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## Critical Thin

### Haunting Sufis and the Also-Here of Migration in Berlin

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■ **ABSTRACT:** This article delves into the spectral and affective reserves of *Zikr*, the Sufi exercise of godly remembrance. It explores how performances of religious longing broaden the moral experience of a post-migrant Berlin by offering contemporary believers critically thin zones of hypersocial contact with Islamic holy figures. *Zikr* emerges as a key interface of felt and material worlds: through acts of remembrance, subliminal figures and migrant inheritances are made contemporaneous while suppressed civic-political matters find a spectral, more-than-visual presence in Berlin. Sufi haunting thus achieves, amid enduring conditions of migration, a provisional positioning of the not-here and the not-now as an also-here. Such remembrance affords migrants a greater awareness of being distinctly historical as well as the critical means to look past conditions of the present.

■ **KEYWORDS:** affect, Berlin, haunting, migration, remembrance, Sufi, urban religion

“It is really a key to another world.” On this ostensibly simple yet lucid note, Onur summed up for me the expansive character of *Zikr*, the Sufi exercise of a mindful remembrance of Allah. He was one of 30 regular attendees at a German-Turkish prayer circle in Berlin who follow the Kadiri Sufi order. The group meets every Saturday evening in a neighborhood mosque to perform the ritual under the guidance of a *hoca*, the Turkish word for a (spiritual) teacher. Although brief, Onur’s words were reflective of what many feel during *Zikr*. More critically, his description captured the affective openings such collective acts of remembrance offer Sufi followers in Berlin, suturing the here and now with what Amira Mittermaier (2011, 2012) has called ‘an Elsewhere’. Writing on saintly dreams in Cairo, Mittermaier (2012) persuasively argues that Sufis do not act alone in the contemporary. Rather, dialogic relations maintained through dreams and visions expand believers’ spheres of action and remind them “of the very condition of being with and continuously being acted upon” (ibid.: 253). My Sufi interlocutors in Berlin had similarly described to me that atmospheres of *Zikr* were charged with the presence or passage of saintly, historical, and other-worldly figures. Their experiences and descriptions here serve as intimations as to why religious remembrance is a hypersocial and intercorporeal genre, how constituents of *Zikr* exceed the ritual’s duration or the place where it takes place, and



the ways in which the heterotemporal architecture of its atmospheres brushes against a disaffected geochronology of migration. My hauntological reading of the ritual serves to illustrate that Islamic saintly presences, whether passing, partial, or indistinct, assume public and political shapes insofar as these expand migrants' horizons of belonging in ways oblique to dominant, secular, even godless ideations of Berlin.

Noting religion's tryst with the extra-worldly and its "multiplicitous affairs with notions of the divine," scholars note how affect can be foggy, an "indistinct yet critical volume" that discretely impinges but also concretely and "animatingly moves through, between, or alongside other volumes and engages its subjects in dialogue across invisible borderlands" (Kasmani et al. 2020: 93). In the case at hand, I take the position that given *Zikr's* pronounced tryst with porosity, between its atmospheres of religious longing and Berlin's unlikely saintly traffics lies an opportunity to think thin through the thick of affect.<sup>1</sup> My use of thin is clearly seduced by Ann Armbrecht's (2009) notion of 'thin places'. In a handful of instances peppered through the course of an entire book, she describes thin places as places "where one's nerve endings are bare" (ibid.: 204), telling us that such thinness has to do with a heightened awareness of being "raw and exposed" (ibid.). Hinting at the delicate structures of feeling, emotion, and affect, Armbrecht speaks of "rushed over" places that call us to linger (ibid.: 148) and of places "where we let ourselves be transformed by touch" (ibid.: 208). Thin, as I recast it in queer and critical terms, additionally speaks for partial registers of knowing by way of feeling as it does for an aptitude for spectral depth and emotional traffic (Kasmani 2019: 35). I am interested in how critical intimacies arising out of a religious ritual render the city a diaphanous ground for post-migrant feeling, a porous and expansive urban whose boundaries although never sharply drawn are constantly tested through affective genres.<sup>2</sup> Such a view helps illustrate that religious remembrance involves forms of longing through which subliminal figures and migrant inheritances from elsewhere, even if temporarily so, are made contemporaneous in Berlin. Thin, queerly imagined, allows us to read a religious ritual in its dilations with the urban or the religious in its entanglements with other aspects of the social and the historical. It is not only to say that mystical ties or religious remembrance are matters relevant to the individual or the inward but also that these have a bearing on the political.<sup>3</sup> Writing on comparable Sufi practices among British Pakistanis, Pnina Werbner (1996: 322) has noted that the value of performing *Zikr* goes beyond the transformation of the believer in that such ritualized remembrance of god is also concerned with sacralizing geographies. This article embraces the position that as migrants act and interact with saintly companions in ritual across orders of space and time, they touch and are touched in physical and emotional terms, move and are moved in interiorized and outward ways.<sup>4</sup> Critical thin proposes that, more than a religious act, *Zikr* is that crucial interface of felt and material worlds through which suppressed civic-political concerns or migrant inheritances involving diverse or less visible actors find a shadowy, spectral, more-than-visual presence in Berlin. Such queer traffics in the city, whether defying borders or desiring opacity, infringe on European norms and understandings of what counts as participation proper in the public sphere.<sup>5</sup>

