

Fieldwork in-between architecture and anthropology: The case of Marxloh - Duisburg

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ABSTRACT: Architecture and anthropology have long had similar interests regarding the built environment and its relationship to social life. While architecture has traditionally held the material aspects of the built form as its focus, seeing the built structure as an end in itself, anthropological studies considered the built form as a means to gain further insight into different sociocultural practices. Developments over the last few decades have changed the direction of both disciplines. With architecture's break from modernism and universalism, more architects began creating buildings for culturally specific contexts (Stender, 2017). At the same time, anthropology, along with other branches of the social sciences, took a "spatial turn," developing an interest in space, place and their human and non-human interaction with an emphasis on the performative nature of the built environment: what architecture does, rather than what it represents (Buchli, 2013). Despite different foci, the approaches of anthropology and architecture to the same subject allowed for significant methodological and theoretical overlap, and therefore potential for collaboration. In this paper, I explore this potential. In order to do so, I examine the historical links between anthropology and architecture as academic disciplines, identify religious architecture as a potential area of collaboration, and present the preliminary results of my ethnographic fieldwork in Duisburg, Germany.

KEYWORDS: Architecture, Anthropological methods, religious architecture, ethnographic fieldwork, Marxloh

INTRODUCTION

During a period of research in which I asked questions to the users of the Turkish commissioned mosques in Duisburg about the architecture of the mosque, I regularly faced interventions by my informants requesting that I stop posing questions about the architecture of the mosque. My participants argued that the essence of religion lies in individual faith, community, charitable deeds and rituals. As Verkaaik summarizes it, "the soul of the building lies in its people, not in the material of which it is made" (2013, 8). But then, I asked, why spend such a large amount of money to build a mosque? Although many Muslims insist that one can perform their religious duties anywhere, it is not uncommon for poor immigrant communities in Europe to raise millions of euros to fund the construction of a community mosque. Apparently, despite the religious dogma, buildings do matter (Verkaaik 2013).

One answer to this disparity can be explained through anthropological methodology, developed after the publication of Malinowski's influential work: *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). His argument is based on the idea that there exists a divergence between ideology and practice, claiming that people do not always say what they do, nor do what they say.

Architecture and anthropology have substantial common ground regarding issues such as the form of the human dwelling, spatial organization of the built environment, and their relationship to social life. Although they approach these topics with different foci in mind, recent developments have changed the direction of both disciplines. Differential approaches to the same subjects have created significant potential for collaboration.

In this paper, I examine this potential in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches. In order to do so, I first review earlier overlaps and encounters between the two academic disciplines. I argue that combining anthropology's "spatial turn" and architecture's break from modernism and universalism allows for an intriguing contribution. After presenting a literature review of studies in the area of religious architecture that have used anthropological methodologies, I discuss the preliminary results of my fieldwork in the mosque spaces of Marxloh in Duisburg, Germany.

1.0 ARCHITECTURE IN ANTHROPOLOGY VS. ANTHROPOLOGY IN ARCHITECTURE

The relationship between anthropology and architecture is unusual. Although anthropological literature is filled with sketches of the layouts of houses and villages, as well as cultural analyses of their spatial organization, it has been noted frequently that anthropology has historically never paid much attention to architecture (Stender 2017, Humphrey 1988). The relationship between the two disciplines was confined to the margins of mainstream debate in each field, where built environment and material structures were assumed to play a secondary role, supporting the actions and relations of their human subjects (Allen 2016). The stature of architecture, which was overlooked by anthropological inquiries in comparison to other social forms (kinship and religion) (Humphrey 1988), has in recent years started to emerge as a sub-field.

Despite complaints about anthropology's disregard for architecture, a significant body of literature focusing on the documentation and analysis of material culture exists (Vellinga 2011). Early Anglo-American anthropology, aimed to document "hidden" and rapidly disappearing cultures, including descriptions of indigenous buildings, settlement plans and construction methods, often regarded comparatively (Horowitz 1967, Heider 1979). The existence of such a body of literature, however, does not form a structured "anthropology of architecture", in the same way that can be said for topics such as kinship, religion and political structure. These works do show anthropologists' interest in the role that architecture plays in the reproduction of cultures and societies (Vellinga 2011).

