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### **ABSTRACT**

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Panel: **Religion and Urban Spaces**

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### **FLEXIBLE TOPOGRAPHIES: MUSLIM SPACES IN GERMAN CITYSCAPES**

Mosques are central in the lives of many pious Muslims in German cities. Yet there are many other permanent and transient spaces where Muslim interactions unfold. The lives of pious Muslims – like anybody else’s – largely take place outside mosques. They are located in neighborhoods, work places, schools, streets, parks, public transportation, or stores. In these contexts individuals and groups mark certain places and interactions as Muslim, i.e. inspired by Muslim beliefs and practices. Such permanent spaces include facilities in secular cultural centers where some Qur’an study circles regularly meet, or private homes which people arrange and decorate to reflect their religiosities. Other spaces are of a more transient nature. They are marked as Islamic by specific encounters, discursive practices and material items.

This paper examines transient urban Muslim spaces, their construction, temporary use and relevance for diverse Muslims. Based on several years of ethnographic fieldwork in Stuttgart, Germany, I illustrate how individuals mark or inhabit spaces momentarily as Muslim spaces. At least for the length of a particular encounter, these spaces ought to be used by those involved in manners that reflect Islamic rules and sensitivities. If, for example, one person greets another with “Salam Aleikum” (instead of more secular greetings) on the street and the two individuals start to chat, this greeting for many sets the tone for the conversation and interaction as a one framed by a Muslim idiom. Subsequently, this street corner momentarily becomes a

Muslim space, and an extension of the global Muslim *ummah* (community of Muslims believers). The street corner space, turned transient part of the Muslim *ummah*, becomes one element of a growing topography of similar Muslim spaces in German/European cityscapes. Local social norms are momentarily suspended and Islamically inspired ones take their place. While the street corner space is transient, other spaces become semi-permanent, in particular, in neighborhoods with larger Muslim populations. The local playground becomes a female space, where elderly women socialize, often in the absence of any children. The front yard of the local Turkish café becomes a male Muslim space where men sit in front of empty tables during the month of Ramadan.

Introducing spaces and spatial encounters, I analyze beliefs and dynamics that undergird these topographies. I argue that dynamics of small urban Muslim spaces illustrate both processes of the localization of Muslims in Europe, and their simultaneous integration into the global *ummah*. I illustrate how the creation of transient or semi-permanent urban Muslim spaces is a multi-layered and at times contested process, as Muslims of diverse religiosities do not necessarily agree on the nature of resulting spatialities. Some prefer secular greetings and spaces over religious ones which produces tension and compromises. Finally, I demonstrate how diverse Muslim topographies are framed by broader urban dynamics which are frequently characterized by prejudice, resentment and discrimination in German cities. These hinder the production of Muslim topographies or push them into particular working class/migrant neighborhoods.