The Sufi circle I refer to is based in Berlin-Neukölln. It is one of the city's most diverse districts and has long been associated with Turkish migrants. In certain quarters, it is estimated that two-thirds of its inhabitants bear what in German public discourse is called *Migrationshintergrund* or migration background. In other words, regular attendees at *Zikr* are sons of Turkish *Gastarbeiter*, guest workers whose history in the city can be traced back to the early 1960s.<sup>6</sup> These are men in their twenties and thirties, most of whom were born and socialized in Germany.<sup>7</sup> Although the mosque community is locally grounded in a Berlin neighborhood, it is also transnationally configured. It has significant ties with sister circles in other European cities, while the Grand Sheikh as well as the organizational center are based in Istanbul. The material

I discuss in this article was gathered during fieldwork conducted for over 15 months in Berlin and only briefly in Istanbul. It involves semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observations, and limited participation in *Zikr* between June 2016 and October 2017.<sup>8</sup>

### Longing for Saints in Circles of Feeling

*Zikr* is not an obligation for Muslims. It is a Sufi exercise that is considered key to the further refinement of one's faith. Such remembrance of god and the Sufi masters involves followers rhythmically chanting names of Allah, singing praises of saints, and reciting melodic formulae of prayer. The ritual, as I observed during my time with the Kadiri Sufis in Berlin, was unmistakably sonic, although vocal chanting almost always gave way to bodily movements. *Zikr* atmospheres were in fact heterogeneously constituted, abundant also in the sensorial and sensational forms that thrived in such gatherings. Sounds of breathing, of singing, of chanting were not entirely independent of the textures of the mosque's interior. The sweat that glistened on men's bodies in dimly lit interiors was drenched also in the smell of fragrant oils. The subtlety of bodies brushing against other bodies was routinely offset by the occasional scream or outburst that tore away from it. Even breathing took material shapes through the wayward rhythms of the bodies as men in the circle moved between listlessness and excitement, rigor and exhaustion. The affective and emotional intensities one witnessed during the ritual were possibly also tied to the groundwork that preceded the performance of *Zikr*. Heads lowered, eyes shut, the circle would dive deep. A somber silence pervaded the room in these moments as men performed *tefekker al-mawt*, literally, reflection on death. Participants were required to conjure up moments following their deaths: affective scenes of their bodies being ritually washed and prepared for burial, their souls ready to face Allah. A few minutes into the reflection, the *hoca* would guide the men to silently recite *rabita*. This was a memorized list of names of holy men, an uninterrupted chain of transmission that tied followers in the present with the Prophet Muhammad. It confirmed believers in the idea that divine grace and guidance flowed through mortal as well as saintly figures and that its transmission across time and space was neither contained by the finality of a single lifetime nor hindered by borders and migration. It is only after such preparatory work that chanting would begin and the circle would move.

In the early stages of *Zikr*, the chant *hu-Allah*, mixed with the sound of heavy breathing, provided a heady base. At some point, the *hoca* would introduce lyrical verses to the mix. Floating atop waves of chants were songs of praise dedicated to Islamic saints. By the time the base chant turned to *ya-Hayy, ya-Qayyum* (The Living, The Ever-Sustaining), the men would already be on their feet, their arms now locked with one another.<sup>9</sup> The mood would have risen by many folds. Emotive texts often brought the men to tears, although some would scream out of excitement or even fall on their knees. No matter the disruption, the circle swiveled left to right, right to left, the gathering of men turning sweaty by the minute. A half-hour into the performance, breaking tempos of breathing would signal a descending exhaustion in the room. After 40–45 minutes of an intense performance, *Zikr* would usually come to a sudden end. As the congregation would sit down, the *hoca* offered his hand, a closing gesture as it were, to the person sitting to his right, who then transferred it to the person next to him. Amid a melodious round of salutations offered to the Prophet Muhammad, the *hoca's* handshake traveled through the circle. Some kissed it, others brought it to their eyes or rubbed their palms around their face, arms, and chest, making the most of this vestige before passing it on. To a participant-observer like myself, this was a reminder that no matter *Zikr's* orientation to mystical elsewhere or its overwhelmingly affective and thus hard-to-hold registers, touch and texture always returned the ritual to its place in the world.