Such interest can be seen clearly in the French school (of social anthropology), which viewed spatial forms as representations of universal social structures (Buchli 2013). The French sociologist Marcel Mauss viewed architecture and architectural form as a key technology through which social life is (re)produced (2006). Claude Levi-Strauss launched use of the term "House Societies", which defines the house as an institution that encompasses relations of kinship, hierarchy and physical structure, while objectifying these relations (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu's account of the Kabyle House in Algeria analyses spatial divisions as representations of dichotomies between men/women, outside/inside, day/night or, as he coins it, "the world reversed" (1960). As Buchli (2013) and Vellinga (2011) note, these prominent studies had an impact on the field of anthropology; however, another theoretical development also had a major influence in the field. The "spatial turn" or the "material turn" in the social sciences claimed a new emphasis on things, artefacts, dwellings, spaces and even landscapes, not only as things people attach meaning to, but as things that have a performative nature, therefore actively influencing our being in different ways (Stender 2017). This development influenced later ethnographic¹ accounts in the fields of architectural anthropology (Amerlinck 2001), house societies (Sparks and Howell 1999), the home (Cieraad 1999), as well as influencing the perception and meaning of the built environment in general (Ingold 2000). These later studies concentrated on the social implications of the material structure of architecture, voiding any physical features or symbolic reading of these building forms. As Stender concludes, anthropological studies appropriated the built form as a tool to gain insight into cultural meaning or social practice, rather than as an end in itself (2017).

In contrast to social anthropologists, architects, have historically studied buildings and dwellings for aesthetic inspiration; functional, tectonic and material knowledge; and for

theoretical development. Joseph Rykwert, an American architectural historian, claims that the investigations into the “primitive hut” reemerges at times when there is a need for renewal. He views architectural form as a tool to establish proximity by bringing things and people in relation to one another, affecting the relationships of people with one another and with the built environment (1981). While French architectural theorists Eugene Viollet-le-Duc and Marc Antoine Laugier used the primitive hut as an analytical category to understand the relationships between building material, architectural form and human behavior, German architect Gottfried Semper used anthropological speculation when developing his theory of “The Four Elements of Architecture”, locating the primitive hut ethnographically in the Caribbean (Stender 2017). During this period, architecture was also utilized in the anthropological discipline of archaeology. While architecture was used as a tool of illustration and reconstruction, archaeological discoveries helped shape architectural fashions. However, this mutual attempt at linking architecture and anthropology was severed, as architecture began to answer the transformative demands of nineteenth-century industrialization. The dominant forces in the development of architecture were in the demands of production itself, not in the human domain (Jasper 2016), eventually giving rise to the “International Style”.

Accounts that have criticized the “International Style”, especially from the mid-twentieth century on, were against universalism in modern architecture as well as the perceived homogeneity produced by the global construction industry. A renewed interest in the “architecture of the common people”, and promotion of new vernacular architecture placed an emphasis on the cultural and environmental benefits of learning from local building traditions and materials (Frey 2013, Richardson 2001). While this new interest in vernacular architecture engaged with the architecture of the common people, it also triggered an interest in the study of the Other (Vellinga 2011). The architectural interest in the Other cultures, focused on the monumental and historical traditions found in the Middle East, India and Central America, was brought into scholarly focus. A renewed interest in the “the architecture of people” has solidified within in the field of architecture, meaningfully engaging with Others and their material traditions (for an early example, see Rappaport 1969). Some examples of this engagement can be seen in the work of architects such as Trevor Marchand and Dorothy Pelzer who conducted ethnographic field investigations (in Yemen and Southeast Asia respectively) into local building and construction techniques. Although a considerable body of literature on vernacular architecture exists in the architectural discourse, far less has been written about modern architecture in anthropological writing (Verkaaik 2013). Despite their differences, architects and anthropologists increasingly agree that the scope of anthropology neglects contemporary architecture.

2.0 ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

So far, I have concentrated on the theoretical overlap between architecture and social anthropology, and have shown potential areas of collaboration. Within this context, religious architecture presents an excellent opportunity for collaboration. While religion by definition brings people together, religious architecture materializes both the culture and the belief system. Going back to the question that I left unanswered in the introduction to this paper – why people put so much time and money into religious architecture if they claim it is unnecessary for religious practice – one could argue that religious buildings may not be imperative for religious purposes but have social and political importance.

In the context of contemporary mosques in Europe and North America, such interpretations can be found in the work of Dodds (2002) and Metcalf (1996), who argue that religious minorities see religious buildings as a representation of their religious identity, and link them to processes of integration and attaining power. This argument brings together what religious people say (that the building is meaningless for religious purposes) with what they do (that they build and pay for them for their sociocultural and political importance) (Verkaaik 2013).

