Ethnic and Racial Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rers20

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To cite this article: Matteo (Teo) Benussi (2021) Pietaskscapes of halal living: subjectivity, striving, and space-making in Muslim Russia, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 44:10, 1821-1843, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2020.1856904

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1856904

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Published online: 05 Jan 2021.

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ETHNIC AND RACIAL STUDIES
2021, VOL. 44, NO. 10, 1821–1843
https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1856904

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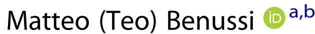
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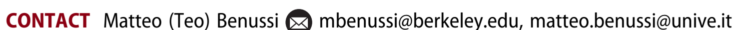
ABSTRACT
Drawing on ethnographic research in Tatarstan (Russia) and through an engagement with Foucauldian, phenomenological, and ecological social theories, this paper advances the concept of piety taskscape, or "pietaskscape", to indicate the granular, organically emerging meshwork of settings and locations where Muslim pietists carry out self-fashioning. This concept aspires to grasp the nexus of ethical action, space-making, and experience, in concrete human environments such as the post-Soviet city. Such a concept may prove a valuable contribution to scholarly conversations about religion and space by placing subjectivity, performativity, teleology, and materiality in resonance with each other. It will be argued that, compared to alternative approaches, this framework affords greater analytical insight into the spatiality of Muslim piety beyond the scholarly box of Islamic "sites".

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 21 February 2020; Accepted 21 October 2020

KEYWORDS Islam in Russia; Volga Tatars and Tatarstan; Islamic ethics; piety taskscape; self-cultivation; Muslim subjectivity; religion and space

Introduction: space, subjectivity, and Islam in Russia

"[Only] subjectivity is truth, subjectivity is real": thus Søren Kierkegaard (2016, 231) characterized religious experience for individuals with an intimate, continuous, "ethical" engagement with faith. Written by a nineteenth-century Danish philosopher-cum-theologian, this dictum offers a useful starting point for a contribution that deals with spaces of Islamic piety in Russia. This paper is an attempt to capture the experience of Muslim pietists as they inhabit, perceive, and produce space in a secular, post-Soviet urban environment, by advancing a conceptual framework that foregrounds *subjective* engagements with the world through the notion of piety taskscape or, and I apologize for the mouthful, "pietaskscape".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While a man of his time, Kierkegaard anticipated important and wide-ranging conversations associated with the "ethical turn" in the anthropological study of religion by framing ethical-religious life as first and foremost a matter of becoming a certain type of subject (Laidlaw 2014; Fadil and Fernando 2015).[1] To Kierkegaard, who was steeped in a Protestant sensitivity and intent on reimagining the place of religion in the "new era" of modernity, ethicized religiosity implied "inwardness" – the strenuous pursuit of a truth that cannot be grasped, measured, or observed "objectively", and that, more often than not, runs against the grain of dominant mores and norms, even to the point of defying common sense. Conversely, the Danish philosopher took a dim view of a religiosity based on "objective" collective identities, time-honoured local customs, and life-cycle ceremonies (2016, 238–239). Kierkegaard's position resonates with well-documented attitudes in the contemporary global Islamic revival (Hirschkind 2006), and his demanding criteria would meet the approval of many of my pious interlocutors in the Russian republic of Tatarstan, in the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Volga-Ural region.

The Volga Tatars, a Turkic ethnic group that makes up Russia's largest minority but represents a majority in Tatarstan, have historically practiced Sunni Islam since the tenth century. The twentieth century witnessed a severe attack against religion at the hand of the Soviet authorities, with seven decades of state atheism, cultural assimilation, and audacious social engineering resulting in Islam being marginalized from the Tatars' moral worlds. After the Soviet demise, however, Tatarstan witnessed a booming success of transnational piety trends emphasizing self-cultivation, ritual correctness, and virtuous conduct in accordance with Quran and Sunna. Despite remaining a minority phenomenon, this loose, dynamic, theologically diverse network has gained traction amongst businesspeople, students, professionals, and aspirational urbanites. The piety network is cosmopolitan, mobile, and outwards-looking, and it prioritizes Islamic universality over ethnic affiliation and local customs. It is this demographic that constitutes the focus of my paper.

In other contributions, I have discussed how piety trends contributed to the deprivatisation of religion in Tatarstan, resulting in Islam rapidly becoming visible in the region's anthropic spaces (Benussi 2020; forthcoming). The number of mosques, places of Islamic learning, shops selling religious literature and "Muslim merchandise" (*musul'manskie tovary*) has grown spectacularly. In a city like Kazan, Tatarstan's capital, it is now common to spot halal (*khalyal'*, meaning Islamically permitted) signage or other markers of Islamicness (Maevsky 2014). Halal butcheries, stores, dedicated halal sections in supermarkets, halal cafes and restaurants, Muslim-friendly beauty salons and hotels, and even Islamic financial consultancy firms have opened across the republic and beyond (Images 1 and 2). These are settings for

Image 1. Roadside halal shop in rural Tatarstan. Photo: Teo Benussi.

prayer and learning, but also socialization, leisure, consumption, production, and care of the self. Piety's emphasis on inwardness does not mean to turn one's back on the world – rather, the ethical-religious subject engages with the world in an intense, reflexive manner, constantly making decisions

Image 2. The opening of new halal store in an East Tatarstan city. Note the Quranic verses ("O you who believe! eat of the good things that We have provided you with;" 2: 172) above shelves of products "for Muslims". Photo: Teo Benussi.

consistent with one's conception of God or "God-relationship" (Kierkegaard 2016, 241–247).