Observing such atmospheres week after week, I grew curious as to how participants dealt with the intensities and emotional passages folded in the ritual. When I had first put the question of the rising moods to Hasan, a regular attendee at the mosque, he had, to my surprise, relied on the idea of what Sufis see in the circle. This, it bears emphasis, was a ritual performed with one's eyes closed. As it turned out, Hasan was pointing me to attendees that were differently present in such assemblies of remembrance:

When *Zikr* has begun to take its course, and this spiritual feeling is so strong, it's possible that one, that a few, see things which one normally doesn't see. He sees angels! He sees people who have lived 500 years ago! Saints, they are there and they do *Zikr* with us. And when you have your eyes closed, you feel that, but you don't see them. But when all of a sudden you see other figures, you'll get the shock of your lifetime. You can fall over. You know what I mean? There have been many cases like this. Everyone was doing *Zikr*, and there was a nine-year-old who also did *Zikr*, and his eyes were totally open the whole time. After the *Zikr* he asked us, where are all the other people, who were just as many as us, who all had green hats and white beards? Where did they go? We said, but there was no one here. He really saw people who had died back then, who had always done *Zikr*. Allah sends them back to earth, their blessing, because they took the love toward *Zikr* so seriously that they are still allowed to taste this love, you understand? And the boy saw all of that. There are so many things. You don't sleep, you see things that normally can't be seen. Because ... Allah has placed a veil over our eyes. When you lift that veil, we would see the Satan, the angels. We would see the situation of the dead. We would see other things ... And it's possible that this veil is briefly lifted in *Zikr*. (Interview conducted on 15 September 2016)

Visionary experiences that Hasan was describing in this moment were critical in that these were proof that a fuller apprehension of the world required more than what met the eye. It is important to bear in mind that what believers see during ritual are citations of the imaginal. Not imaginary, unreal, or concocted, the imaginal is an order of reality. It is for Sufis a distinct and betwixt realm of perception, as reliable as it can be deceptive.<sup>10</sup> Drawn particularly from the works of the renowned Sufi intellectual Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240), the imaginal qualifies as a significant mode of perception that is central to Sufi cosmologies and life-worlds, as scholars of Islam have illustrated. It correlates forms of seeing and varieties of perception across wakefulness and dreaming and involves both the eye of sense perception and the eye of imagination. This means that those who approach such betwixt orders of space and time must also learn to discern between imaginal and sensory objects. In other words, visions of the imaginal always require the skill of unveiling (Chittick 1993: 8). In fact, on our first meeting, the *hoca* himself had brought up the idea of the veil—a curtain (*Vorhang*), as he called it—that stands between worlds, two seas, in his words, one salty, the other sweet. To followers of the Sufi path, the seductions of such aesthetic world-making are a given, insofar as the yet unrevealed is removed, but at the same time has a bearing on the immanent, a realm shrouded but tappable—an infinitely extendable worlding in that only a curtain stands in the way of its longing. Whether as a deep, sea-like realm or as a key to other worlds, my interlocutors' experiences of *Zikr* were fittingly articulated in grammars of the revealed and the concealed. For Sufis, *zahir* is the outwardly manifested world, which is distinct from *batin*, or the sense-affective perception of *zahir*'s hidden counterpart.

"It is a concealed world," Onur put it when describing to me how the mysterious lines the everyday. "We do not know exactly how it works in theory. We just know, we can judge only on the basis of its external appearances." Like Onur, regulars at *Zikr* reveled in the delicate potentialities of such knowing, routine but fragile occasions when such veils were to be durationally lifted, ushering in the company of historical saints and holy men in ritual time. That Sufis saw

with eyes closed meant that in the context of the ritual, affect turned the invisible ‘sense-able’. It confirmed the view that invisibility was not a proof of a thing’s absence. Rather, as Armbrecht (2009: 215) notes, “invisibility was simply the presence of things that were not readily visible to our eyes, not because they were not present, but because they were no longer valued by the world in which we lived.” Figures with white beards and green hats that Hasan had mentioned were regular attendees yet not perceptible to all especially the anthropologist, save in those moments of affective abundance and release when men in the circle screamed, shouted, laughed, wept, or simply fell to the ground. In my learned observations of the ritual, eyes closed, these served as the only outwardly sense-able traces of believers’ briefly lived yet temporally drawn-out experiences (Mattes et al. 2019). “You call that *jezbe*,” said Imren when I had asked him about the intensities of *Zikr*. He is also one of the regulars in the circle. Turkish from Arabic, *jezbe* is the Sufi term for divine attraction that conveys ideas of absorption, immersion, passion, and also emotion. Even though Imren by his own admission found it difficult to translate *jezbe* into German, he knew that it had different manifestations in *Zikr*. “There are kinds where people scream. There are kinds where people cry. There are kinds where people laugh. There are even ones where people grow tired,” he noted, duly adding that “the heart is so filled with love in that moment, it doesn’t fit anymore. It explodes.”

