Continuities of Culture in the City: Using Accidental Clues to Access London/Turkish Spiritualities in Commercial Cultures

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Matthias Zick Varul

University of Exeter, CSSIS

Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology

Amory Building, Rennes Drive

Exeter EX4 4RJ

+44 (0) 1392 26 3283

m.z.varul@exeter.ac.uk

While European leaders squabble about whether or not Turkey does or does not belong into the European Union and in Germany, the main destination of Turkish migration in the second half of the 20th century, Turks remain the target of racist discrimination and blame (Soysal 2013), Turkish London looks like a model case of cosmopolitan co-existence. During the 2011 Riots Daily Mail reading British tourists in Turkey learned in amazement how members of this "Muslim" population played the part of vigilante defenders of British retail, while the Turkish media noted that against the looters London Turks stood together with London Kurds. While celebrations of multicultural success stories need to be taken with a pinch of salt (particularly as they might be used as reproach towards groups considered less well "integrated"), the inconspicuous and under-researched case of London Turcophone 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' (Lamont/Aksartova 2002, also cf. Werbner 1999 for working class migrant cosmopolitanisms) deserves attention. At a time when multicultural society is questioned and anti-Muslim hate crimes are on the rise, what makes the apparently unproblematic everyday cosmopolitanism of Turkish London possible?

In this paper I will try to *begin* answering this question by presenting preliminaries for a study on the intricacies of London/Turkish life, developing from material clues gathered on a single day of preliminary ethnographic research on Kingsland Road and Stoke Newington Road, Dalston/Hackney - showing that already on the basis of very little evidence assumptions about bounded and un-ambiguously identified ethno-religious migrant community can be challenged. Randomly encountered artefacts such as a cartoon character themed yogurt drink from a Turkish supermarket, the grandfather clocks in the prayer hall of a Sunni Mosque, a guide to the ritual prayer (*namaz*) bought from a Turkish/Islamic book shop or a 17th "Turkey upholstery" chair displayed in Geffrye Museum of English Interior Design tell stories about how both breaks and continuities in space and time are established through spiritual and commercial practice. Spatial references - between metropolises such as London and Istanbul, and transcendent and immanent spiritual places such as the *Álem-i Misâl* , local mosques, cinematic imaginations and the *Kaabe* in Mecca - intersect and reflect back on each other. As do temporal references - the clues were gathered on the opening day of the London Olympics, the first Friday of *Ramazan*, market day on Ridley Road. The aim of this paper will be to set out the parameters to investigate continuities of culture in the cosmopolitan metropolis as continuities of time and continuities of space, as lived in practices and coagulated in artefacts whose initial function may have been distinction rather than connection.

Of course – this falls short of the full investigation that London Turkish spiritual and commercial life would merit. While one aim of this paper is to show that even before deeper investigations, clues (Inglis 2010) can destabilise existing preconceptions, even in an observer who comes in with 'interactional expertise' (Collins et al. 2006) I am also making a case against a too systematic approach to research as stipulated by the current funding system – a system that nominally favours "innovative" research, but requires researchers to lay out, in advance, very detailed proceedings. In this initial refusal to systematise the field from the outset I follow

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Çağlar's (1997) programmatic call for research perspectives that do not *start* with cultural categorisation, but to find sideways access into everyday life worlds, e.g. through practices of consumption. Küçükcan (1999) has drawn up, and Çoştu (2009) has updated, a very useful map of London Turkish religious and community organisations. But in the end this leads to a categorisation of segments within the London Turkish speaking communities that may be relevant for those centrally involved in those organisation, but less so for the many who use their facilities without deeper involvement. So, while, as Werbner (1997) argues there can be no doubt about the validity of such essentialising of collective identity where it is driven by community self organisation, the symbolic work done by such organisations can only be understood against the background of the fluidity of cultural practice, the *ebruesqe* nature of identity in a cosmopolitan age (Durak 2006, Varul 2012). While the perspective from organisation unwittingly emphasises boundary construction and maintenance, the perspective from casual observation favours the discovery of connections and lines establishing the continuity of culture which Ingold (1993) asserts. Ingold resolves the seeming tension between the universal possibility of understanding implying homogeneity and cultural variety and diversity which implies an impossibility of such understanding by invoking the metaphor of a landscape:

> 'I find it helpful to imagine the world in which people dwell as a continuous and unbounded landscape, endlessly varied in its features and contours, yet without seams or breaks. As we travel across the landscape we move from place to place. Each place is different from the last, each is surrounded by its own horizons, yet these horizons dissolve on approach as new ones loom up ahead – they are never crossed. So how do we describe the particular character of a place? I answer: "By the way the world looks from that place, by the vista it affords to someone standing there"' (Ingold 1993: 226)

However, unlike Ingold (2008) who in a pronouncedly anti-urban turn dismisses any artificially set boundary as discontinuation of landscape and culture, I will argue that it is, paradoxically, through identity-setting, defining and "othering" delineations (which those artefacts embody) that the possibility of continuity and connectivity is constituted in the first place. Here I take inspiration from both the sociological tradition (mainly Simmel, e.g. 1994) and, as this is about continuity of culture after all, from the Sufi spiritual-philosophical tradition of the communities studied. The notion of "limit" *berzah*[1] as the divide that connects, as the intermediate between material and spiritual existence which is the realm of the creative imagination, the *âlem-i missal,* the world of images (Bashier 2004, Chittick 1989, Corbin 1969). [2] The "great sheikh" Ibn Arabi characterises the *berzah* as follows:

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[1] I am using Turkish transliteration throughout, whether concepts used are of Turkish origin, Persian, or as in this case, Arabic.

[2] The paradigm of the creative imagination is the Muhammad's ascension to receive the Koran, the *Miraç* – which is as important in mainstream Sunni Islam as it is constitutive for Alevi spirituality (cf. Schubel 2002). The idea of travel, i.e. the journey in between places affording 'religious experience and insights […] of the unseen world (*ghaib*) while passing bodily through the visible world of illusion', as Sirriyeh (1985: 96) characterises the travel writing of the 19th century Ottoman Nakşibendi Sufi poet Nabulusi. It is also worth noting that Sufi concepts are equally virulent in Turkish secular discourse and popular culture, with pop artists like Sezen Aksu (who makes an appearance in the Royal Albert Hall on 15th October) singing lyrics by Rumi and Yunus Emre.

"The closest, most affectionate, and most unifying of relations is one between Other (*khilaf*) and its other, from which it is differentiated … Affection (*mawadda*) between differentiated things prevents each of them from wanting the disappearance of its other from existence. Each desires and wishes that it could become one with its other for the sake of avoiding any difference between itself and Other, so that witnessing becomes only for the one and that the other disappears in it.' (cited in Bashier 2004: 87f.)

This finds a correspondence Georg Simmel's notion of relation through separation, of – if you like – presenting by absenting:

'By choosing two items from the undisturbed store of natural things in order to designate them as "separate", we have already related them to one another in our consciousness, we have emphasized these two together against whatever lies between them. And conversely, we can only sense those things to be related which we have previously somehow isolated from one another; things must first be separated from one another in order to be together.' (Simmel 1994: 5)

Where Simmel sees separation as precondition for connection, Ibn Arabi (and, it should be said, the Romantics – for a speculation on some parallels between Sufi and Romantic ethics in relation to consumer culture cf. Varul 2013)

While for Ingold (2007) the mapping of a stream as an international boundary is merely an act of violence against the flow of the landscape, for Simmel this wilful misunderstanding of flowing water as a limit or separation is at the same time a stimulus to the imagination and a provocation to build a bridge. In recognising this paradoxical function of reifying identity ascriptions fluidity and hybridity can be exposed without denying the reality of socially constructed and maintained "cultural difference". Against the Heideggerian-Lukácsian horror of reification (Honneth 2008), the dialectical nature of reification needs to be recalled – as (even though without explicit reference to the dialectical tradition) Silva (2013: 83) does in her empirically grounded assertion:

'Reification is always and necessarily linked not with inertness but with responsiveness; not with detachment but with involvement; not with passivity but with activity; not with a lack of control over one's products, but with a tighter control over those products and the advantages they bring. In the end, a different view of mastery and control will surface: to regain control and effect change it is not sufficient to adopt a critical stance and come to terms with the "objective" fact that our reified world is after all our own creation, and what we did ourselves we can undo.'