Dodds’ and Metcalf’s interpretations, however, are not entirely satisfactory as they conceptually separate the religious and political dimensions of religion in a way that may not exist for the people practicing it. According to Asad’s analysis, which argues that the dynamic

between the inner faith and outer form has marginalized the importance of 'ritual' in the religious experience (1993), such an analysis eventually disconnects the ritual, aesthetic and habitual aspects of religion from religious socio-political identity. In other words, it assumes that the materiality of religion, which is a part of the domain of political identity, can be distinguished from the immateriality of religion (Verkaaik 2013). The informants in my study would surely agree, that as "religion strives for immaterial beyond the material, it necessarily needs material to evoke the immaterial" (Miller 2005, 1).

The use of ethnographic approaches allows us to go beyond purely material analysis, to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the world by incorporating architecture with symbolic territorialities and socio-political practices (Tomasi 2015). Ethnographic methods offer an alternative perspective for architectural critics who tend to focus on the function, symbolism and character of the building. Semiotic readings of architecture shift the focus from the design and construction of the building to the ways people use such buildings, and from production to consumption (Buchli 2013, Vellinga 2011). This approach does not see religious architecture as a static container of the ritual which encloses the religious interior and reflects the political exterior, but an active or live agent of religious experience, identity and community (Appadurai 1986).

Yael Navarro Yashin, analyzing the affective power of spaces and buildings, argues that religious spaces have agency as well as an impact on human experience. More specifically, such spaces can direct and limit movement, emotionally affect their visitors, and make and unmake identities (2009). Tamimi Arab's paper, which examines the Essalam Mosque of Rotterdam, examines the affective dimension of the discourse created around this mosque. The "megamosque" discourse blurs the line between the fact and the fetish and has an affective impact (that ranges from anxiety to pride), that causes different material experiences of the mosque (2013). Tutin Aryanti's research on contemporary mosque architecture in Indonesia refers to the performative character of religious architecture. Her research not only examines how gender conceptions permeate the architectural space of the Indonesian mosque but also regards the mosque as an active agent shaping the gender relations in and around it (2013).

Another advantage to incorporating anthropological approaches into architecture is that ethnographic methods allow us to avoid ethnocentric interpretations that make local ways of conceiving and living architecture invisible. This, in turn, allows us to locate architectural practices within the interpretive contexts where they have developed (Tomasi 2015). Eric Roose's study on contemporary mosque design in the Netherlands illustrates this point by moving away from the architectural critical perspective that dominates the public debate surrounding the issue. Roose's iconological approach diverges from architectural criticism that dismisses new mosques as nostalgic replicas of the Ottoman, Moghul or Mamluk traditions. Rather than interpreting them with respect to their temporal and regional style, his focus is on the design process as a symbolic-political practice. He views parties that were involved in the construction process as active political actors rather than passive agents. Roose argues that these actors do not unreflexively mix and match styles from their country of origin; rather, their choice of a certain style is an attempt to actively make a political statement (2009).

Shahed Saleem, focusing on contemporary mosque design trends and development in postwar Britain, presents a further example of anthropological work within architecture. His analysis views the design process as a process of negotiation, learning and "objectification". While he avoids the commonly trope that European Muslims simply produce kitschy replicas of traditional Islamic building styles, Saleem argues that Muslims in Britain did not just aim to relocate a religious institution from a "home" culture to a "Western" one, but that they were driven by other concerns, such as religious disputes on mosque design, creating a familiar space for worship, and the gaze of the secular world. He concludes that these complex interactions do not reveal themselves through formal architectural analysis but can be

understood when the building process is framed as a performance that creates intragroup and intergroup dynamics (2013).

3.0 METHODOLOGY IN PRACTICE: THE CASE OF MOSQUES IN MARXLOH, DUISBURG

My current research examines Turkish commissioned mosques in the Marxloh neighborhood of Duisburg, Germany. Ongoing fieldwork involves three different mosques: Marxloher Merkez Mosque (DITIB² organization), Marxloh Cultural Center (IGMG³ organization) and Duisburg Ulu Mosque (VIKZ⁴ organization). The primary goal of this work is to examine how mosque spaces in non-Islamic contexts contribute to the reproduction of Turkish-Muslim group identities, and how Turkish-German women interact with and appropriate the male-dominated space of the diaspora mosque. This paper includes preliminary results of my fieldwork, with a focus on Marxloher Merkez Mosque.