Critical intimacies, emotional passage, and affective abundance are characteristic of *Zikr* and explain why its performance warrants the watchful guidance of a teacher. The *hoca* not only steers emotions and experiences in ritual time but also helps followers make meaning beyond it. This takes place especially in the context of *sohbet*, the didactical talk and gathering that precedes the collective performance of *Zikr*. It can be described as the discursive counterpart to the ritual where, citing from scriptural and Sufi literary and hagiographic sources, the teacher delivers moral and ethical concepts as well as the etiquette required to perform *Zikr*. Quite often in the circle, these talks revolve around the sinfulness and moral depravity of Berlin. *Zikr* is in fact understood as the collective performance that ensures routine cleansing of individuals and secures the community’s protection in the hands of saintly masters (Dilger et al. 2018: 102; Selim 2015). But for a city described as the atheistic capital of Europe, saints are unlikely figures of occurrence.<sup>11</sup> Followers know that saints do not simply roam around Berlin, nor is saintly protection exactly unconditional. It is rather contingent on the maintenance of unbroken ties with a whole line of spiritual masters, what my interlocutors called *rabita*. “What does *rabita* mean?” the *hoca* asked rhetorically during one of the *sohbets*. He then elaborated further: “It means connection, a means of connection, it means connectedness, it means consistency, it means arrangement, it means order, it means link, encounter, interest.”<sup>12</sup> The need for such connectedness or belonging to a spiritual master is all the more pressing in the context of migration. Believers understand that in a place so insufficiently sacralized as Berlin is for its Muslim inhabitants, saintly affective companies must be effortfully invoked in ritual time and sustained through iterative performances of remembrance. Weekly routines of *Zikr* not only ensure such connectedness between the living and the more-than-living, between migrant believers and saints; they also enable a deep sense of time. Longing for saints or remembering Allah one performance at a time also means iteratively sacralizing a context where one’s ancestors and landscapes, shrines and pilgrimage routes, sounds, smells, and sights cannot ordinarily be assumed or taken for granted.

### Haunting Sufis and the Also-Here of Migration

In the critically acclaimed short story “Der Hof im Spiegel” (The Courtyard in the Mirror), the Turkish-German author Emine Sevgi Özdamar employs not one but three mirrors—placed at

strategic angles in a single apartment—to create an expanded scene of home.<sup>13</sup> Reflections from the inner yard gather in the three mirrors and interact so that, in Özdamar’s own words, neighbors would wake up nose to nose. In my reading, what the author captures is not simply the courtyard or her neighbors, but rather a condition of migrant longing. In one instance, while describing her neighbors’ movements in the mirrors to her mother on the phone, Özdamar lets her readers in on a swelling experience. She writes, “In the mirror I tickled the young nun’s back so that she suddenly began to laugh in the courtyard below. ‘Mother, I’m tickling her just now.’ My mother said: ‘And just now the sun is shining in my left eye.’ I heard voices of children playing on the steep little street in Istanbul. The ships’ horns commingled with the children’s voices, and a street vendor yelled ‘Watermelons!’” (Özdamar 2005, as translated by Adelson 2006: 12). As the story unfolds, German neighbors become effortlessly present in Istanbul, which is rendered coterminous in the mirror, and her mother’s memory commingles with Özdamar’s present. A little later, on the same page, Özdamar herself notes, “I was happy in the mirror because, in this way, I was in several places at the same time” (ibid.). In Özdamar’s writing, mirrors do more than reflect. They bring into conversation the near and the distant, the dead with the living. Mirrors long for and ache with scenes from elsewhere. They stretch the physical and affective horizons of home and furnish a feeling to borrow a phrase from Özdamar’s translator of “something approximating postnational intimacy” (Adelson 2006: 1). It is such affective porosity—a stretching of migrant horizons and an aching for one’s histories—that I also locate in a Sufi ritual in Berlin.