This paper is about the spatial configurations that Muslim pious subjects "produce" (Lefebvre 1991) as they bring their conception of God into the world. A few lines above I have listed a series of "categories" of urban landscape features that can "objectively" be associated with Islamic piety: mosques, madrasahs, halal shops, restaurants, businesses … But this paper will go no further in that direction: in its Kierkegaardian attempt to stick closer to the "truth" and "reality" of pietists themselves, the remainder of this paper will go "against" the facile pretence of objectivity. I will not treat halal logos or Islamic signage on shop windows as unproblematic jump-off points for analytical exactitude, but as outwards manifestations of complex, collective, spatialized performances of piety which extend far beyond circumscribed locations that can be surely identified as points on a map. My specific contention is that rather than foregrounding specific locations, types of urban settings, or seemingly self-evident signage, we can achieve greater insight into the spatial dimension of Islamic piety by focusing on pietists *subjective* experiences of and engagements with space. The concept of piety taskscape aspires to achieve greater insight into how pietists take their faith with them as they move in their lifeworlds, thereby transforming both their lifeworlds and themselves.

This term, which will be discussed in more detail below, encompasses: the multifarious everyday activities carried out in ways that respond to Islamic standards of permissibility; the diffused meshwork of "spatial configuration" – an expression meant to suggest a processual, ever-provisional dimension of space-making – where the pursuit of Islamic *askesis* (lit. "training/practice;" in religious contexts, "self-discipline/asceticism") manifests; and the material and immaterial features of reality that afford pietists God-conscious behaviour. While this framework and terminology will be discussed with reference to ethnographic material from post-Soviet Tatarstan, my proposal aspires to general analytical relevance beyond this specific case-study. Potentially, it might be useful to frame space-making in other reform settings which emphasize coherence, doctrinal exactitude and scriptural regulation of the minutiae of everyday life (cf. Hovland 2016 on space-making and Protestantism).

Living halal in space

Before expanding on the pietaskscape concept, let me share some ethnographic coordinates. In 2014–2015, and then in a series of shorter visits, I ethnographically explored "halal living" (*khalyal' obraz zhizni*, *zhizn' po-khalyal'nomu*) in Tatarstan and the Volga region. "Halal", as is well known, is an Arabic term meaning "permissible" according to Islamic jurisprudence

and etiquette. During my research, I was taken, either physically or through narrations and reminiscences, to countless "halal places", or locations for halal living. Islamic piety extends well beyond designated places of worship, learning, or rituality, reaching into the fabric of the city and countryside. As one interlocutor, a young entrepreneur in his early thirties, put it:

> Mosques must be built, of course, but are just places for praying, not places to live a fully halal way of living. There are other places [where halal living unfolds], for instance those that revolve around food, like cafes and restaurants, or shops. Halal is global: clothing, fashion, entertainment, tourism, even real estate … everything can be halal. Money has to be halal, too. So, it's not only mosques or only restaurants, but *all kinds of places*.

The list of halal locations "of all kinds" is potentially ever-expanding, and not at all predictable. I visited settings whose halalness is apparently "objective", such as farms where animals are slaughtered in accordance to Islamic precepts and their meat is sold under the halal logo. But note: sometimes it happens that the "objectivity" of brands, logos, and certifications is shattered by scandals and various crises of trust. I also visited places whose halalness comes from a biographical, *subjective* standpoint, such as a travel agency opened by an ex casino owner who, upon heeding Islamic calls to self-reform amid a life crisis, decided to drop his religiously illicit businesses making profits from gambling and booze. Or a vegan tea-house in Kazan, alcohol and meat-free, which caters to both urban "Muslim hipsters" and "secular" (*svetskie*) alternative lifestylers – the tea-house's halalness emerges or recedes depending on whom you ask. Below are a few particularly representative examples of the many forms that manifestations of spatialized piety can take.

The first comes from the early days of Tatarstan's piety boom in the mid-to-late 1990s, when the problem of the lack of halal food at the industrial scale was urgently felt, and the solutions particularly creative. One Eastern Tatarstani respondent, a middle-age "veteran" of the piety milieu, nostalgically reminisced about the time when groups of Muslims would contact local "regular" food-processing factories – which dealt with pork and non-Islamically-slaughtered meat – in order to rent premises, assembly lines, and canning equipment for 24 hours each month. They would thoroughly wash all mechanical elements, only then using them to manufacture Islam-compliant food products which would then be sold at affordable prices on makeshift stalls around mosques. Proceeds barely covered the expenses, but over the next two decades, this do-it-yourself attitude would evolve into a florid (though, as mentioned, not scandal-free) halal industry with stable production and distribution infrastructures catering to a growing base of halal-conscious Muslim consumers (Benussi 2020). To the men who participated in those early experimentations with halal infrastructure-building, as well as

to their extended community, the profane space of a non-Muslim-run meat factory floor remains to this day a powerful materialization of the ethical commitment and "passion" (Kierkegaard 2016) of that generation.

The second example also comes from East Tatarstan and is contemporaneous with my research. In the industrial town of Tübän Kama, home to a thriving Muslim community with scripturalist leanings, a group of pietists regularly rents out sports facilities in order for women and men to work out in the gym or swim in the pool without gender mixing. Being healthful and cultivational, practicing fitness is considered God-pleasing and indeed an important element of a life of piety, as long as certain conditions, such as modesty, are met. Thus, Tübän Kama's pietists enthusiastically pool financial resources to secure access to halal fitness. Outside the time slots allocated to the mosque community, however, the sports centre attracts regular ("secular") gym lovers. Mosque community members also organize hikes and practice outdoors fitness activities.[2]