This appreciation of limits and boundaries also entails a methodological break from the idea of unconditional immersion. While, in further research, a high degree of immersion (and what is more, research subject generated content) will be sought, my starting point is one of learned distance, which combines the notion that (against a background of eclectically accumulated familiarising knowledge) every tiny detail found in the field can become a vital clue, with a radical de-familiarisation and alienation that refuses to privilege *any* knowledge – not even "indigenous" knowledge. To take the detective metaphor of the "clue" seriously, we will follow the abductive approach exemplified Arthur Conan Doyle in his *Sherlock Holmes* stories as interpreted by Seboek/Umiker-Seboek (1988) in which the imaginative construction of possible connections and relations is the first step. If you like, this amounts to an adoption of the concept of *berzah*

not just for the interpretation of the artefacts, but in the positioning of the interpretative approach itself as one activating the sociological imagination. (Mills)

This paper is thus written from an "armchair" position, rehabilitated by Willerslev (2010: 509) as counterweight to the paradox of immersive anthropology which 'the more faithful it becomes to ethnographic reality, the more it loses its high function of imagery, namely that of synthesizing and interpreting what it represents'. Needless to say that I am not only resisting the temptation to fully immerse in one of the spiritual outlooks found in the field,[3] the same approach is taken towards "Western" interpretations.

This attitude (which is not a retreat – the necessity of a return to the field is fully recognised here) is, I suggest and hope to demonstrate, also advantageous in finding ways of articulating the meanings contained on the level of 'iconic consciousness' which for the immersed observer become inexpressible because:

> 'the iconic is about experience, not communication. To be iconically conscious is to understand without knowing, or at least without knowing that one knows. It is to understand by feeling, by contact, by the "evidence of our senses" rather than the mind.' (Alexander 2008: 782)

To make a first step in articulating the iconic consciousness residing in the objects found on the way learned detachment is indispensable. The adoption of the paradoxical notion of the limit, the *berzah*, will help accessing the way that iconographic artefacts both presenting and absenting simultaneously, notions which 'may inform antagonistic philosophical perspectives, but' as Alexander (2008: 786) asserts 'are not antithetical in the empirical sense.' This claim, of course, is one that needs to be validated or at least rendered plausible. in the discussion of the empirical material. If successful this should lead up to a 'writing against culture' in the three senses that Abu-Lughod (2006) outlines, by refusing the 'distinction between ideas and practice' (2006: 472) – when understanding how the religio-political and the commercial interact on a yoghurt pot whose contents have been consumed by myself –, by making 'connections and interconnections' (ibid.), especially 'national and transnational connections of people, cultural forms, media, techniques, and commodities' (2006:473), but also between the researcher and the researched, and 'ethnographies of the particular' (2006: 473) where single narratives, artefacts, practices reflect, but do not exemplify the general, and thus generalisation is rejected even where a claim to general validity is part of the artefact's meaning structure.

What I am presenting in the following is only part of my "haul" from a single day of field work in London Hackney, up and down Kingsland Road and Stoke Newington Road – commonly viewed as the centre of Turkish life in the UK. I can highlight only a fraction of my observations

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[3] For instance the adoption of a Sufi notion (*berzah*), for example, does not require me to accept the ultimate reality of the metaphysical/spiritual ideas behind it Ewing (1994) ponders whether it is not a necessary final step in getting a full understanding of Sufism to let go of the resistance to maintain an outsider status and accept, for example, the validity and reality of her dreams of the sheikh. I fundamentally disagree for the simple reason that in order to give voice to the Sufi experience we do not need anthropologists – as far as it is possible at all to account for the authentic Sufi experience Sufis themselves will be able to speak for themselves. To put it bluntly, the whole debate around "going native" (e.g. Sluka/Robben 2007: 14ff.) can be easily resolved by pointing out the fact that, since the "natives" have mouths to speak there is no point in "giving voice" – what someone "gone native" can say can be said equally well by someone born "native".

– and by doing so am making my point, namely that even a very short and unsystematic observation immediately shatters any notion of reified cultural community and coherence and points to a fractured continuity of culture.

Of course, I will not deny that to make this observations a certain level of what Collins et al. (2006) called 'interactional expertise' is necessary. So I came to the field all read-up on varieties of Turkish Islam, equipped with some (basic) knowledge of Turkish language and a history of partial immersion in diasporic Turkish life in Europe. But there was no attempt at a systematic "mapping". In a very situationistic way, my observations are guided by coincidence (a bit like the idea of exploring one city using a map of another city). I did not plan this field trip properly and would normally have avoided going at the opening day of the London Olympics – which happened to be the first Friday in *Ramazan* and also market day on Ridley Road. I also did not plan in the weather (after all – this is England), so once I hit Kingsland Road, against all reassurances of the Met Office, it started to rain heavily. I found refuge in the [Geffrye Museum](), (which I otherwise would have ignored), a museum that, as "museum of the home" set itself the task to 'how homes and gardens reflect changes in society, behaviour, style and taste over the past 400 years'[4]. Here, due to bad conscience (I was travelling on research expenses) instead of just sheltering, I started to explore with forced interest. After all, to coincide with the Olympics, the museum had a special exhibition on the world at home in London (as symbolised in the giant teapot in the courtyard

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[4] http://www.geffrye-museum.org.uk/

What I found in that special exhibition was

an unexpected chair

Chair with turkey upholstery, about 1685, Geffrye Museum

So this is evidence of London Turkish life without London Turks – an Orientalising adaptation of Anatolian material and artistry for early bourgeois home life in the 17ᵗʰ century. Reflecting on this item, lines open both to Orientalist romanticism and Enlightenment rationalism, linking British Imperial notions of cultural superiority with longing imaginaries relating to Turkish lands as magical and luxurious East. Also there are lines into the Turkish notions of progress and Westernisation.

The chair on display clearly is, by design, an ordinary North West European chair and as such (and in contrast to what colonialist explorers found in exotic places... and before them what crusaders and traders found in the East[5]) epitomises Western civilisation in disciplined and self-controlled sitting. This is well documented in the Geffrye Museum. We find chairs arranged around dinner tables and at desks.

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[5] As Marcel Mauss in his 1934 essay on the techniques of the body has pointed out both chairs and tables are far from culturally universal (1950: 379)
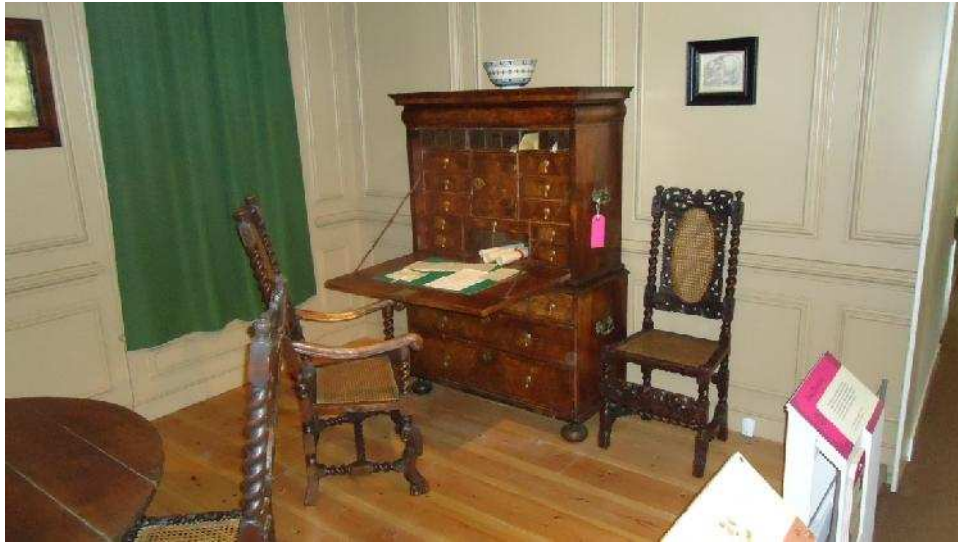
Bourgeois living room arranged in the Geffrye Museum

Fixating the sitter in the direction of the envisaged activity (supping, debating, writing, studying) and enforcing an upright position, the European chair underpins the self image of the modern European bourgeois as focused, purposeful, rational and diligent whose sitting is elevated from squatting. In the way the seat is set roughly at knee height, the sitting position of the Westerner is made to resemble standing up as closely as any sitting position can possibly be. Standing up, springing into action, requires minimal effort. In a pronounced way the chair does not only 'afford sitting on' (Gibson 1977 uses a chair to explain his notion of 'affordance'), but it affords Western superiority:

> 'The chair, as we know it today, derives from the throne, and the throne presupposes subject animals or human beings, whose function it is to carry the weight of the ruler. The four legs of the chair represent the legs of an animal – a horse, an ox, or an elephant – and sitting in this way, on a raised seat, must be clearly distinguished from sitting or squatting on the ground, which means something quite different. To sit on a chair was originally a mark of distinction. The man who sat rested on other men who were his subjects or slaves. While he might sit, they had to stand.' (Canetti 1962: 389)

By combining this piece of furniture with an Anatolian rug, a *kilim* (which in itself can act as a piece of furniture in that one can sit on it, mostly cross-leggedly – *bağdaş*), the displayed chair presents as its opposite what it decidedly is not. It presents and absents "Oriental" sitting.
The latter is imagined as reclined, relaxed and either related to the meditative practice of the religious writer or the leisurely hedonist (e.g. drinking coffee and sucking on a hookah, or *nargile*, as these men in front of a coffeehouse in 1905)

