modernity as a site that ascends the ideals of liberal democracies and its discourses, creating innovative possibilities of how to live as believers; and a not always seamless fusion of identities drawn at once from their belief and their surroundings, opportunities as well as constraints of the physical worlds that they inhabit. Further scholarship should examine relationships with materiality in other

revivalist Muslim communities in Europe, including how a growing body of mosques with deep cosmopolitan convictions similarly, or differently, utilize their surrounding material worlds. The role of technology, in particular, requires additional research as a cutting-edge communicatory form used towards pious ends: from local mosque-based support groups that communicate largely online to the growing virtual communities of believers that transcend national, ethnic and geographic boundaries.

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Résumé

La matérialité a été largement laissée de côté dans l'étude de la vie musulmane en Europe, et limitée à une approche étique plutôt qu'émique. Dans cet article, j'analyse la communauté d'une mosquée conservatrice de Londres (la East London Mosque) qui dépend de la matière – ce que j'appelle la « substance éthique » – pour renforcer son rejet ascétique du monde. En m'appuyant sur cinq mois de recherche ethnographique dans cette mosquée, j'examine trois aspects de la matérialité : les vêtements, le bâtiment de la mosquée et la technologie, afin d'explorer comment la communauté négocie sa position dans la ville en question et plus largement dans la modernité. La mosquée apparaît comme un site de tension discursive-matérielle où l'éthique et le milieu se croisent, et où l'intention (*niyya*) importe plus que la constitution des objets. La modernité européenne y est présentée comme plus vaste que les idéaux démocratiques libéraux, à l'intérieur d'une communauté qui met l'accent sur un retour vers la tradition.

Mots-clés: Islam ; Europe ; Mosquée ; Matérialité ; Modernité.

Zusammenfassung

Das Wesentlichkeitsprinzip wurde bei der Untersuchung des muslimischen Lebens in Europa weitgehend ignoriert und mehr auf einen etischen als auf einen emischen Ansatz beschränkt. In diesem Aufsatz untersuche ich eine konservative muslimische Gemeinde in London (die East London Mosque), die sich auf Wesentlichkeit – ich nenne sie „ethische Substanz" – stützt, um ihre asketische Ablehnung der Welt zu verstärken. Grundlage meiner Beobachtungen ist ein fünfmonatiges ethnografisches Forschungsprojekt in dieser Moschee. Drei Aspekte der Wesentlichkeit oder Materialität werden erörtert: Die Kleidung, das Gebäude der Moschee und die Technologie, um zu beschreiben, wie die muslimische Gemeinschaft ihren städtischen Standort sowie im weiteren Sinne ihre Verortung in der Moderne aushandelt. Die Moschee erscheint als ein Ort der diskursiv-materiellen Spannung, an dem sich Ethik und Umgebung überschneiden und an dem die Absicht (niyya) wichtiger ist als die Konstitution von Objekten. Die europäische Moderne geht hier weit über die liberal-demokratischen Ideale hinaus, und dies innerhalb einer Gemeinschaft, die eine Rückkehr zur Tradition betont.

Schlüsselwörter: Islam; Europa; Moschee; Materialität; Moderne.