The third instance is from Kazan. Due to the piety movement's politically ambiguous standing vis-à-vis the secular state and the majority of Tatarstanis, some high-visibility performances of piety, such as daily prayer (*namaz*) in congregation, are sometimes carried out in a hushed fashion. Russia's secularist public sphere, forged through Soviet irreligiosity and permeated by securitarian paranoias about religious fundamentalism (Kravchenko 2018; Yusupova 2019), has literally little *room* for *namaz* outside "authorized" places of worship: praying outside a mosque risks being considered suspiciously close to "fanaticism". Although places of worship have opened, there is still a shortage of mosques in many parts of Kazan's Russian-built city centre. Observant Muslim students are among those who are confronted with this problem. Many interlocutors who attended university in Kazan reported with a half-smile about how they would gather in small groups in dusty, dark, quiet corners of the university building during prayer times. There, at the bottom of a staircase or in a poorly lit basement corridor, they would pull out prayer rugs and perform *namaz*. "Underground prayer" (*namaz v podvale*) is talked about with a proud feeling of integrity, which extends to the quiet nooks where prayer rugs are unfolded.[3]

Another comparable if less remarkable case of "making room" for prayer in "profane" settings is the carving out of *namaz* corners in non-religious social occasions – such as, in Image 3, wedding receptions. These can take a gamut of different forms: the weddings of devout pietists are "halal" from start to end, but secular (*svetskie*) Tatar couples (a majority in Kazan, according to a friend who organizes events) normally opt for "mainstream" receptions, with drinks, music, non-Muslim guests, and without dress-code or gender uniformity, after *nikakh* at the mosque. That picture was taken at one of such

Image 3. Behind the scenes: a "hidden" corner for namaz at a "secular" wedding reception in Kazan.

"mainstream" receptions, at which the not-particularly-devout newlyweds had a *namaz* corner arranged for more pious Tatar guests.

Lastly, consider devout pietists' recurrent dilemma as to whether to participate in national folk festivals such as the summer celebration of Sabantuy, cherished by most Tatars as an expression of national pride and beloved by children, but often involving drunken revelling, loud music, and "immodest" dancing. In the past few years, grassroots Muslim groups have started organizing "halal Sabantuys" in quiet peri-urban groves, featuring traditional games, food, and sober conviviality, but *sans* alcohol and ethnic-techno tunes.

Speaking of halalness and space, we readily think of restaurants and cafes, shops, supermarkets, and so forth. However, examples like the ones above, to which interlocutors clearly attribute considerable importance – not just individually, but at the community level on which they are shared as exemplary –, invite us to frame the spatiality of Islamic piety beyond the conceptual box of bounded (and religiously marked) locales or "sites". I am not proposing to completely abandon a focus on physical urban landscapes and the "punctual" items therein. Instead, I am proposing to broaden the scope of the conversation by paying special attention to a wider lifeworld animated by *practices* of piety that include, and intertwine, worshipping, learning, consuming ethically, caring for the body, socializing, studying, having fun, working, using money, and in general "being alive" (Ingold 2011) *as pietists*. All of these practices take place in lived environments, and make places out of lived environments.

Pietaskscape: a conceptual outline

I propose the notion of piety taskscape as a conceptual aid for this refocusing operation. Piety taskscape or, for the lovers of tongue-in-cheek "scape" neologisms (Porteous 1990), "pietaskscape", combines *pietas* (Lat. "piety, dutiful conduct") and "taskscape", thereby signalling its indebtedness to Foucauldian literature on ethics as self-cultivation, on the one hand, and to phenomenology, human geography, and ecological psychology, on the other.

Building on the Foucauldian-Asadian tradition in the study of Islamic ethics (Asad 1986; Anjoum 2007; Foucault 2010, 343–354; 2011; Mahmood 2012), but also with a nod to Kierkegaard's moral philosophy (on points of overlaps between Kierkegaard and Foucault,[4] see McDonald 1996; Ohaneson 2019), here *pietas* refers to the fashioning of religious subjectivities, *askesis*, the cultivation of virtues, and, ultimately, the pursuit of salvation under the aegis of Islam's discursive tradition. Here I am particularly interested in what I call *performances* of piety, i.e. the material, spatialized actions through which "inward" work-on-the-self is carried *out*. According to Kierkegaard, the "ethical individual" inwardly cultivates their God-relationship in countless outward ways and settings: even an outing in a leisure-inviting city park might well be a setting of the most intense inward labour, perhaps even more than a conventional place of worship (2016, 244–252). This applies to pious Muslims, too. It must be emphasized that in Islam, the principal witness of a performance of piety is God (other pietists are important, but secondary), and God is, subjectively, *omnipresent*. Performances of piety vary from physically strenuous efforts like cleansing meat processing machinery to casual activities like checking labels in a supermarket, but the everyday life of pietists is primarily composed of mundane, everyday actions carried out with both ethical purpose and cultivated spontaneity (Laidlaw 2014, 147).

Taskscape is a concept devised by phenomenology-influenced geo-anthropologist Tim Ingold to foreground how environments/lifeworlds are simultaneously experienced and produced through spatialized human actions/practices, rather than being "objectively", abstractly given. "Just as the landscape is an array of related features, so – by analogy – the taskscape is an array of related activities" (2000, 195). It goes without saying that "task", for this paper's purposes, stands for the labour of *askesis* under Islam's ethical tradition: the performance of piety. At first sight, Ingold's intellectual predilection (2000, 2011) for the animist religiosity of hunter-gatherers, his commitment to blurring the boundary between humans and nature, and his emphasis on organic spontaneity, may appear distant from a form of piety premised on Axial scripturalism, rational-reflexive intentionality, a cosmology simultaneously theocentric and anthropocentric, and a modernist *Weltanschauung*. And so they are, but Ingold's model remains useful nonetheless. Muslim pietists too, being humans in an environment, enter in resonance

with space, shaping and being shaped by their lifeworlds as they go about making and remaking themselves.

Another concept that has informed the idea of pietaskscape is Webb Keane's notion of *ethical affordance*, in turn derived from James Gibson's ecological psychology (2014; cf. Ingold 2011, 77–79 for a phenomenological take). Keane defines ethical affordances as "any aspects of people's experiences and perceptions that they might draw on in the process of making ethical evaluations and decisions, whether consciously or not" (2016, 27). Just like a chair cognitively *invites* people to sit down (cognitive affordance), certain "objective features" of reality invite people to act ethically. Ethical affordances may be circumstances, encounters, speech acts, but also "material forms".