My reading of *Zikr* approaches a ritual of godly remembrance in terms of atmospheres of longing and belonging, or porous and viscerally connective conditions imbued with hauntological possibility. On the one hand, this allows for a view of religious commitment that is conscious of its rootedness in historical time despite being stretched through migration. The underlying assumption here is that religion serves as an important resource to negotiate a post-migrant condition, that is, to endure with or remain in the wake of historical affects of migration.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the hauntological reading I pursue recognizes that *Zikr* is replete with “traces, fragments, fleeting moments, gaps, absences, submerged narratives, and displaced actors and agencies,” which, in Lisa Blackman’s (2015: 26) terms, “register affectively—in a profound sense that there is something more to say, that one should look for something more than now.”

Hauntology, the Derridean concept or rather ‘puncept’ for ontology, as I invoke here through the register of thin, makes room for spectral, reflecting, or differently attendant bodies’ effecting presence without having to be physically present (Fisher 2014). Working through a Sufi register means that we can expand our ambit of specters and account for other figures of return in the city. For instance, in Islamic thought, djinns with their long lifespans are crafty beings of smokeless fire known to shapeshift; angels are believed to descend and become temporally present in the company of the living. Saints are likewise transhistorical figures who for many Muslims serve as the more-than-living. Not exactly ghosts, saints are literally ‘friends of Allah’ (*wali*, pl. *auliya* in Arabic), who by virtue of their closeness with god are privy to divine secrets. It would follow that coming close to saints means drawing near to unrevealed dimensions of the world. What is more, Islamic saints are not considered the dead proper: no matter that their bodies are interred in the earth, they guide the living, acting and moving beyond their lifetimes. Notwithstanding their distinct form or religious orientation in this work, spectrality, as Avery Gordon (2008: xvi) has noted, “alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future.” Furthermore, apparitions that bear minoritized, migrant, or other religious inheritances and genealogies ring all the more critical insofar as in acts of returning they unsettle long-standing colonial and often exclusionary configurations of what constitutes the public sphere proper in the current European context. That being said, Islamic saints are not

the only figures of return, and by no means is haunting solely a province of religion or migration. Cities host manifold ghosts of their own, and this is especially true for historically fraught places such as Berlin. Benedict Anderson (2017) makes the case that the ‘material memory’ of Berlin’s own ruination—25 million cubic meters of debris left behind in the aftermath of World War II—is literally a subliminal figure, buried in the city’s seven hills of rubble. This is to say that despite a geography designed for forgetting, scars of a once divided Berlin re-emerge in urban demographics, city planning, and infrastructure. Furthermore, the city’s infamous neo-Nazi edges and the alarming rise of right-wing politics in Germany are concrete reminders that what is hidden is not always removed from consciousness, nor are certain histories ever finished. Religious or not, Islamic or otherwise, haunting is primarily about principles and processes of return. It helps us articulate, more so in conditions of migration, how and why what is buried is not done away with; what has come to be is not exactly over; what has been left behind, not entirely forgotten.

Through the critical figure of thin, I refer to affective conditions that make recurrence likely or possible, even integral to migrant worlds. Put another way, thick as *Zikr* is in its affective make-up, it is laced with thin openings. Ghostly and saintly figures bearing other temporal rhythms are synchronized in ritual and are thus rendered contemporaneous in Berlin. Believers’ shared understanding that the saints are present during *Zikr* points us to the heterotemporal architecture of the ritual as well as its capacity for enduring modes of belonging that are hyper-social. This, to lean on Elizabeth Freeman (2019: 14), refers to a process whereby “the synchronization of bodies does not require their physical touch, but rather a simultaneity of movement in which the several become one.” Her argument that “the sense of time is instrumental to becoming social in an expansive mode” (ibid.: 17) helps make the case here that affective companies in *Zikr* broaden migrants’ access to historical figures elsewhere and the ways in which their relations with holy persons extend beyond their own lifetimes. Through collective acts of remembrance, believers acquire a sensibility to engage with realms ‘Elsewhere’, to borrow from Mittermaier (2011), as they learn to entangle “Elsewhen” or “times other than the contemporary moment” (Taneja 2018: 60). This is to say that a ritual such as *Zikr* affords its Turkish-German participants a heightened awareness of being distinctly historical as well as a situatedness in the present to act toward the future. This follows the assertion that the migrant’s want to belong “is to long to be bigger not only spatially, but also temporally, to ‘hold out’ a hand across time and touch the dead or those not born yet, to offer oneself beyond one’s own time” (Freeman 2007: 299). Through routine occasions of sociability with Islamic historical figures, believers enfold inheritances into the contemporary otherwise aslant to the city’s dominant histories and heritage. Amid persisting conditions of migration, Sufi hauntings achieve in *Zikr*, as multiple and strategically placed mirrors do in Özdamar’s story, a provisional imbrication of the not-here and the not-now as an also-here.