The false generalisation from such practices onto an "Oriental mentality" was introduced in a Romantic fascination with the Islam (Rodinson 1980) which left us with the Turkey-derived concepts of "ottoman" "sofa" and the "divan". This chair is an interesting combination alluding to perceived Turkish luxuriousness and Western rational interior design. On the one hand it enforces ideas of Western superiority, the idea of the Occident as purposive and rational – i.e. "masculine" – and the Orient as fatalistic and passive – i.e. "feminine". On the other hand it represents, by way of consumer cultural transcendence (McCracken 1988 calls it 'displaced meaning'), escapist dreams of an "Oriental" life of sensuous existence as delicately depicted in Liotard's painting of two cross-dressing and leg-crossing Westerners.[6]

(Jean-Etienne Liotard (1702-1789): Monsieur Levett and Mademoiselle Helene Glavany in Turkish Costumes (oil on canvas), Louvre

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[6] In an ironic turn of self-Orientalisation, the Turkish Cultural Foundation uses a detail of the image, the woman pretending to be playing the *tanbur*, as icon for their section on the history of Turkish music, declaring her an 'Ottoman lady' - http://www.turkishmusicportal.org/page.php?id=1&lang2=en

The picture shows a friend of the painter and a British businessman – for whom the relaxed, reclined and passive Oriental other must incorporate an unachievable release from the Protestant Ethic coagulated in the "spirit of capitalism". Oriental sitting (in the European imagination) is passive, inward, un-busy

> 'Unlike those who use chairs, the oriental, when he sits, does not parade the fact that he could, if he wished, be sitting on his fellow-creatures. He is like a beautifully clothed sack; everything he owns is inside the sack, and it is this sack that his servants wait on. But squatting or sitting on the ground also implies acceptance of everything which may happen. If he were a beggar, the rich man would continue to sit in the same way and, in doing so, would say in effect that he was still the same man. the posture contains both wealth and poverty, and this, together with what we said about the absence of needs, is why it has become the posture of contemplation, familiar to all who know the East. The man who adopts it has freed himself from the world. He reposes in himself and burdens no-one.' (Canetti 1962: 393f.)

The upholstery on the chair in the Geffrye museum does the consumerist trick of incorporating the, in a capitalist society, seemingly unachievable release represented by the imagined Oriental into a quintessentially Western piece of furniture. The "turkey upholstery chair" affords retaining embodied notions of Western rationality in contrast with the Oriental Other (a superiority which is driven home by the ultimate symbol of "possessing" as "being able to sit on") – and simultaneously long for another, less disciplined and more indulgent life which is dreamt into the Orient. It is a micro-*berzah*, a distinction that creates, paradoxically, an imagination that *may* go on to undermine the rigid distinction.

On a much more trivial level I would suggest that it does something else as well: it familiarises with a textile aesthetics and even in Orientalising usage reduces the otherness of the visual appearance and the tactile feel. The knowledge that the material has been imported from Ottoman lands (which in the 17th century certainly would have been understood to be a world power equal to the British Empire), also has the potential to engender imagined journeys, awaking an interest that may set out to (and likely to) confirm preformed ideas of self and other – but at least as a possibility also may destabilise those stereotypes and lay the ground for genuine discovery. It can be expected to reduce the potential of revulsion by complete strangeness – a process that involves all senses. Visual, acoustic, olfactory and haptic aesthetics seep from one place into another, and although they are put to different uses and understood through different systems of meaning (e.g. Coca-Cola on Trinidad according to Daniel Miller 1998), it could, for example, be argued that the cosmopolitan scentscape of consumerist and multicultural London is an unacknowledged facilitator for further global hybridisation. With time the exoticism wears off and it is hardly conceivable any more how, say, a damask rose and musk hand wash in any way makes one smell "Oriental". What Colin Campbell has described as the 'Easternisation of the West' could well be the end product of this sort of wearing-off in what Nava (2007) analysed as market-based 'visceral cosmopolitanism' whose vanishing point is the implosion of compass based cultural metaphors.

The relation works both ways. Chair and table have come to symbolise Westernisation in Turkey. In a way this is quite rational in itself, given the affordances of the combination chair-desk, enabling work using multiple sources at the same time, contrasting with the single-focused writing or reading of other arrangements.

As Tekgül (2012) highlights, the Nobel Prize-winning Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk uses this affordance of the chair-and-desk ensemble to symbolise the ambivalences of competition, aspiration and suspicion towards the West and Westernisation when the Venetian slave of an Ottoman grandee convinces him that for his scientific work he really needs – a chair and a desk – which his master metaphorically associates with the death of culture as it evokes the image of a bier in him. Today different dining and sitting room arrangements still carry symbolic (as well as practical) significance, as Henkel (2007: 63) reports:

> 'Although all of the homes I visited in Istanbul were furnished "European style" with sofa arrangements dining tables, and so on, my hosts often preferred to sit in front of sofas and armchairs on the floor. On some occasions (e.g. when I was invited to dinner together with my wife) the entire family was seated around the dining table. On other occasions my hosts preferred to take their meals sitting on the ground with the food spread on platters placed on a cloth, rather than sitting around the dining table. Generally only men would partake in these meals. Often, no individual plates would be used but bowls and platters would be shared, with the cloth tucked over the knees of the participants of the meal. Given that, on these occasions, cutlery was normally not used for eating, the role of the right hand as the clean hand was especially conspicuous. Often this use of furniture reflects personal taste as much as more serious considerations. On several occasions, however, my interlocutors explicitly referred to the sunna or to "our tradition" or the "Anatolian tradition" (another way of referring to the Muslim tradition, adding a distinctly Turkish dimension.) This was given as their reason for preferring to sit on the ground to eat, and, especially, for eating together from the same platters, which they pointedly contrasted to the Western (*batılı*) style of eating and socializing.' (Henkel 2007: 63)[7]

Here too we find that the definition of the other through an practical aesthetic artefact also serves to establish the very continuities that it seems to deny in the first instance. While initially the Western chair (with table) is a symbol of the alien and hostile (and increasingly dominant) West, it also familiarises that other on an everyday practical level so that, in the end, microcontinuities are established. When trying to reaffirm a distinctively Ottoman Turkish identity of Istanbul the then mayor (now Prime Minister) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan oversaw the refashioning of the popular municipal Çamlıca cafe in an *alaturka* aesthetics. However, so taken for granted had the Western way of sitting become that an essential detail was overlooked:

> 'While the illustration on the wall stood as yet another insistent effort to verify the authenticity of Ottoman culture by emphasizing historicity and tradition, the actual furnishing of the coffee house had no resemblance whatsoever to the representation on the wall. The chairs and tables in the coffee house were of nineteenth-century French style and were arranged in an orderly fashion,

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dividing the space so the guests could sit separately, in contrast to the Ottoman divan-style seating, which preserved the singularity of the social space, enhancing communal interaction.' (Çınar 2005: 132)

On the one hand you could say that "the West has won this" – the world is now further rationalised through the proliferation of chairs. But one could equally say that the chair has been de-Westernised and has thus long lost the power of signification used to have (at least for Pamuk's fictional Ottoman grandee).

Tiles…

All this forward and backward between Orientalism, self-Orientalisation, Westernisation etc. reminded me of another accidental clue that I had picked up much earlier without giving it much thought. It is an item I have purchased in the British Museum shop a year before.

This is a pair of tea/coffee mugs (left) embellished with a pattern taken from an İznik tile (right) on display in the Museum's Islamic collection.

In this early 21st century item we find very similar contradictions of presenting and absenting an "other culture". Like the turkey-upholstery chair it is a pronouncedly Western item decorated with a conspicuously and explicitly "Oriental" aesthetic surface. This lends beauty to a profane object –beauty of a pattern that due to its use mainly in imperial palaces and mosques carries similar notions of spirituality and hedonistic indulgence as the *kilim* in its evocation of "Oriental sitting". And the profane object, too, is one that is closely linked to practices of rational nutrition and work[8] – be it the builders' tea or the coffee on your desk top that "keeps you going" which are typically drunk from mugs like these. Turkish tea and coffee are typically consumed in different vessels – tea in small glasses and coffee in cups which, on average, are a bit smaller than an espresso cup.

So while I can continue my "Americanised" academic practice of coffee consumption as part of legitimate work routine (cf. Gaudio 2003) I can indulge in handling an object that has "a Turkish feel" to it. This, of course, brings in all the problematic implications of pre-conceived cultural properties (which are also touristically reinforced in that ceramics with İznik pattern are one of the major souvenir s sold to visitors), but again familiarises and de-alienates aesthetic patterns. In highlighting and propagating the İznik tile pattern to an "educated public" the British Museum contributes to a construction of an aesthetically different "Turkish culture" which hence is

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[8] cf. Mintz 1986 for how tea with sugar came to replace vegetable broth in working class diets

absented as belonging somewhere else, but also presents this different aesthetics as adequate for the decoration of "own" cultural objects – a border river and a (potential) bridge connecting the so separated banks.