Keane does not elaborate further on this aspect. Here I argue that spaces infused with pietists' ethical intensity transmit, amplify, and consolidate piety affordances. Gibson observed that humans intervene upon their environments in order to change what they afford them (2014, 56). Pietists make no exception. Performances of *askesis* shape and transform bodies and selves, generating intensified solidarity and purpose among those who have cultivated the right predisposition (Id., 57), that is, fellow pietists (Hirschkind 2006). But whenever possible, pious practice feeds back into spaces and environments, changing them to make ethical affordances more available. Pietaskscapes thus *make room* for further ethical action.

Some piety affordances operate physically/materially. Religiously-charged accoutrements such as Quranic calligraphies, a clock marking prayer times, or fragrances such as musk and ambergris may be explicitly conducive to God-conscious conduct. In other cases, such as the 1990s meat factory, it is industrial machinery's potential to manufacture food for hundreds of co-religionists that invites ethical action. Other affordances operate immaterially: through atmospheres, as in the case of the university basement's silence and privacy, or through in-the-moment arrangements, such as gender uniformity or regulated gender mixing. Image 4 was taken at a social event organized by a Muslim youth organization to foster friendships and meet potential marriage candidates: the mood was informal and warm, but not unrestrained, with male and female participants playing out conversation, activities, games, etc. while maintaining a discreetly choreographed pattern of physical distance and gender uniformity. The example of other, more experienced pietists – their manner of speech, comportment, gestures, etc. – may also afford pious conduct. Piety affordances emerge on account of ethical labour that people carry out in their surroundings, habitually or spontaneously, regularly or occasionally, in purpose-built spaces or surreptitiously. Either way, taskscapes are contingent on intentionality. Not coincidentally, ethical subjects' religious purpose (*niyat*) is a recurrent theme of conversation among pietists – which allows me to remark, in passing, that mobilizing the

Image 4. Choreographed gender mixing at a social event for Muslim youth. Photo: Teo Benussi.

concept of ethical affordances does not amount to attributing agency to non-human actants, even though for Muslim pietists, action is guided by an inward relationship with the Divine.

To summarize (and to provide a definition), the notion of piety taskscape or pietaskscape indicates: (a) the array of activities/performances of piety that take place under the aegis of an ethical-teleological framework, (b) the meshwork of lived environments/spatial configurations that ethical strivings bring into being, and (c) the emerging piety affordances that make spatial configurations conducive to further ethical action. The three aspects are intertwined and can only be isolated through analytical abstraction.

The challenges of writing on spatialized piety

The question arising whenever a fresh concept is minted (especially one that is such a mouthful), is always the same: Do we really need it? And why? My answer is that the piety taskscape framework allows for higher analytical precision than alternative approaches to religion and space, while retaining sufficient versatility to be applicable beyond the spheres of Islam and halal. Let me make my case clearer by isolating a series of conceptual challenges that the notion of pietaskscape allows us to address in original ways.

Discussions of Islamic spaces have often given centre stage to places of worship and devotion – mosques, shrines, pilgrimage sites, and so forth (Harris and Dawut 2002; Harris 2015; Walton 2015; Fatima 2016; Di Puppo

and Schmoller 2019, 2020). Such landscape features, thanks to their concreteness and their clear ("objective") function, make for a relatively comfortable subject of social-scientific treatment. But as worthwhile as it is to study such sites, they do not exhaust the picture of piety. On the contrary, an exclusive focus on established spaces of devotion – apart from belying a secularist assumption that religious life can be "contained" in ad-hoc locations (Asad 2002; more on this below) – risks blinding us to far broader lifeworlds and far more subjectively rich experiences and engagements with space. Pietists insist that ethical striving and God-consciousness define all aspects, and all locations, of their waking lives. Which leads me to the first challenge: taskscape allows us to foreground and conceptually frame the three-dimensional, granular, ubiquitous, and subjective unfolding of ethical life without siloing *pietas* into ready-made "boxes" of devotionalism and ceremonialism.

Of course, the past two decades have witnessed a flourishing of studies dealing with self-cultivation, striving, and ethical passion in Islam (Anjoum 2007; Mahmood 2012; Fadil and Fernando 2015). Some of the most influential studies in this tradition have explored issues of space-making (Hirschkind 2006), opening the path for contributions like this one.

Yet these works reveal a seeming paradox: Islam's ethical tradition rests upon revealed texts that claim universal truthfulness – and universal truths do not easily "let themselves be territorialized" (Rancière 1994, 91). Islamic ethics is thus "portable" (Metcalf 1996, 6), and may therefore be seen to transcend, or even *defy*, spatialisation/localisation. Headscarves (Bowen 2007) provide pious women with the possibility of moving safely in spaces dominated by irreligious norms or rendered fraught by strangers' fields of view. The practice of listening to sermons through small players (Hirschkind 2006) allows pious Muslims to navigate the often-unsympathetic environment of the secular city. From a certain angle, ethical practices may be interpreted as erecting – to borrow Caroline Humphrey's metaphor (1996, 204) – a portable "citadel" around pietists' bodies, thus establishing a separation from not-necessarily-pious backgrounds.[5] From a different angle, though, controversies about veiling and about the disruptive effects of Islamic sounds – Quranic recitation, preaching, or calling to prayer – in public places show that performances of piety reverberate *beyond* the boundaries of religionists' bodies and selves. This is the second challenge: taskscape brings space more firmly into the foreground of discussions of Islamic ethics, exploring how pietists produce ethically-loaded environments capable of affecting those who inhabit/experience them.