### The Politics of Godly Remembrance in the City

Like many Berlin mosques, the one where the Sufi group used to gather was a shy structure. Not identifiable to a passerby on the street, it was tucked away in the backyard of a residential building. When I had first arrived at the address, there was little to marvel at. One had to walk through two interior yards into a third one, where it stood, half-yellow, half-green, facing an automobile workshop. *Hinterhof Moscheen* or backyard mosques too often evoke an air of suspicion in Germany. Mainstream discourse on Islam in German media is ripe with worries about Muslims withdrawing into a parallel, if not also a dangerous, world of social existence, one that

is often believed to exist behind closed doors and away from public gaze and scrutiny. If fighting perceptions was an uphill task, the dynamics of gentrification were equally hard to withstand in Berlin, especially in this part of Neukölln. Although long regarded a migrant 'ghetto', the district has in recent years attracted the interest of big investors, thus altering its demographics, rentals, and patterns of property ownership. Neukölln is increasingly popular with international artists, urban hipsters, and tourists. Social and economic shifts come with diverging prospects as well as occasional frictions and anxieties around questions of sharing public space, in particular when it comes to religious communities and buildings.<sup>15</sup> Hardly a month into my research, the Sufi group had received the sad news that the rental contract of the mosque could no longer be renewed.

On the last day of the mosque, many of the regulars gathered to help with the moving. Its once yellow walls adorned with green calligraphy were now a faint memory. Koranic verses had been buried under multiple coats of white paint. The green carpet was stripped off the floor. As the last features of the mosque were being dismantled and its 18 years put away in boxes, I found the chance to record it photographically. Unfolding in front of my eyes, over the span of an evening, was a process of demosque-ing, as it were. Photographs and notes from that evening record how a bare concrete surface emerged from under the carpet, haunted if you will, with stubborn vestiges of color that had stuck to the floor. Once *Zikr* was over, performed one last time in the space, I duly wondered if "departing from its air were rhythms of the body, sounds of joy and fear, and possibly the saints too who were known to haunt the room week after week" (Kasmani 2019: 50). Loss, as I would learn from the Sufis, was not a closure but an opening (ibid.):

Those who apprehend the world in delicacies of *zahir* and *batin* know that potentiality is distinct from a thing that simply might happen; that it involves a certain mode of nonbeing; or that fear, loss, disappointment, indeterminacy are potentiality's affective contours, indispensable to the work of imagining the world otherwise. When Sufis in Neukölln long for the unrevealed, they know well that as much as a tactfully hidden world of saints, spirits, djinns and holy men is at arm's length during *Zikr*, it is not exactly durable outside it—illuminating as a potentiality, hence present without actually existing in the present tense.

It would take at least six months for the group to find what would be after all a temporary solution—a mosque in the vicinity that they could share on Saturday evenings. Until then, *Zikr* was to be organized in followers' homes. These were ordinary living rooms turned into makeshift sites of migrant religious longing. A message from the Grand Sheikh in Istanbul addressing the Berlin circle offered some reassurance to followers. Equally comforting was the knowledge that even without a mosque, their contact with the holy was intact through uninterrupted routines of *Zikr*. During this period of change, the matter of the former mosque would understandably come up in my conversations with followers. These were often marked with a sense of loss and of not knowing what might come in its wake. Ali, a young follower I spoke with, thought that the "mosque gave many people a social, .... rather more a spiritual hold." When I asked how it felt to perform *Zikr* in new and strange places, he replied as follows.

It is of course exhausting in a worldly sense that you always have to drive to different places, that you always have to discuss, ok, where are we going to do it now, at whose place? ... Regardless of that, I actually always found it very nice, because people are opening their apartments for other people. They come inside, do *sohbet*, think of Allah, think of the joy of Allah, think of the prophets ... I found that very, very nice, because, even though the mosque closed down, it all still worked out. Because it's got to be an emotionally, spiritually blessed thing, it having all worked out like that ... and because you still managed to feel that love, at strangers' places, somehow. I find that beautiful. (Interview conducted on 10 March 2017 2017)



Collective acts of migrant remembrance, as Sara Ahmed (1999) argues, bear the potential to pursue a ‘shared terrain’ where none exists. My observations among the Sufis confirmed that even with the mosque lost, saints remained unfinished business in the city. In the absence of concrete conditions, or rather in spite of it, godly remembrance and joys of saintly company continued. *Zikr* emerged as a way through which a sense of community was felt but also restored. In such abundant gatherings, believers allied with more-than-living and spiritual beings as a hypersocial way to act and deal with greater conditions of displacement and migration. It is a reminder that although *Zikr* is performed behind closed doors, it is not the same as withdrawing to a *Parallelgesellschaft* (parallel society). Neither is the ritual’s concern with interiority, I would add, “to detach from the desire of the political as such” (Berlant 2011: 231). On the interventionist politics of spectrality in Karachi’s public sphere, Iftikhar Dadi (2009: 189) observes that it is “precisely because the path toward smooth and formal participation in official public life is blocked or impeded for diverse groups, their concerns are expressed obliquely by images, specters, shadows, and silhouettes.” Migrant intimacies with Islamic saints take on critical charge since they subvert the liberal take on political emancipation that “elevates the virtues of inclusion and visibility to master principles of good governance—participation and transparency” (Piliavsky 2013: 107) and where acting valuably in the public sphere is made contingent on full social disclosure.