Which leads, finally, to some of the things I actually came looking for. It is not only the British Museum that uses İznik to Turkicise a British artefact. There is a precedent in the first Turkish mosque in London, Aziziye Camii on Stoke Newington Road. This mosque, which is run by the foundation affiliated to the Turkish ministry of religious affairs (*Diyanet*), is an example of a converted building – which still is the most common case of a mosque in Britain.

Aziziye Camii, Stoke Newington Road, Hackney (Olympic bunting in front)

The building is a former theatre, cinema and bingo hall which has been transformed into a conspicuously Turkish mosque not only by the addition of small domes (though not a central dome over the prayer hall as one would expect) and: İznik style tiles on the exterior.
While these do signal that this is a Turkish mosque, it is doubtful that the signalling function is the main motive behind the tiling. If we understand the tiles as iconographic then it makes more sense to say that they give the mosque "a Turkish feel" – which equally caters to the aesthetic/emotional needs of migrant Turkish Muslims. Ever since the 16th century, these tiles are seen as the natural choice for decorating a mosque. That the mosque serves not only the spiritual but also the social and the aesthetic needs of Turkish Muslims in London is also manifest in the fact that what looks like the main entrance is actually a shop and butcher. At least in the early stages of the migration experience, reliable supplies of *helal* meat were an urgent need. But a mosque shop also provides other specifically Turkish goods that migrants have found lacking from the supermarket shelves. The shop also has standard items you would find in every other corner shop. The prominence of a shop that is geared towards religious compliance, profane everyday needs and, at least initially, combating loneliness and estrangement of the diasporic situation (very precisely captured in the Turkish notion of *gurbet* – cf. Schiffauer 2007,

Yazbeck-Haddad 1999)[9] through products – mainly groceries – representing home. It is an important clue as, only looking at the way the building was Islamicised one could be misled to think that the two domes oddly placed where the minarets should be while the central dome over the prayer hall is absent, in combination with the tile patterns "*signal*" Turkish-Islamic identity. While in practice this may be an *effect* (especially for those who have purchased that mug in the British Museum...), it cannot be the main purpose – the building has been converted to serve the London Turkish Muslim population, so it needs to speak to them at least as much as it speaks to others. The simple fact is that tiles just belong to a Turkish mosque in the same way as a dome and minarets. The conversion does its best, within the limits that are set by the pre-existing building – to enable the believer to feel at home – and the prominence of the mosque shop – situated where you would expect the entrance to be - supports this interpretation.[10]

But as far as the İznik tiles cannot help signalling "different culture" they enter a dialogue with the outside. It is now recognised part of the palimpsestical urban landscape that becomes the object of quasi touristical exploration by avant-garde consumers and residents who trickle in to create another layer on Hackney's aesthetic surface. In an article on Dalston's 'growing theatre and music scene, all-night restaurants and multicultural buzz' the London *Evening Standard* celebrates Kingsland High Street in terms homologous to a 1970s Turkey travel guide book

> On a balmy evening the smoky aroma of kebabs and Turkish pizzas fills the air along Kingsland High Street. The use of pavement seating for smoking shisha pipes and playing backgammon gives the area an Eastern feel (Kasriel 2006)

Reasonably priced lentil soup, pastries and kebabs available inside Aziziye are specifically mentioned – integrating the first Turkish mosque in London into its internal touristic consumptionscape – following a now common pattern across London:

> Most tourists still visit the famous sites redolent of the nation's past but the guidebooks urge them also to sample London's multicultural diversity and alternative locales. Although Soho wsa already portrayed as an alternative locality within the imperial capital, Spitalfields and Docklands add new themes in the global city. Furthermore, they lead tourists away from the West End and City of London honeypots. A Soho restaurant, a Brick Lane café, and a Docklands pub may be surrounded by the residues of industry and poor working-class housing, but they acquire an image of exciting authenticity. Their dangerous and impoverished past is made safe for the contemporary visitor.' (Eade 1996: 179).

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[9] NB that the edition of *Hürriyet* pictured in the last section of this paper carries a short note that European Turks have started a campaign against the notion that they are *gurbetçi*, i.e. in exile, since many of them now feel quite at home and would rather they'd be referred to as *Avrupalı Türk* – European Turk.

[10] This case is similar to the misunderstanding of all forms of "Islamic dress" as identity statement. As Werbner (1999: 25) observes: '... exotic dress may seem deliberately aggressive: a visual barb. this is, however, to misread the intentionality of our casual Pakistani female stroller. Pakistani women wearing traditional clothes in public are hardly conscious of their dress as an act of identity display. They dress as they do because they regard their outfits as aesthetically beautiful.' (Werber 1999: 25) Campbell's (1997) warning against misunderstanding the meaning of dress as a message, fashion as an expressive language, seems to apply equally to architecture.

The difference allows overcoming indifference, translating it into, initially, culinary/touristic interest. The *Diyanet* mosque has, in this way, paved the way for a much more self conscious and bolder approach by a community not linked to the Turkish government – one that in the literature is rather noted for its reticence and inward-looking nature – the (possibly) *Süleymanlı* UK Turkish Islamic Cultural Centre (UKTICC)[11]

London Süleymaniye

The secretary of the UKTICC actively uses the touristic bridge to invite passers-by to inter-faith exchanges. Interviewed by the local paper he says

> 'Thousands of people go to the mosques in Istanbul, but they do not need to, they can come here' (Hackney Gazette, 28th July 2011)

In a BBC London report on the then newly opened Süleymaniye Mosque was introduced as aesthetic enhancement ("regeneration") of Kingsland Road – and located in an area that Londoners will know for the best Turkish food available in the country. While the tourist gaze clearly is one that is charged with inequalities and prone to distortion (Urry), it is here used as an

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[11] The ascription is problematic and contested. According to Küçükcan (1999:) and Çoştu (2009) the association behind Süleymaniye mosque, the UK Turkish Islamic Cultural Centre UKTICC (*İngiltere Türk İslam Kültür Merkezi İTİKM*) has been founded 1982 'by a Süleymanci group'. The Süleymanlı are followers of the Nakşibendi sheikh Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan. In Germany they have been portrayed as socially conservative, reclusive, Sufi-oriented community with little active involvement in political agendas and a strong focus on interiority and private piety and ethical conduct (Jonker 2006) while drawing on authority transmitted through a spiritual link (*rabıta*) of the community's leaders to the deceased sheikh Süleyman (Yükleyen 2010)

The information material available from the UKTICC, however, makes no reference to Tunahan or the Süleymanlı community. Instead, they present themselves as aiming 'to meet the religious and cultural needs of the Muslim community living in Britain' (Brochure *UKTICC London Suleymaniye Cultural Centre Kültür Merkezi*, without year (but not earlier than 2011). The brochure is bilingual, Turkish with English translation, page 3) and more specifically characterises that community as *Ehl-i Sünnet* in the Turkish text and Ahli Sunnah wal Jamaah in the English text.

Although generally the Süleymanlı are portrayed as reclusive, here we have a self-location within not just the Turkish but global community of Muslims who follow a Sufi-inspired Islam (i.e. in the context of South Asian Islam, they would affiliate themselves with the Barelwis practice rather than the anti-Sufi reformist Deobandis)

The notion of being Suleymanli may be actively avoided due to the way the community was presented and misrepresented in the past. According to Gokalp (1990), who uses very little and rather unreliable source material and secondary literature, and also does not gesture to any primary research, the Süleymanlı was affiliated with far right political activism, particularly in diaspora. His claims about connections to the MHP ("grey wolves", ultranationalists) and a history of pro-Hitler activism sound implausible and I cannot find them corroborated anywhere else. For most observers the Süleymanlı are traditionally distant to political activism and where involved tend to gravitate to the centre right, like, in the late 1980s, ANAP and DYP (Küçükcan 1999: 212ff.). Yükleyen (2010: 282f.) reports that all political involvement was terminated after electoral failure and that there is no active support from the Süleymanlı *cemaat* for the currently governing Islamic-conservative Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi AKP*). It is, however, likely that the AKP would be a preference in terms of voting behaviour for followers of the Süleymanlı path. It is not clear if the UKTICC sees itself in a Süleymanlı tradition *at all*, but their present political affiliation or orientation in a London context seem to be "liberal" in the broadest sense

entry point in the hope (whether justified or not cannot be fully assessed here) to open a cosmopolitan dialogue that goes beyond the consumption of cultural difference.

Süleymaniye Camii – as purpose built mosque – comes with all the hallmarks of a mosque as one may find in Turkey, including İznik style tiles imported from Kütahya and minaret with tannoys (although the call to prayer, the *ezan*, is only transmitted within the mosque compound and not onto the road, they complete the visual authenticity of the building). It is also ostensibly modern with its steel and glass front.