Lastly, in recent years there has been a growth in scholarly interest in halal issues (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer, and Lever 2015; Christians and Yakin, forthcoming). For the purpose of this paper, I focus on two contributions that resonate with the notion of pietaskscape: Mona Harb and Lara Deeb's (2013) work on the "moral geography" of "conservative" cafes in Beirut and Iwona

Kaliszewska's contribution on the "halal landscape" of entrepreneurs in Dagestan, Russia (2020). These authors have opened fresh ethnographic ground at the intersection of space and Muslim life by takingcafes/leisure and workplaces/business, respectively, as their objects of investigation. Kaliszewska's excellent paper, in particular, goes in a direction comparable with mine on account of its Ingoldian emphasis on practices. Given our shared agendas, it is opportune to explain why I feel the need to depart from the conceptual/methodological frameworks of these works. First, the notion of "moral geography" mobilized by Harb and Deeb is vague and worn-out, to the point that its analytical sharpness can hardly be taken for granted. The concept has been used with reference to widely dissimilar subjects, from the spatial materialization of community values to the right to the city, from ecological justice to premodern settlements – and the list could expand (Smith 2000). By contrast, Kaliszewsta's choice of framing her informants' "landscapes" as "halal" is context-specific and based on emic registers. However, this label is not self-explanatory outside the field of theology, and it does not tell us much about what patterns of conduct lie behind the term and its uses. Furthermore, it might be too specific: in post-Soviet Russia, Islamic piety is vernacularized in terms of halal/haram, but as Harb and Deeb's study indicates, this is not universal. Such a framing thus risks hindering comparison/triangulation, both across regions and across religious confessions. Finally, but crucially, Kaliszewska's "landscape" metaphor is somewhat misleading (her paper does not deal specifically with landscapes), and above all it defeats the purpose of adopting an Ingoldian perspective that focuses on action rather than physical features (*land*scape).

Second, both contributions end up marking particular categories of place (respectively: cafes, workplaces), activities (leisure, business and money management), or Muslim "profiles" (consumer, entrepreneurs). While this makes sense in the economy of the respective works, this operation retains an element of arbitrary pigeonholing. As we know, from a religious viewpoint, ethical intensity unfurls holistically and does not belong to any bounded domains of activity. Thus taskscape meets the third challenge: to frame discussions on halal and space in a way that is at once nuanced, analytically sharp, and conducive to widening the scope for conceptualization and comparison.

Producing Islamic pietaskscapes

The notion of pietaskscape has allowed me to unburden myself of approaches that explicitly or implicitly frame space as organized in bounded locations, some of which a-priori invested with "religiousness" or "halalness", instead following pietists along "the myriad of pathways they take […] as they go about their daily tasks" (Ingold 2011, 146). This has

opened new vistas on ethical life as it blossoms in mundane, easily-overlooked settings – a university building, a swimming pool, a clearing in the wood, etc. I do, however, reiterate that pietists' taskscapes also include "expectable" places, such as prayer halls or halal cafes. Specifically, such settings may be regarded as relatively stable nodes in a broader, richer, varied collective "meshwork" of subjective pathways, "lines and dots", vibrant with ethical intentionality (Ingold 2011, 150). Although some such "knots" may be more or less crystallised, more or less lastingly inscribed into built environments, pietaskscapes emerge organically "from below". Earlier in this paper and in a different contribution (Benussi 2020), I have referred, for example, to how Tatarstan's stable infrastructure of halal factories and restaurants has grown out of rented equipment and makeshift, temporary vending stalls. Permanent physical landscape/cityscape features are the outcome of the aggregate needs and initiatives of Muslim subjects intent on changing their lifeworld's affordances in order, ultimately, to change themselves.

As spatial configurations, Islamic pietaskscapes are produced (Lefebvre 1991, 73) at the intersection of lived environments, human subjects, and Islam's discursive tradition. Engaging with Islam's discursive tradition requires modelling one's inner life and outer conduct in accordance with injunctions/examples ultimately derived from the Quran and Sunna (Anjoum 2007). To do so, subjects make use of a plethora of piety affordances, both material and immaterial: books, sermons, role-models, hijabs, mosques, halal logos, gender separation, and other behaviours and setups compliant with Islam's body of doctrine. These affordances may occupy physical space (books, prayer rugs), imply movement in space (prayer, ethical consumption), or dictate certain spatial organization (gender separation). At the same time, *negative* affordances (Gibson 2014) such as sensual distractions (loud music, erotic imagery), doctrinally inappropriate features (idols, icons), forbidden/disapproved behaviours (unregulated gender mixing, interest loans), or spiritually harmful substances (pork meat, alcohol) are either avoided or actively removed (cf. Deeb and Harb 2013, 8).

Let us make this less abstract through the most mundane example – shopping in a supermarket. The majority of supermarkets in Tatarstan sell halal products (there are also entirely halal-certified supermarkets). Devout shoppers move in space, scan the shelves, check labels, discuss and deliberate (more halal-trustworthy products may cost more), balancing personal preferences, financial considerations, and reflectively-chosen ethical obligations. A word/logo, often in Arabic (حلال: a snippet of theology and jurisprudence), beckons, affords action. A supremely quotidian space, a supermarket aisle, becomes a setting for deliberation, even temptation (those jellies look inviting, but might there be pork gelatine – "hidden haram" – in there?), and ethical choice. The taskscape of piety is a mosaic of micro-performances that include reading labels and resisting jelly temptations.

Affordances (including negative ones) present themselves to those who have the suitable subjective predisposition (in Gibsonian terms, an updraft affords flying only to individuals predisposed to flying, either naturally or artificially). Predisposition can be cultivated, enhanced, or caused: "behaviour affords behaviour" (Gibson 2014, 58). This is particularly true of piety affordances. It takes at least some degree of previous engagement with Islam's discursive tradition to "read" one's material surroundings as a lifeworld brimming with actionable affordance for ethical living. Only someone taking *namaz* seriously will apprehend the silence of a university basement as an invitation to pray. Conversely, even a "blatant" piety affordance such as a halal logo might be completely lost on a non-Muslim subject.