The affective modes of *Zikr* mobilize in various ways a spectral aesthetics of intransigence in the European contemporary. Amid regimes of linear or straight time, such remembering fosters historical abundance otherwise removed. Assemblies of *Zikr* are weighed over by present pasts; these endure multiple nows at once. More than forwarding a critique of godless time, the ritual points to Sufi bodies’ critical translations of the otherwise untranslatable or “immiscible temporalities” (Lim 2009: 13) into embodied moral and affective forces. The heterogeneously durative rhythms that bear on *Zikr* atmospheres attest to the various “worlds that intermingle” in the ritual’s folds, “but whose differences are never fully dissolved” (ibid.: 133).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, moving moments and touching encounters that I observed during *Zikr* were illuminations that historical saints from elsewhere can impinge on life in the contemporary; that intimate interactions unfolding during ritual can encompass oblique affects that surpass it; or that remembering can constitute a living archive of critical and allied forms of resistance to aspects of the migrant present.<sup>17</sup>

### Critical Thin: Open Reflections

Thin is critical just as the fantastic and the ghostly, in Gordon’s (2008) terms, is a felt mode of historical critique. Thin helps us appreciate how religious performances in the city exceed believers’ desires for connecting with the divine or why remembering is not exactly a past-oriented genre. Atmospheres of *Zikr*, as I have illustrated, imbricate the here with the also-here; they encapsulate a forward-dawning longing for the not-now and the not-yet. In summoning saints from elsewhere, Sufis sacralize the contemporary. In evoking religious histories, migrants recollect what is at risk of loss in conditions of displacement. These insights are surely not new to the anthropology of religion. However, religious remembering here enfolds a queer-futural stance insofar as believers’ experiences in ritual—despite being partial, fleeting, or not entirely knowable—open up ways “to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (Muñoz 2009: 1).<sup>18</sup> This was most pronounced in the wake of the mosque’s closure. In continuing to nurture their ties with saints, Sufis revealed an awareness for a long historical view of the present. They knew that remote horizons can propel them onward, that what is physically present can be lost, and

that futures may dysfunction amid a city's many provocations. Thus, much like the willfulness of Shi'i sound in the context of Pakistani shrines—an argument I have made elsewhere—Sufi religious longings in Berlin bear forth inheritances into the present that either have been minoritized through the workings of colonialism and migration or do not align with official ideations of the city. *Zikr* routinizes in the European urban “a historical-emotional consciousness that critiques, interrupts, and refuses a for-granted continuity of the present” (Kasmani 2017).

Thinking thin what is ostensibly a private ritual—conceptually tied to mystical interiorities and practically confined to mosque interiors—also helps question the shapes through which religion becomes present in the public sphere. It has already been noted that visually determined, material-spatial readings of urban religion carry the risk of overlooking “religious expressions that are spatially unstable, unfixed, evanescent or ephemeral” (Burchardt and Westendorp 2018: 165). In this regard, *Zikr* offers an insight into critical coagulations of material and immaterial presence of religion in the city.<sup>19</sup> Thinking religion in its hauntological presence—or the ghostly modes through which Sufis nurture affective contact with the saintly—bears public and political import. That such felt modes evade ordinary view hints not to parallel worlds but to the critical ways in which these might temper the established terms on which religion comes under the purview of the state. This is particularly political in the European public sphere where debates over Islamic dress, architecture, prayer, and processions continue to regard religious belonging as antithetical to belonging proper.<sup>20</sup> Private and inward religious performances assume public meaning insofar as these upset and reorient the dominant terms of publicness on which Islam's presence is expected to take shape in the European urban. In a sense, *Zikr* ritualizes for migrants what Édouard Glissant (1997: 190) has termed “the right to opacity.” In working against European norms of transparency, such refusal to be known solely on the terms of the colonizer interrupts the gaze of both Western thought and governance (Simek 2015: 366). In addition, affective accounts of what Sufis see with eyes closed during *Zikr* brings home the point that visibility is not always more political than its counterpart, nor is acting visibly the only mode of acting in the world. Sufi hauntings of Berlin take us beyond what Burchardt and Becci (2013: 12) have called “hidden religious topographies” in that these hauntings reveal not what lies concealed, but rather that what recurs differently. Because *Zikr* extends migrants' felt sociabilities to include saints, spirits, angels, and djinns, it also, in my view, alters and mitigates spatial, temporal, embodied, and affective separations of the urban. Berlin, by such virtue, is rendered porous, and the city becomes a breathing ground of affect, whose volumes billow with Islamic spectral presences and whose boundaries are temporarily but routinely dilated through genres of touch and feeling.