Süleymaniye Camii (UK Turkish Islamic Cultural Centre), Kingsland Road, Hackney

According to the UKTICC, here the aesthetic surface indeed is intended as a message. The combination of Western and Islamic styles is meant to communicate the fact that 'you can be a good Muslim by living here in Britain and giving benefits to the community.'

Being propelled to the status of a quasi-central mosque comes with a particular expectation of non-sectarian openness (cf. Gilliat-Ray/Birt 2010: 147) – so even though the name and perceived origin point to a particular stream within Turkish Sunni Islam of Nakşibendi Sufi tradition – the Süleymanlı – the presentation of self in its official brochure places the mosque as serving the *Ehli Sünnet*,[12] i.e. broadly all Sunnis who stand in a Sufi-inspired tradition. The openness of the mosque is testified not only architecturally by the heavy use of glass, but also by the fact that the UKTICC is involved in a range of interactions with the London political establishment, municipal public life and community exchange. As an unannounced visitor on the first Friday of Ramazan I was asked in and invited to take photos without actively seeking that permission.

Süleymaniye Camii, staircase

As an architectural artefact London Süleymaniye iconographically manifests cosmopolitan globality in a sequence of presenting absences and absenting presences. It very clearly pronounces Turkishness and Islamicity, but it does so in a way that creates a

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[12] This entails an appeal also to a wider Muslim community beyond the Turkish and Kurdish constitutents.

'Ahl as-Sunnat wa Jamaat – mainstream Islam around Sufism, but not self-defining as Sufi 'defined by Hazrat Allama Pir Faizul Aqtab Siddiqi, a British-born shaykh of the Naqshbanid tariqa, as:

A belief that the Prophet had knowledge of the Unseen while alive and continues to possess a spiritual omnipresence.

Allah is omnipresent, and expressions in the Qur'an which ascribe hands and limbs to Allah or describe Him as sitting upon a throne, must be taken figuratively.

Intercession is normal practice in Islam whether it is through the Prophet, angels or saints. Neither the Prophet nor Sufis are dead in the tomb and prayers can be addressed to Allah through them as they have permission to intercede. Prayers can be made by the living on behalf of the dead.

It is normal and acceptable to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet (*Milad-i Nabi*).

Muslims who adhere to those beliefs and practices are better defined under the label of followers of the *aqida* of the Ahl as-Sunnat wa Jamaat than the more problematic term of Sufi. There is some justification in arguing that the practices and beliefs (to varying degrees) of the Ahl as-Sunnat wa Jamaat are observed by the vast majority of Muslims.' (Geaves 2000: 76f)

romantic/imaginative *berzah* opening lines of topographical (and chronographical) reference which stipulate Simmelian bridgings. The two main references present distant absences – Istanbul and Mecca – in a way that they allow the imagination to travel (under a willing suspension of disbelief uniquely possible in a consumerist society, see Campbell 1987). They absent the presence of London – just as the *ezan* that acoustically creates an Islamic soundscape (Metcalf 1996: 8) inside of the premises, leaving behind the near constant police sirens that are the most distinctive element in Hackney's urban soundscape and singular markers of metropolitan hostility and danger;[13] and just as the flowing-together of both sounds at the perimeter of the premises re-presents the absented from both sides of the created separator.

The first spatial orientation that offers itself, in an Islamic place of worship, obviously is Mecca as the orientation, *kıble*, of the ritual prayer, *namaz*, towards the Kaaba. Mecca is also presented by the UKTICC's role in organising annual pilgrimage, *haç*, packages – constituting Mecca as a place that is to be faced five times a day (and, particularly on Fridays, from inside the mosque), and to be travelled to at least once in a lifetime if at all possible. The direction is marked not only by a niche in the wall, the *mihrap*, but also by a pattern of prayer mats, *seccade*, lined towards the *kıble*. During the *namaz* orthodox Muslims around the world are united in facing a spiritually and historically meaningful location in Arabia. In fact, as the prayer times are determined by local astronomical data that relate to the turning of the planet, Muslims keep drawing concentric circles around the Kaaba in which they face both Mecca, but also each other on a global scale. In the presenting of the centre of Islam and absenting of London, however, the absent is re-presented by the very practice of absenting in at least two ways. The clues in the below image are the grandfather clocks and the fact that the *seccades* do not face the East wall in a right angle.

Süleymaniye Camii, interior of prayer hall, facing the *mihrap*

London topography – and in particular Kingsland Road, filters into the exterior from which it seemed to be excluded. In an Islamic city, a mosque would have been oriented towards Mecca –

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[13] As it was the opening day of the London Olympics I had plenty of occasion to watch North American visitors making their way from the accommodation they managed to get hold off wherever to the nearest Tube stations, both fascinated by the cosmopolitan feel of the area and horrified by its seemingly criminal character.

in London the street layout renders this impossible in most cases. The slightly odd angle of the prayer mats is a constant reminder that this is outside what is commonly called "the Islamic World". The second marker is the acknowledgement of clock time framing the *mihrap*. In the aforementioned BBC London programme it is explained that these are here because it is important to carry out *namaz* at the right times of the day (and these times, vary each day since they relate to the movement of the sun.) Traditionally (and in some heartlands of Islam till today), the five prayers are the main orientation points for time keeping (so you could, for instance, agree to meet a friend after the fourth prayer). As the prayers are located in relation to the position of the sun, it is an indirect form using sacralised "natural" time – here solar time – as opposed to "mechanical" or clock time. This submission follows a globally repeated process that has been first rehearsed in the process of British industrialisation (Thompson 1967). The identification of prayer times via a timetable and a mechanical clock constitutes an ironic inversion , a technological secularisation in which the divine mechanism of the firmament is replaced by the human-made mechanism of the clockwork. What is more, there is something very London-centric about these two clock. The time they show is derived from the British imperial assumption that London, and not Jerusalem, Rome or Mecca, is the centre of the world, and hence its meridian is the one that defines world time. Time in London is GMT – time in Mecca is GMT plus three hours.

> 'Children educated in London's schools, like their counterparts in the rest of the Empire, were taught geography from textbooks which were unambiguous about London's place in the world. In a common school trip, children were (and still are) taken to the Prime Meridian at Greenwich to experience the whole world divided into two between their feet, in the place "where time begins".' (Driver/Gilbert 1998: 24)

Note that not only does the post-Imperial metropolis here continues to claim the title of "centre of the world" – there also is a religio-metaphysical undertone in the notion that the *beginnings of time* lie in London. The two grandfather clocks standing sentry left and right the *mihrap* have a colonel-in-chief in Big Ben, the great grandfather clock of the British Empire.

The second reference point that deserves attention is one that relates two post-Imperial cities: London and Istanbul. The clue is in the name which reveals an utopic aspect of the building:

> 'Of course, not all places are called utopia, but there is a utopic behind every place (alternatively, perhaps, a dystopic behind some as well). Naming is also about valuing and comparing. Arranging is a selective process that includes and excludes. In doing so it allows some to name, to make known, a place as meaning something in particular: my home, the place I was born, a prison, a school, a scientific laboratory. The name of each of these places derives from an ordering that is given by a name that carries with it a utopic, a name implies some sort of meaning to what the place is about, what its purpose is and what it stands for and how that contrasts with places that are not of this kind.' (Hetherington 1997: 191)

In the first place, for the followers of the Süleymanlı way (who will easily see their last sheikh Süleyman Tunahan honoured in the name) Tunahan's tomb in Istanbul is a centre of their spiritual geography and they aim at visiting it at least once a year. (Yükleyen 2010: 280) But while this reference may or may not be a valid interpretation (given the absence of an official statement

with regards to Tunahan and his order I am reluctant to follow Küçükcan's and Çoştu's readings) – there is another much more obvious and, in more than one sense, powerful reference in that "Süleymaniye" is also the name of the largest mosque in Istanbul

Vue panoramique de la Mosquée Suleymanié / Sébah & Joaillier around 1900[14]

This Süleymaniye Camii, *the* Süleymaniye Camii, owes its name to the Sultan under which rule the most famous Ottoman architect of all times, Mimar Sinan, has overseen its building : Süleyman the Magnificent, in 1550 to 1558. A time when the Ottoman Empire was at the height of its power. To call a mosque Süleymaniye is to evoke the building which is the materialisation of Ottoman civilisation not only in terms of religion – but generally culture, learning, and scientific achievement. As Stratton (1972: 125) points out, Süleymaniye in Istanbul is a bold statement of superiority in science and engineering:

'In 1550, the Sacred Law was fixed as a pure science. The dome of the Süleymaniyé rises and soars. It is celestial, but it certainly does not float upon mysteriously illuminated golden air. It is held up by the law of gravity. In his building Sinan stripped bare all the technical forces at work. He revealed the structural engineering, the masonry walls, the buttresses, the solid stone piers, the granite pillars, the voussoirs of the springing arches, the thrusts and the counterbalancing resistances of the dome and its supporting members. In the Imperial Friday Mosque there is no dialogue between man and God, no space within a space. But there is perfect, and thus infinite, unity. Through tiers and rows and banks of windows, daylight fills the space flowing through the defining masses. In this building, Sinan first worked out his principle that engineering and architecture are inseparable; the one is the other. Therefore, in all his buildings the exterior is the outside of the interior, and the inside is the interior of the outside. As with crystalline forms, the eye looks clear through Sinan's architecture.'