The feeding loop of affordances and ethical conduct infuses pietaskscape "knots" with characteristic moods or atmospheres. Atmospheres are, in fact, no less important than the physical characteristics of a space of piety. I note in passing that, while anthropologists and social scientists have been increasingly attentive to atmospheres (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015; Schroer and Schmitt 2018), this topic's relation to ethical life remains little studied.[6] By grafting Ingold's phenomenological outlook on space-making, with its explicit focus on atmosphere (2011, 126ff), onto scholarly approaches to pious conduct that account for its spatial reverberations (Hirschkind 2006), this contribution hopes to invite more conversations about the ambiences of piety.

My interlocutors, for instance, insisted that a good halal café is not just free from pork/haram meat and alcohol, but also warmly *affordative*: a setting where ethical consumption and performances of piety can take place with ease and comfort ("*khalyal'nenko*": cosily halal). Objects, such as calligraphies, may contribute to setting the right tone, but ambience is more than a matter of furniture and décor (Thibaud 2015), as shown by the festively pious atmosphere of "halal Sabantuys" that take place in groves or parks. A decisive role is played by the vibrancy that comes from shared commitment, manifest in behaviour (for instance, gender norms), attire (modest garments, beards), speech, and other manifestations of what Inge Daniels aptly glosses as "choreography of groupism" (2015, 50). Another example is the atmosphere of heightened "ethical passion" (Kierkegaard 2016) that my interviewee from East Tatarstan reported when he reminisced about working in the meat factory – against the clock, exhaustingly, yet enthusiastically and in the company of like-minded brothers-in-faith. If atmospheres always express the "existential value" of places (Thibaud 2015, 41), this is particularly true of atmospheres of piousness, saturated, as they are, with God-consciousness.

In light of all the above, how are we to understand the proliferation of halal signage and related visible signs of Islamicness in the streets and supermarket aisles of Tatarstan (note: halal certification and related deliberations/debates are beyond the scope of this paper)? To begin with, it goes

without saying, these signs are piety affordances, enabling a Muslim's action and movement in lifeworlds shared with other communities. But what exactly does a halal logo, neon sign, or framed certificate hanging on a wall tell us about a given establishment? Adapting Peircean terminology to a problem of anthropology of religion, I argue that halal signage is a material *index* of Muslims' pietaskscape. In making this argument, I follow Roy Rappaport's intuition (1999) that religious commitment is not communicated through symbolic or iconic language but through indexicality.[7] Indices are signs that do not represent, but manifest, and are evidence of, that which they signify: similarly to "a dark cloud [which] does not symbolize but *indicates*, or is an index of, rain" (id., 14, emphasis added), or smoke being an index of fire, halal signs *index* – are evidence of – halal consumption in the city. Let us proceed with caution: halal logos cannot directly index, for instance, whether a cut of meat was sourced through Islamic slaughtering – after all, the vendor might be using it fraudulently. What a halal logo *does* index is that in a given community there is a critical number of people, both among producers and among consumers, who care about Islamic ritual and conduct, make their choices accordingly, and will respond to related affordances. Hence: halal signage is not *primarily* about marking a specific typology of urban landscape features, symbolically alluding to faith identities, etc. – those are post-factum operations which may or may not take place. Rather, it is (a) a piety affordance that guides ethical consumption, and (b) the visible tip of an iceberg of piety, a "Peircean" manifestation of the concerns and strivings of an ethically-oriented Muslim community, which in themselves cannot be photographed, mapped, or geo-localised.

Piety unmoored

The fact that Islamic ethics resists confinement has long been established (Hirschkind 2006; Bowen 2007), but the notion of pietaskscape allows us to follow pious Muslims closely as they move in space – from mundane activities like stopping at the grocery store to major shifts like, say, establishing a new faith community in a remote oil town in the Russian North. Ethical subjects perform piety, respond to ethically actionable prompts/cues and scan their surroundings for them, and intervene on/engage with their lifeworlds (sometimes – or somewhere – permanently, but often not) through individual and collective action. High-visibility landscape features such as halal signs are the tip of the much richer and more fluid taskscape of a community's ethical life. In addition to halal establishments, in Tatarstan/Russia, there are other spatial configurations associated with the "Islamic revival". Let me focus on three such spatial configurations – heritage sites, pilgrimage sites, and religious architecture – and reflect on their respective relationships with pietist taskscapes.

Post-Soviet political restructuring initiated a flourishing of religiously-connoted, and in Tatarstan, specifically "Islamic", *heritage sites*. These sites hinge upon material traces of the region's Muslim past: ruins of ancient mosques, mausoleums, pre-Revolutionary buildings. These landscape features become invested with the local political elites and institutions' intent to "make Russia multicultural" – with Moscow's supervision and support (Graney 2007; Kinossian 2012; Plets 2015) – through infrastructural investment (renovation, musealisation, even Disneyfication) and political storytelling (Graney 2007; see Yusupova 2016). Heritage projects are so laden with the overlapping, sometimes contradictory myths and visions that they cannot even start to be unpacked here. Suffice it to say that Muslim pietists have a nuanced relationship with such places, with some cosmopolitan scripturalists expressing aloofness vis-à-vis what they see as little more than localist politicking, and ethnic-minded religionists (Yusupova 2018) embracing these sites as powerful symbols of Tatar identity and resilience. The extent to which heritage sites can be included among Muslim pietaskscapes rests with the subjectivity of individual pietists. Kierkegaard argued against religiosity based on "outward" social identities (2016), and many Muslim scripturalists would agree. However, many others would respond that embracing one's Islamic history is not only compatible with but conducive to virtuous conduct. A museum or a piece of ancient architecture, then, might become a piety affordance. Either way, heritage sites may be conceptually distinguished from pietaskscapes in terms of the *primary* intentionality behind them. Heritage sites are first and foremost storytelling mechanisms for the broadcasting of politically-charged discourses about the country's identity – and Islam's *specific* place therein – to a citizenry that includes both Muslims and non-Muslims. Piety taskscapes, by contrast, manifest (*index*) the religious passion of individuals and communities who are subjectively/holistically engaged with Islam's discursive tradition, beyond any "specific" place.