Figure 1. Marxloher Merkez Mosque, ("Merkez Moschee, Marxloh", 2011)

Marxloher Merkez Mosque (Marxloh Merkez Camii), located in the northern section of Marxloh, is the largest mosque in the city. Marxloh is characterized by its immigrant Turkish population: out of 20,500 people living in Marxloh, an estimated 65% have a Turkish background (Uslar 2017). The former DITIB mosque was established in an unused cafeteria space and was regularly overcrowded on public holidays, making it unsuitable for religious use for a community of 500 households (Ehrkamp 2007). The local DITIB, active in the area from its inception in 1984, decided that the makeshift prayer rooms were inadequate and they needed a new building. In 1997 and with the support of the local Turkish community, DITIB proposed the construction of a classical Ottoman style mosque. Being aware that such construction projects may become a source of anxiety in the district, the association's Marxloh board of directors sought cooperation with the local municipality, the Duisburg Development Union (*Entwicklungsgesellschaft Duisburg*), churches, and other institutions. By 2002, an advisory council for the project was established, with representatives from political parties, churches, local associations, neighborhood residents, and businesses. DITIB's expressed aim was transparency and openness. During the construction phase alone, the project received 40.000 visitors, who wanted to learn more about Islam and the Muslim population of Marxloh. Although in 2006, the relationship between the congregation and the city was clouded by media reports that members of the construction company were involved in right-wing circles, such incidents were almost forgotten by the time the mosque was opened in 2008 (Gorzewski 2015). Today, the Merkez Mosque functions as a religious, cultural and social meeting place, and continues to provide educational and interfaith dialogue programs to bring together people from different backgrounds.



Figure 2. Marxloher Merkez Mosque ("Merkez Moschee, Marxloh", 2011)

A purely architectural analysis would present the design and construction process of the mosque, yet I argue that to be able to answer the question of how identity and gender in the diaspora permeate and influence the architectural space of the mosque, and how mosques shape these relations in turn, an ethnographic method is necessary. Over a span of 6 months, I thus collected data from participant observation, go-along observations⁶ and interviews with the female members of the mosque. I also interviewed experts involved in the construction and operation of the mosque.

Preliminary ethnographic analysis indicates three main results. The first is related to the hierarchical structure of the mosque, encountered during the initial stages of my fieldwork when I was attempting to get access to the mosque's spaces. Although I had no problem reaching out to the community (and gaining the trust of Turkish Muslim women), I soon faced administrative road blocks, impeding conduct of my research. Since Germany does not recognize Islam as an institution (mostly due to the fact that Islamic groups do not unite under a unified umbrella, like the Catholic Church), the mosques function through registered associations. The local board of the mosque in Marxloh fearing that my work would be "another research to harm Islam", required written permission from the head DITIB office in Cologne as well as the Turkish Consulate. This process shows both the difference between the discourse created around the mosque (openness and transparency) as compared to the actual process, and the strict hierarchy within the mosque's organization.

The design of the mosque included large transparent windows, which aimed for openness that was further underscored by the mosque's self-promotion. Although at the time of its opening, Marxloher Mosque staged and performed the civic ideals of loyalty, participation, and transparency, a fact that was emphasized by the expert interviewees, the difficulty of accessing any information showed the disparity between the organization's words and actions. Later expert interviews with the actors that took part in the mosque's construction process confirmed that the local associations are not independent. These interviews affirmed that the DITIB head office had largely chosen the mosque's style. Since DITIB has close ties to the Turkish government, the choice of this style followed contemporary Turkish directives, rejecting modern forms in favor of a traditional Ottoman mosque architecture. Circumventing German law, which stipulates an architectural competition for projects over a certain size, the Turkish-German architect Cavit Şahin was directly commissioned to design the mosque. In short, although at first glance the mosque might seem like a replica of the traditional Ottoman mosque, a more detailed analysis reveals social and political relations.

The second result that my analysis has yielded shows that Marxloher Mosque has become the center of a socio-spatial network. Unlike Turkish mosques, which only serve the purpose of religious practice and are familiar elements of the urban landscape, the diaspora mosques in

Germany function differently. Their importance as spaces of socialization exceed their use for religious purposes, as they help maintain the sense of community that produces identities built on both shared spaces and religion. The mosque does not exist as a single building, as over time, the surrounding land and buildings were acquired by the organization through funds raised by the local mosque community⁷. Most of the educational and socialization functions do not take place inside the mosque proper, but in these secondary areas. Furthermore, although Marxloher Mosque is located off the main boulevard in a declining neighborhood, the existence of the mosque makes it a profitable location to live for Turkish Muslims. My informants reported that they prefer to live around the mosque, as they feel more at home living near a familiar element. They also acknowledged that people who have a prestigious social role in the mosque community live closer to the mosque, revealing the spatial hierarchy within this network of spaces. Briefly stated, the mosque complex adds another center to the neighborhood, effectively changing the area's physical and social composition, a fact that cannot be perceived at first glance.