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[14] **Title:** Vue panoramique de la Mosquée Suleymanié / Sébah & Joaillier. **Creator(s):** Sebah & Joaillier, photographer **Date Created/Published:** [between 1888 and 1910] **Medium:** 1 photographic print : albumen. **Summary:** Exterior view of the Süleymaniye Camii (mosque), showing the Golden Horn in background. **Reproduction Number:** LC-DIG-ppmsca-03742 (digital file from original) **Rights Advisory:** No known restrictions on publication in the U.S. Use elsewhere may be restricted by other countries' laws. For general information see "Copyright and Other Restrictions..." (http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/print/195_copr.html) **Call Number:** LOT 13554-2, no. 84 [P&P] **Repository:** Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA

In a way the glass construction in London Süleymaniye could be seen as much a tribute to this principle as it is to the modern cityscape of London. The name of the original Süleymaniye, makes another claim of Imperial glory as well as of boundless piety. Sulaymân is the Arabic form of Shlomo – Solomon. And as a 1900 British travel guide book relates that, referring to the Hagia Sophia the Christian Emperor

'Justinian, when he entered his great church, had said, "Solomon, I have surpassed thee": Suleiman was determined that he would surpass the Christian Emperor' (Hutton 1925 [1910]: 295).

In referencing the mosque of Süleyman the Magnificent, which competitively relates to Judeo-Christian imperial/sacral architecture from the Temple of Jerusalem onwards, London Süleymaniye creates a distinction that wants to be bridged to another imperial place of worship less than three miles away – the also magnificently domed St Paul's Cathedral.

'As Saint Paul's is Sir Christopher Wren's, so the Süleymaniyé is Sinan's monument.' (Stratton 1972: 255)
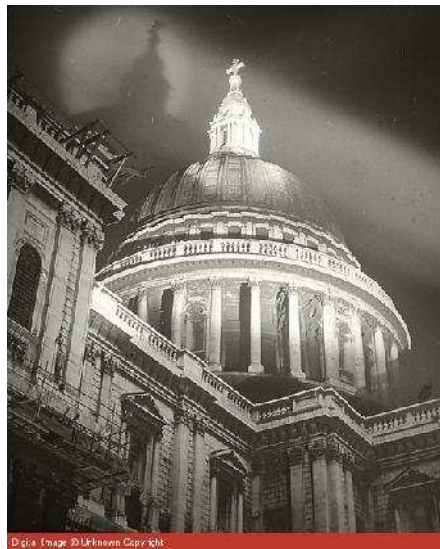
If St Paul's has been the parish church of the British Empire (Eade 2000: 91), Süleymaniye was designed to be the Friday mosque of the Ottoman Empire. In displacing meaning London Turkish Muslims have built up a reference point that allows an encounter on equal footing – speaking from descendant of demised empire to descendant of demised empire. This self-Orientalisation, while playing to recognisable patterns, is evidently of a different nature than the Orientalism of the turkey-upholstery chair in Geffrye Museum. And while a distinction is drawn between what Süleymaniye and what St Paul's represent the commonalities of the imperial architects' reference points are also revealed: the cosmopolitan Roman Empire of which both Londinium and Constantinopolis were urban centres as much as the scientific achievement materialised in both (Daniels 1993: 11ff.). Empire breeds (albeit unqual and contorted) cosmopolitanism:

'The phenomena of cosmopolitanism are the products of empires. They bring diverse peoples together into their urban centres who are engaged in various relationships, economic and political. The association of cosmopolitanism with imperialism is one reason nationalists and

fundamentalists have found for denouncing it. The two pertinent empires for the modern history of the Middle East (since the mid-nineteenth century) are the Ottoman and the British, which had important inputs both from French language and culture and German nationalism.' (Zubaida 2011: 132)

The multicultural encounter in a doubly post-Imperial context may engender a more liberal/democratic cosmopolitanism – particularly against the background of burgeoning commercialism. And the location of St Paul's in the City of London points us to that aspect. The cross-referenced buildings are not exclusively sacral ones. St Paul's has been superseded by temples of commerce – much to the chagrin of some observers, among them the Prince of Wales.

'On the skyline St Paul's sinks below the office blocks of the City and the Nat West tower now rises impiously above it: "The soul of the City has been conquered by hovering hordes of giants". While other European cities have maintained their distinctive skylines, London has traded hers: "There is no need for London to ape Manhattan", the Prince declares, "We already possessed a skyline. They had to create one.' (Daniels 1993: 13)

And that was before the Gherkin and the Shard.

The Gherkin[15]

London Süleymaniye precedes both, but the fact that Süleymaniye corresponds with both, and particularly with the Gherkin which is about two and a half miles down the A10 in a nearly straight, constitutes *ex post* validation of its reach into the City. As one lifestyle writer for *The Times* has it:

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[15] **Credits** Francesco Troina (http://www.phototroina.com)/GovEd Communications (http://www.goved.co.uk) **Rights** Published under license from GovEd Communications (http://www.goved.co.uk) - See more at: http://jiscmediahub.ac.uk/record/display/023-GEFT08321;jsessionid=E702E9328430DB386C241F6E1EA97D98#sthash.Z6s1fv7K.dpuf

'Kingsland Road, which morphs gently into Stoke Newington High Street, runs the length of Dalston. Glance up it and see the gleaming minarets of the Aziziye Mosque. Look down it and see the towers of the City, reaching skywards like greedy fingers.' (Barr 2002)

Aziziye, as seen, doesn't have minarets, but you get the drift. The spiritual and the commercial are being juxtaposed here – and one could expect some hostility towards the centre of mammon that is the City from a Muslim perspective (just as the Prince of Wales formulated it from a Christian perspective). One prominent Nakşibendi Sufi sheikh who for a long time had a strong foothold in London, Şeyh Nazım Hakkani el-Kıbrısi is reported to abhor the City as Satan's territory.[16] But Süleymaniye's architectural homology to commercial buildings in the City appears to be a genuine buy-in into the religio/ethno-commercial cosmopolitanism that the City incorporates – a cosmopolitanism towards which Hackney/Dalston contributes the multiculturalist aspect. The relation between the commercial and the religious is unproblematic in Süleymaniye. In a Friday sermon (available on their website) it is emphasised that under the condition of 'being honest, truthful and fair to other people' trade is not just allowed but encouraged by Islamic teaching. This becomes not only evident in the fact that I was able to pick up a brochure for Denis Windows in the anteroom of the mosque (which I found intriguing in that it seemed to play to the overarching theme of glass and transparency/openness), but also in the fact that secretary of the UKTICC was involved in bringing to pass culture exchanges in the Museum of London – in the City shunned by Şeyh Nazım and ostensibly introduced as financial centre in the recent article in the local Turkish language weekly *Olay Gazete*.[17] Thus, Süleymaniye seems to play an active role in completing the post-Imperial/commercial/religious triangle that so crucial in attracting global business to London

'The image of a vibrant, open, multicultural Britain was more likely to attract these members of a global business elite than memories of the Second World War and the British Empire. The transnational aesthetics of the City's new buildings and the modernist formality of the Barbican estate established a local/global identity to which the few remnants of the past, especially St Paul's Cathedral and the other Anglican places of worship, provided a gloss of authenticity.' (Eade 2000: 118)

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[16] 'A Turkish disciple who often drives Shaykh Nazim when he is in London explained that when the Shaykh travels from the Islamic priory in north London to the mosque in Peckham the most direct route is through the City of London, the heart of the financial and commercial world. However, the *Shaykh* always insists on a detour as he believes the City to be the undisputed territory of the anti-Christ (*al-dhajjal*). Apocalyptically he describes the four dragons which guard the entrances to the City of London.' (Geaves 2000: 151f.)