Second, the past decades have witnessed a growing interest in "traditional" *pilgrimage sites* in Tatarstan (Urazmanova et al. 2014; Di Puppo and Schmoller 2019). Again, scripture-oriented pietists are ambivalent towards such places, on the ground of the weak doctrinal foundations of "folk" devotion, and, to some extent, because of the aura of provincialism that some younger Muslims, steeped in the cosmopolitan and modernist ethos of reform movements, attribute to local pilgrimage. Although local holy sites are very popular, they often attract individuals who are *not* particularly observant (even Russians and other non-Muslims flock there) and whose main motivation is tapping into the thaumaturgical power attributed to such sites. Local pilgrimage practices attribute miraculous agency to landscape features such as water springs, often with the mediation/legitimation of legendary saintly figures allegedly buried therein. To reform-minded pietists, however, even though "nature is the work of God, […] God is not there"

(Kierkegaard 2016, 225): according to orthodox Sunnism, attributing supernatural agency to actors other than God even risks trespassing into idolatry. Therefore, local holy sites' status vis-à-vis piety taskscapes is ambiguous. Many of my observant respondents, especially those with some engagement with Salafi theology, exclude such places from their pietaskscapes. On the other hand, there are currents in Islam that tolerate or encourage local pilgrimages (Schmoller 2020). For those religionists, visits to holy sites might well be a high-intensity performance of *pietas*: the answer can only be subjective. Again, however, it is worth underlining the specific dynamics at play in pilgrimage sites: the primary human activity that underpins these spatial configurations is the harnessing of supernatural forces for the purpose of healing through supernatural means, rather than the cultivation of virtues and the teleological fashioning of selves "for the sake of God alone".

Third, the end of state atheism has spelled the multiplication of religious architectures. Why do I include such spaces in this section? Are mosques not part of the piety taskscape? Of course they are: mosques are replete with ethical affordances and house performances of piety which include praying, learning, discussing religion, making ablutions, breaking the fast during Ramadan, etc. However, the story does not end here: mosques are also buildings, landscapes elements, pieces of urban décor. Something has to be said about *mosques as architectural-urban sites*. In such a capacity, mosques belong not only to pietists and their pietaskscape (and ultimately to God), but also to the modern city and the modern public at large. Whether they are restored or newly built, baroque or brutalist, mosques are admired, pointed at from tourist buses, used as scenic backgrounds during photo-sessions or as picturesque tourist landmarks, particularly by individuals who are not predisposed to apprehend them as piety affordances. They are engaged with *aesthetically*, rather than ethically (this extends to soundscapes: think of the Orientalist fascination with the call to prayer, used as romantic/exotic muzak in countless films). A respected Tatar imam once told me that one can spot a very recent convert or an undercover FSB agent by how timidly, awkwardly they move in a prayer hall – a pietist, he reasoned, moves "assuredly, with ease" both during worship and in his/her interactions with other mosque-goers. An out-group's engagement with a mosque, by contrast, often stops at its threshold: it is not rare, walking around in Kazan's Old Tatar Quarter, to spot tourists peeking through the doorway of a historical mosque, without quite resolving to step in. Consider the ambivalence: inside, mosques are places of piety in which human actions express the absolute sovereignty of God; outside, and *as outsides*, they are sites in a "secular" cityscape – a modern lifeworld in which Islam is not necessarily unwelcome, but is *placed* (literally: territorially bounded) under the aestheticizing gaze of out-groups and the tutelage of the civic and state authorities.

Clearly, Islamic heritage sites, pilgrimage sites, and aesthetic urban sites are conceptually distinct places (although in practice they often overlap). However, they share a characteristic that might be defined, using a Deleuzian term, as *molarity*. This geographical-philosophical concept is associated with boundedness, centrality/sedentariness, objectivity, and the condition of existing as specific points on a map (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The word "site" itself suggests spatial configurations construed and experienced as punctual landscape items: well-defined, iconic, stable, centripetal. In different ways and on accounts of different intentionalities, Islamic *sites* are "molar" places where religion becomes "moored" onto specific, circumscribed portions of space. Molarity is opposed to *molecularity*, which is associated with movement, becoming, subjectivity, and the granular, spontaneous flow of life – and is one of the main inspirations for Ingold's concept of taskscapes (2000, 2011, 13–14, 83–84). I have stressed that "molar" sites may well, and, indeed, often do afford/host performances of ethical striving, but they do so as parts of "molecular" pietaskscapes that resist territorialization and a-priori taxonomising.

In post-Soviet Tatarstan, as in many other secular orders (Asad 2002; Kierkegaard 2016, 238), molarity goes hand in hand with the "modern" dynamic of framing religion as a separate domain – no longer suppressed as was the case during state atheism but corralled into ad-hoc "silos" by extra-religious authorities. This logic is particularly visible in heritage sites and aesthetic cityscapes, through which Islam is allocated defined portions of space and rendered publicly accessible through the prism of history, culture, and local colour. But "traditional" pilgrimage sites, too, can be subsumed within it, e.g. by adding a layer of heritage or tourist infrastructure. On account of their tendency to arrange locations into *taxa*, "objectivist" approaches to place risk lending this organization an "objective" rationalization. Now, we know that pietaskscapes inherently elude this spatial organization. To pietists, in fact, such a separation of spheres is precisely what must be overcome, even at the cost of going against assumptions about the "proper" place of religion which, in Tatarstan, are shared by many non-observant Tatars.