I have argued that Sufi rituals of remembrance broaden the moral experience of the city by offering its participants thin zones of hypersocial contact with saints and holy figures, that even sparse intelligibilities given in spiritual experience thicken urban grammars by gesturing at alternate mappings of Berlin. The critical thinness I locate in *Zikr* acknowledges that migrant geographies of the urban are profoundly and continually impinged upon by disparate rhythms and momentums, oblique histories and motivations. An expanded understanding of the post-migrant condition as thin is especially valuable in the study of religious life-worlds, where to be homed is not simply a matter of being anchored in geographical place but of being confirmed in the feeling that amid disruptive conditions of time and space, one's line of access to the historical is intact, that one's future is oriented in the right way. Migrant longings thus restore to the architecture of affect that which lies in excess of the ritual or might unfold in its wake.

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## ■ NOTES

1. My use of 'thin' is not the same as 'thin description,' which in Heather Love's (2013: 404) terms involves "forms of analysis that describe patterns of behavior and visible activity but that do not traffic in speculation about interiority, meaning, or depth."
2. On the notion of 'intimate religion' vis-à-vis the ritual of *Zikr*, see Kasmani (2021).
3. Thinness embraces the idea that inward genres of feeling and interiorized affect bear outward on political resonance, just as the political shapes how and what might we feel on the inside (Cvetkovich 2012). In this regard, the "Public Feelings" project, developed in the early 2000s, is of special relevance here, in particular the scholarship of Kathleen Stewart, Lauren Berlant, and Ann Cvetkovich.
4. In my forthcoming monograph (Kasmani 2022), I contend that Islamic saints make for 'queer companions' and that saintly affects bear public and political ramifications in contemporary Pakistan.
5. For a critical rethinking of the 'public sphere,' see Fraser (1990). On the notion's theoretical biases with regard to visibility, disclosure, and political participation, see Piliavsky (2013).
6. As part of a formal guest worker program, migrants sought work in former West Germany in the 1950s up until the early 1970s.
7. Women followers are equally involved in community affairs and organization, but my access during fieldwork was restricted to men's only prayer gatherings.
8. All interviews in Berlin were conducted in German by the author and translated into English by Marie Römer.
9. According to the Islamic faith, *ya-Hayy* and *ya-Qayyum* are two of Allah's 99 'beautiful names.'
10. For more on dreams and the imaginal, see Chittick (1993, 1994), Corbin ([1969] 1997), and Mittermaier (2011).
11. It is estimated that 60 percent of Berlin's inhabitants profess no religion. For more, see Keenan (2016) and Lanz (2013).
12. This *sohbet*, recorded on 16 September 2017, was translated from Turkish into English by Nicola Verderame.
13. For the text in the original German, see Özdamar (2005). For more on migrant literature of Berlin, see Yildiz (2017).

14. My use of the prefix 'post-' does not refer to a finished process. For more on post-migrant Berlin, see Römhild (2017).
15. According to a 2006 report commissioned by the Berlin Senate for Integration and Migration, the desire for visible mosque spaces often leads to conflicts. As a result, a mosque's size, location, and appearance are sometimes compromised to avoid social discord. For more, see Häusserman (2006). On the spatial and institutional politics of religious buildings in Europe, see Beekers and Tamimi Arab (2016).
16. Bliss Lim (2009) makes this point with regard to supernatural agency in fantastic cinema. On religion's translation of cosmological beliefs into bodily and aesthetic forms, see Butticci (2016).
17. The broader contention is that *Zikr* cannot entirely be read as an inward quest or as a pursuit of the transcendental. For divine mediation through 'sensational' rituals, see Meyer (2013).
18. Reading queer and the religious in affinity is not in service of queering Islam or Islamizing queer. Rather, it is informed by my position that queer lurks ordinarily in religious life-worlds. For more on analytical categories, queer and religion, see Castelli (2017) and Kasmani (2022).
19. The material turn in the study of urban religion is partial to a logic of visibility. For more on this topic, see Garbin (2013).
20. For more on the entanglements of public religion and contemporary cities, see Bramadat et al. (2021).

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