[17] Further evidence for having no problems with City link: 'Londra'nın finans merkezi olarak bilinen City'deky "Museum of London" ilk defa mehter marşları ile çınlandı.' 'Kuzey Londra'da Pazar gününe kadar devam edecek olan "Anadolu Kültür Festivali" kapsamında gerçekleşen program başlangıcında, Dr Hakan Yıldırım, Büyükelçilik Müsteşarı Fatih Ulusoy, Işçi Partisi Milletvekili Meg Hillier yaptıkları konumalarda, mehter ve sema gibi farklıkültüleri temsil eden gruplarin Londra'da bulunmasından duydukları memnuniyeti dile getirdiler.' Etc. – Bursa Belediyesi Mehter Takımı and Konya Mevlana Sema Grubu… *Olay Gazete*, Salı 18 Haziran 2013, s.16
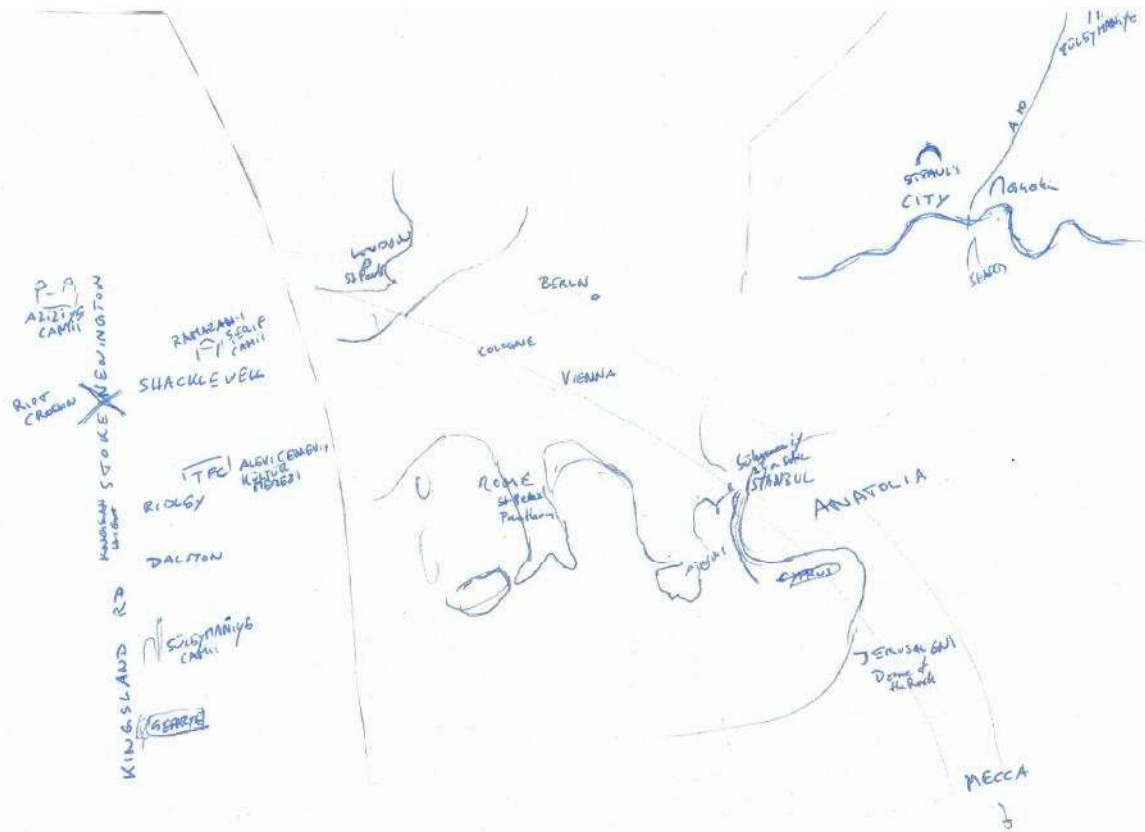
Three sketch maps: Left Dalston, centre Europe between London and Istanbul, right the A10 in relation to Süleymaniye, Gherkin, Shard and St Paul' s

The UKTICC further contributes to the multicultural authenticification of a cosmopolitan Britain by extending the proclaimed quasi-touristic function of the mosque itself and organising the annual Anatolian Cultural Festival which conjures up a historic-folklorist imagery of a traditional Turkey.

Now, as I mentioned, this is not a comprehensive survey of Turkish speaking London. The danger here is to combine the markers of difference, the Orientalising museum artefacts and the partially self-Orientalising architectures of London Turkish mosques (also cf. Metcalf 1996: 3 for a general tendency to gravitate towards stereotypical "Islamic architecture") into an iconography that affords bridging through the creation of romantic *berzahs* – but leaves the claimed the notion of culturally determined difference as such unchallenged, subsuming London Turks (and Kurds) under the notion of a Turkish/Muslim population. That there is a strong section of secular minded London Turkish speakers has become clear, lately, when about 10 000 took to the streets of London to show their support of the protests against the current Islamist-leaning government in Turkey (as reported in *Olay Gazete* 18th June 2013).

I will use the next artefact not just to refracture the image of a culturally defined "London Turkish speaking community" but also to refracture that refracturation.

Heresy on a Yogurt Pot? Keloğlan Ayran

Not all members of what is one of the largest Muslim communities in London – the London Turkish speaking community – are unambiguously ... Muslim. And I am not speaking of the, until recently, dominant discourse of "secular, republican, urban" Turks versus "religious, Islamist, rural" Turks, which as a story of "white/*beyaz*" versus "black/*siyah*" Turks was sustained by both the mainstream republican and religious parties in the promotion of, as Houston (2002) put it, 'fear and loathing in Istanbul'. Houston shows that the metaphor of a black and a white Turkey is not only empirically flawed but crucially, the 'narrative construction of an opposition between white state and black society ushers in at least three unhelpful generalizations.' It obscures 'the self-creation of subjects as different "shades" of "white"', homogenises 'black society' and gives it 'a Muslim character' and portrays Turkish society 'as a passive target of the state's modernizing zeal while Islamism, as a product of black society, becomes by definition anti-modern, rather than a producer of modernity' (Houston 2002: 427f.) The strongest challenge to the *beyaz/siyah* discourse is Alevism – a cultural/religious group that is commonly estimated to constitute about 20 per cent of the population in Turkey and that cuts across ethnic divides, i.e. is as Kurdish as it is Turkish. Crucially, although largely secular (albeit not necessarily Kemalist) in political outlook, the Alevis have at least as much claim to a rural Anatolian identity as have Sunni Muslims. While the UKTICC hold annual Anatolia Cultural Fetes, the London Alevis, too, strongly emphasise their Anatolian heritage, for example stating that 'Anatolian folk music is mostly based on Alevi' music, playing to cultural identity as one main source of legitimacy both within Turkish discourse and vis-à-vis European contexts (also see Massicard 2013)
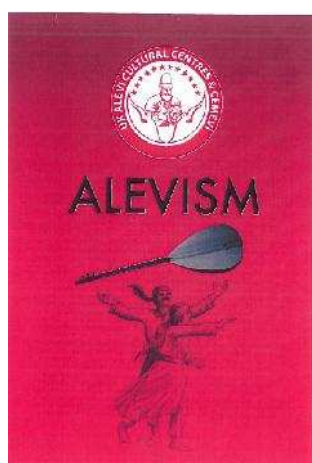
Cover of information brochure picked up at the London Alevi Cemevi

The conflict or at least distinction between Sunnis and Alevis has entered my observation in the most profane way possible – on an innocent pot of *ayran* (a popular yogurt based drink) which I purchased in TFC supermarket on Ridley Road while getting into the London-Turkish retail experience. Here it is on my laptop.

On the screen there's a photo I made of TFC supermarket – right next to the Alevi cultural centre and community house, Cemevi. The *ayran* is named after and has a picture of the fairy tale character Keloğlan (also a TV cartoon series on Turkish state television TRT). I have also included a screenshot of the internet edition of *Londra Gazete* – *London Turkish Gazette* with the news that an extremist Sunni cleric has branded the TV series "Alevi propaganda" and has called for a ban. The arguments may remind one of the Christian fundamentalist response to *Harry Potter*, but another underlying conflict is that between rationalist/reformist Sunni Islam and allegedly semi-pagan peasants. This can be seen as reverberation of the 19th century urban reformist (Sunni-Nakşibendi inspired) move against what was seen as unruly state of central Anatolia to which the Alevi/Bektaşi were identified to contribute (cf. Ortaylı 1999) – i.e. as part of a symbolic struggle over the rightful claim to a legitimate Anatolian identity. At the same time what this cleric complains about, e.g. the appearance of mystical *baba*s, is not so much testimony to Alevi influence but rather to a Sufi legacy that is shared between mainstream Turkish Islam *and* Alevis (Yavuz 2004) in which the idea that *derviş*es can effect "wonders" (often misinterpreted as magic), *keramet*, is not at all alien.

This instant poignantly complicates and refractates not only the notion of a "Turkish Muslim community" but also the secular/religious and urban/rural divides. It also highlights the ongoing debate about the status of Alevis as Muslims or non-Muslims, which is contested not only between Alevis and Sunnis, but also within Alevi communities. This is of particular interest here as, unlike in cases where a heterodox community is denied the status of co-religionists by the orthodox majority (as is the case with Ahmadi Muslims), here we have a double contestation where some Sunnis recognise Alevis as Muslims and others see them as heretics – and some

Alevis view themselves not just as Muslims but as the authentic Muslims, while others don't see themselves as Muslims at all. According to what I have been told at the *Cemevi* on Ridley Road and according to the brochure I have picked up there, the position of the UK Alevi Cultural Centres & Cemevi is the latter, even though shared spiritual sources are referenced.