On account of the state's hands-on approach to the monitoring of Islam in Tatarstan, "unmoored" spaces of piety tend to be carved out quietly, near-invisibly, as in the case of the university basement. But Islamic piety's tendency to overflow the silos of post-Soviet secularity comes with the potential for some trouble. Consider, for example, the words of this pious interviewee: "We [Muslims] need censorship. If individual, personal self-censorship is necessary, I think I could do with some generic, public censorship as well. I think I have a right to environments free from sexualized or violent images, and lewd music". This man voices the aspiration to intervene upon his surroundings to excise negative affordances. But what constitutes an affordance depends on subjective predispositions and concerns: a call to censor may run

counter to the self-expression of other groups, or more generally impinge on the (supposed) "neutrality" of the public sphere.

Relatedly, performances of piety can generate exclusionary effects. Atmospheres that pietists find warm, cosy, and welcoming might come across as off-putting or even intimidating to nonpracticing individuals, as some "secular" interlocutors told me with regards to certain halal establishments and mosques. Attire, language habits, gender mixing expectations, modesty parameters, the entire implicit "choreographies of groupism" of pietists – all these details may reinforce the boundary between in-groups and out-groups. Islam's pietaskscapes elude the secular-modern logic of pursuing a pluralist domain by distinguishing sacred from profane and private from public (Hirschkind 2006). Even though they are based on the universalist message of Revelation, pietaskscapes are not universally inclusive nor pluralist – they welcome those who are prepared to heed the Holy Book's message and let themselves be transformed by it.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I have explored the spatial dimension of "halal living" in post-Soviet Tatarstan by advancing the notion of piety taskscape – "pietaskscape" – as a conceptual framework capable of grasping Muslim pietists' experiences of, and engagement with, their lived environments. This framework, however, is not necessarily limited to geographically or confessionally specific case-studies. By linking action (performances of *pietas*), space (spatial configurations), and intentionality (piety affordances), pietaskscape accounts for the subjective experiences of singular religionists – mindful of the Kierkegaardian dictum that in matters of religion, subjectivity is paramount – as well as the aggregate, molecular effects that the collective practices of communities of faith have on their lifeworlds.

Through a discursive juxtaposition of pietaskscape to alternative theoretical formulations and different modes of organizing "Islamic" space, I have illustrated how Islamic *askesis* takes *place* in myriad mundane settings and situations, with devout Muslims tracing a meshwork of "lines and dots" in space as they strive towards salvation and self-improvement. Through numerous examples, I have shown that the three-dimensionality of Islamic spiritual passion is not exhausted in locations that external observers would "objectively" identify as Islamic. Above all, I have argued that with the proper analytical equipment, it is possible to look at the concreteness and physical embeddedness of religious life while maintaining a respectfully subject-centred scholarly focus.

Although I have no ambitions to claim that pietaskscape is the only way to frame the spatial unfolding of religious-ethical life, I submit that this concept may help defy and complicate the siloisation of religion, add a new and

sharper instrument to the "moral geographies" toolbox, and suggest fresh ways to describe how ethical labour not only changes strivers' interiorities, but simultaneously affects their outer, material worlds as well. At bottom, pietaskscape is one way of capturing the vicissitudes of humans in the pursuit of a transcendental God amidst earthly surfaces, matter, objects, and bodies.

Notes

1. For the merits and challenges of engaging with theology from an anthropological/social-scientific perspective, see Robbins (2006) and note 3.
2. During my stay in Tübän Kama, I heard about plans to open a Muslim-friendly gym in a nearby city. I have visited Muslim-frequented (although not explicitly "Islamic") sports facilities in other Volga region urban centres as well.
3. While the Oriental Studies faculty provided a prayer room for staff and students in 2015, as of 2019 the room's door was, reportedly, permanently closed.
4. Of course, the Kiekegaardian and the Foucauldian-Asadian perspectives ought not to be conflated: the former emanates from modern-era Protestantism and proto-existentialism, the latter from late modernity's neo-Marxist and post-colonial social theories. The former foregrounds the paradoxes and inner torments of Christian life, the latter how subjects come about through mechanisms of power and authority. The former focuses on individuality, the latter on politics. Yet – and although an exhaustive discussion of how Kierkegaard can be put in conversation with anthropological/social theory lies beyond the scope of this work – striking parallels can be pointed out. Both perspectives frame subjectivity as a site for/the outcome of self-formation processes endowed with biographical as well as historical dimensions. Both approaches mount a sophisticated critique of the modern condition, while also recognizing modernity as a crucible of *both* secularism and religious piety. Both, lastly, recognize in theology a powerful tool for subjectivity-making, discerning a pronounced emancipatory potential in religion.
5. Tellingly, the term *purdah* used with regards to integral female covering comes from a Persian noun that means "curtain" – which migrated into Tatar as *pärdä* –, originally indicating a spatial delimitation.
6. Within the anthropology of religion, it is mostly studies of ritual that have taken "moods" into consideration.
7. Although Rappaport formulated this argument in the context of a discussion of ritual, his intuition can be applied to different religious performances as well, including expression of piety and the cultivation of virtues.

Acknowledgments

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement 843901. I thank Tobias Müller, Adela Taleb, Chris Moses, the ERS editorial team, and my reviewers for their critical role in this paper's journey. I am grateful to Ruiyi Zhu, Mansur Gazimzyanov, Matt Candea, Olivier Allard, Menna Al Sheiby, and Marie Aurelie for the fruitful discussions and helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The writing of this article was supported by H2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions [grant number 843901].

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