The last result that my analysis has shown is related to the role and participation of women in the mosque. A superficial reading of the mosque points to a space that imposes sexual segregation, with little visibility of women during prayers. The local administration likewise does not include women. My expert interviews showed, however, that women have been very active in mosque affairs, and helped bring about major changes during the design and construction phase. When the idea of building a mosque in Marxloh was first suggested in 2006, Leyla Özmal, the integration commissioner of Duisburg at the time, came up with a plan to fund the project's 7.5 million Euro budget. Since Islam, not recognized as a "church" by the German government, could not use the same funds as churches or synagogues do, the mosque's construction was funded by DITIB and donations from the congregation, while municipal authorities and the EU incorporated the project into their development plans and funded the construction of the community center⁸. While Özmal's leadership resolved the economic problems, another woman, Zülfiye Kaykın, who served as a state secretary at the time, fought to make women part of the mosque. The initial plans of the mosque did not include a space for women, since the attendance of women was not expected. Through Kaykın's influence, a second floor was included where women could pray. In an unorthodox move, women and men use the same entrance to the mosque⁹. Although this decision initially drew some reactions from the congregants, after the mosque opened it ceased to be an issue¹⁰. As these examples show, architectural transformations during the design process show the transformation of gender relations as well.

The spatial practices of women active in the mosque community show another dimension of gender relationships. Although women seem absent from the mosque at first glance, becoming a part of the mosque community shows how women have appropriated certain spaces in the mosque. While women make full use of the educational facilities, they have transformed part of this facility into a kitchen where they make baked goods every Friday to sell after the Friday prayer. Another area that women use is a room for the "youth branch", which is used for occasional meetings and free for the use of the community. These interior spaces and the spatial practices that take place there show the architecture of the mosque as driven by the desire to create a familiar and relaxing place for prayer, rather than by religious disputes or political symbolism.

CONCLUSION

The examples presented in this paper show how combining architectural and anthropological research provides methodological and theoretical opportunities. Although it has been claimed that the interest of the architectural discipline stops where anthropologists enter the scene (Iberlings 2011), I argue that two have much to contribute to each other through active engagement with one another. I have identified the field of contemporary religious architecture as a subject that might especially benefit from the use of anthropological methods. Through the preliminary results of my fieldwork conducted in Duisburg, Germany, I have argued that although conventional architectural analyses are necessary to be able to understand a building, social anthropological methods can combine architecture's materiality with religion's

immateriality for a deeper understanding of both. Reflecting critically on how architecture is created between different actors, we understand how social relations and meaning are materialized in the built environment, allowing us to better understand the role of architecture, once built and consumed.

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ENDNOTES

1. The two terms, anthropology and ethnography are used interchangeably throughout this paper.
2. *Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği* (DİTİB), the Directorate for Religious Affairs Turkish Islamic Association is an umbrella organization established in 1984. DİTİB works under the Directorate for Religious Affairs, which is a part of the prime minister's office in Turkey. The organization is responsible for delegation of imams and employees abroad and these employees have the status of civil servants of the Turkish Government (Tol, 2008).
3. *İslamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş e. V.* (IGMG) was founded in Germany in 1971 as Türkische Union Deutschland (Turkish Union Germany). Its name was changed in 1976 to Milli Görüş (National Vision) and eventually became İslamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş in 1994. The ideology of this group goes back to the political views of radical Islamist party which was banned from politics for violating the secular legislation. IGMG is known with its militant attitude (Tol, 2008).
4. *Verband Islamischer Kulturzentren e.V.* (VIKZ), Islamic Cultural Centers Association is another Islamist movement banned by the Turkish government in 1970s. This group is the European branch of the Süleymanî movement, a *tariqa*, following centralist principles (Pedersen, 1999).
5. Personal interview with Metin Dayıoğlu, the chief engineer during the construction process
6. Go-along technique is proposed by Margarethe Kusenbach (2003) to explore participants' everyday

lived experiences as they interact with the built and social environment. In this technique, the researcher accompanies subjects on their 'natural' outings, allowing the researcher to actively explore the subjects' experiences and their interactions with their social and physical environments. For my go-along interviews, I accompany mosque-attending women in their social outings to understand what people say they do vs. what they do.

7. Personal interview with Necati Mert, the former president of the local mosque organization
8. Personal interview with Leyla Özmal, former integration commissioner
9. Personal interview with Zülfiye Kaykın, former state secretary
10. Personal interview with Metin Dayıoğlu