Of course it is hard to deny that Alevism has at least some roots in Shia Islam and in Sufism. The Alevi Bektashis were a recognised Sufi order (*tekke*) through much of Ottoman history – and in fact they were important as the *tekke* which catered for the spiritual needs of the Ottoman elite troops, the Janissaries (*Yeniçeri*) whose demise in 1828 was followed by the suppression of the Alevi/Bektaşi order.

(Janissary prayer and cleaning utensils at Hacıbektaş, Cappadocia, Central Anatolia)

On the other hand Alevis, particularly the urban and more educated members of the community, tend to define Alevism as a culture and a way of life rather than as a religious belief system (whereas traditionally Alevis did not only see themselves as Muslims but even as the only proper Muslims)[18]

Recently there have been moves by the Islamist Turkish government to, as it were, invite the Alevis back. And while a I was, as I said, assured by a number of London Alevis that they do not consider themselves to be Muslims, the *Hürriyet* European edition (one of the main Turkish newspapers with a very strong European presence, based in Frankfurt), carried the news that the AAİB, the Union of Islamic Alevis of Germany (a relative small, but not entirely insignificant

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[18] This research was, quite unusually, reported in the *Milliyet* daily newspaper in a five part series
http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/07/04/guncel/agun.html ,
http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/07/05/guncel/gun01.html,
http://www.alevi.org/yaz-dizileri/kentlesen-alevilik/1611-kentlesen-alevilik-3.html,
http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/07/07/guncel/agun.html,
http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/07/08/guncel/axgun02.html

organisation) asked the Ministry for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet Bakanlığı*) for funds to send 200 of its members on the annual Hajj.[19]

Front page of *Hürriyet* European edition, 27th July 2012

What, then, does the *ayran* pot tell us? For one thing, it tells us how such symbols as televised fairy-tale characters with a semi-religious and folk-cultural relevance present shared legacy in non-sectarian ways on everyday profane objects where they, to the annoyance of extremists, travel unproblematically through screens, supermarket shelves, fridges, restaurant tables, and dining rooms. The contained substance, *ayran,* can be seen as one of the most Turkish (and Kurdish) of drinks, carrying strong references to Anatolian rurality. But it is more than just a signifier. The reason I have bought it from TFC supermarket was not because of the symbolic significations. It was a hot day and while the reason for entering TFC (as opposed to Sainsbury's round the corner) in fact was so as to get a glimpse of the London Turkish retail environment, the intent to buy was governed by thirst. Initially heading for the usual fizzies, I went for an ayran as an ideal drink in hot weather, given its light acidity and slight saltiness. In a way it is the perfect illustration of what is meant by iconographic symbolism as it combines meaning with unmediated aesthetic experience. This in turn allows for a tourist/consumerist daydream that equips the Anatolian village world romanticised in the cartoons with gustatory sensuality – a daydream that may either remain at the stage of one-dimensional stereotyping or be disrupted by boundary contestations (and contestations of contestations) as represented by the spat triggered by Ismailağa Cemaati's statement. The idea that a character like Keloğlan himself would sip on a cup of ayran is perfectly plausible. So while on the one hand the charge of the cleric that Keloğlan is Alevi propaganda is a hurtful reminder of the ongoing discrimination against

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[19]   http://www.hurriyet.de/haberler/gundem/1252414/almanyali-aleviler-hacca-gitmek-istiyor/alevi%20diyanet%20ha%C3%A7

minorities in Turkey – on the other hand it is a confirmation that Alevism is at the heart of Turkish culture, and the link to *ayran* reinforces this.

Another way in which the difference to orthodox Islam is expressed – e.g. the assertion that for Hacı Bektaş the human being was the Kabah – comes in an idiom of Islam (Mardin 1989). But I am not trying to play out this history and inner disagreement to corroborate an academic claim that Alevis are indeed Muslims. What I am saying is that the conflict itself, the claim to difference, and the disagreement to that claim point to continuity of culture as much as to difference. Like the jibe against Keloğlan as 'Alevi propaganda' (and the challenge of heresy), the insistence on difference testifies not only to division and confrontation, but also to mutual acknowledgement and belonging. A Hindu would not need to insist that they are not Muslims, and a Muslim would not see a Catholic as a heretic. As Atay (1999) shows for the case of London Nakşibendis, different currents placing themselves inside or outside Islamic orthodoxy, reproaching each other, using each other as negative reference points, also depend on each other. Similarly, we can read various swipes against Alevism as can be found in Sunni artefacts as an unavoidable acknowledgement of shared membership in a discourse universe[20] – without, to emphasise, implying that Alevis are, or are not, Muslims.

In this context, whatever the answer to the question whether or not Alevis are Muslims: While in organisational discourse these difference are thrown into sharp relief, in everyday life the boundaries are much more blurred. And while some Alevis from Germany are joining the annual *Haç* pilgrimage, I have observed, in the centre of Alevi spirituality, the town *Hacıbektaş*, a number of recognisably Sunni Muslims showing their respect to this Shiite Sufi saint at the monastery that is one of the sources of Alevism as a spiritual movement originated in the 14th century.

This ambiguity surfaced in the recent conflicts in Istanbul and across major Turkish cities. One point of contention was an insensitive mishap in naming one of the current governments megaprojects: a third bridge over the Bosporus which is to be called "Yavuz Sultan Selim Köprüsü". Now one of the reasons this 16th century Ottoman sultan was given the title "the stern" (*yavuz*) is that he crushed an Alevi rebellion and is reputed to have massacred 40,000 people in the process. Given the more recent anti-Alevi pogroms, for example in Maraş 1978 and Sivas 1993, from an Alevi perspective this has a similar significance as a "Cromwell Bridge" in Belfast would have for Irish Catholics. But what has begun as (possibly unintentional) affront against the Alevi community – creating a divide by naming, of all things, a bridge – has turned

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[20] In the Divan of Yunus Emre I have bought in the Turkish/Islamic bookshop opposite Aziziye Camii the question whether Yunus Emre was a Bektaşi is emphatically answered "he is not". What is more – it is the only passage emboldened in the whole commentary, i.e. a distinction is drawn and its importance emphasised.
But at the same time the fact that a shared discourse universe is inhabited is emphasised by this denial – otherwise the difference would not be worth pointing out at all. Another instance of adversarial construction of shared discursive space is found in the *Resimli Namaz Hocası* I have mentioned (bought in the same bookshop): The little book contains two poems praising the practice of *namaz*, i.e the prescribed five ritual prayers – and both are pointedly directed at two groups of non-readers who will not be among the practitioners of ritual prayer. One is by Yunus Emre *Dur Erte (Sabah) Namazına* ('Get up (Tavaslı, s.a., 19) – which is directed against the Alevis whose ritual practice does not include *namaz*, and the other is by the theorist of the Kemalist revolution, poet, politician and Durkheimian sociologist Ziya Gökalp *Namaz Ne Güzeldir* (How beautiful is the ritual prayer!).

out to prompt conservative Sunni politicians, intellectuals and spiritual leaders to go to some lengths to emphasise continuities between what has been so openly separated. Fethullah Gülen – politically influential leader of a neo-Sufi movement bearing his name – has a history of emphasising shared ground, projecting the image of Sunni mosques and Alevi *cemevis* being erected side by side. But so far this could be construed as an attempt to, in the last consequence, re-Islamise Alevism and deny distinctions that are important for conscious Alevis. He has taken the recent conflicts as an occasion to speak up again[21] – but even though he may just be repeating the same message, once a strong distinction has been made in form of outrage at the Prime Minister's bridge naming, the projected continuity can no longer be imagined as one in which one side is to be subsumed under the other.

Conclusion

While very often the emphasis in the study of identity-making is on the notion of difference and separation, I have tried to uncover how markers of distinction by virtue of constructing a relation between what is distinguished create the potential for a (cosmopolitan) continuity of culture which neither homogenises nor commits to fixed and unchangeably different identifications. With reference to a case of Orientalised British middle class domestic items, a case of Turkish-Muslim space-making and identity demarcation within what has been broadly defined as the London Turkish speaking community I have tried to show that in all these cases attempts to separate and distinguish also open an imaginative space that affords communication and bridging. Now fully ethnographic research is required to investigate whether or not (and to what extent and how) the cosmopolitan potential opened by the *berzah* of everyday multicultural artefacts is realised.

It will be crucial, in order to access the iconographic imagination that spun around Turcophone material culture in London (and elsewhere) to draw on participant generated and reflected content, such as photos (e.g. Holgate et al.2012 in a pioneering investigation into labour relations in London Kurdish businesses) and diaries (along the lines suggested by Latham 2004) to uncover how the material potential outlined above is realised in actual 'cosmopolitan habits' (Noble 2013).

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[21] 'Cami-cemevi yan yana yapabilir; yeni düşmanlıklar oluşturulmamalı', Zaman, 19th June 2013

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