

‘BETWEEN BELIEF AND UNBELIEF LIES THE PERFORMANCE OF *SALĀT*’: MEANING AND EFFICACY OF A MUSLIM RITUAL

HEIKO HENKEL

University of British Columbia

Drawing on fieldwork in Istanbul, Turkey, the article analyses the role of the Muslim five-times-daily prayer (*salāt*), within the Islamic tradition. It is argued that the prayer, with its intricate ritual format, provides practitioners with a formidable resource for strengthening their commitment to Islam and asserting membership in a community of believers while at the same time enabling religious Muslims to pursue new and diverse interpretations of Islam. The character of the *salāt* as a mobile discipline that can easily be inserted into very different forms of life has become especially important as religious Muslims have increasingly been incorporated into liberal society in Turkey in the past decades.

Introduction

Among the many forms of religious practice performed by Muslims in Turkey, the *salāt*, the five-times-daily prayer (Turk. *Namaz*), holds a special place. Not only is it seen by many religious Muslims as the single most important of the ritual obligations specified by the experts of Muslim *fiqh* (jurisprudence) but, together with the Muslim headscarf, it is also the most visible and perhaps most provocative aspect of everyday Muslim religious practice in Turkey. For my friend Ayşecan,¹ a middle-aged professional woman from Ankara and self-declared secularist, the prayer’s dramatic gesture of submission is proof of Muslim fundamentalism, smacking of irrationality, intolerance, even violence, and the Arabic texts of the prayer and the *ezan* (call to prayer) sound to her foreign and archaic. Ayşecan’s views are shared by many in Turkey and Europe, of course, who see in the insistence on the absolute truth of the Qur’anic revelation, which is affirmed in the prayer, a commitment inherently at odds with liberal society.

To view the prayer as an archaic fixture of an outdated tradition is, however, to overlook its role in the dynamic landscape of religious commitment in contemporary Turkey. In recent decades an explicitly religious (*dindar*) middle class has increasingly been integrated into mainstream Turkish society, religious women have become active players in its institutions and public sphere, and Turkish Islam has embraced the language of human rights and liberal concepts of society. The most tangible aspect of this transformation is the triumph

of the post-Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP), which won a landslide victory in the 2002 elections with a platform combining commitment to its roots in the Islamic tradition with a programme of political liberalization and the quest for EU accession.² These changes have occurred, this article will propose, with the aid of the *salāt*, which inserts a fixed point of reference into the diverse and changing lifeworlds of religious Muslims.

A substantial literature is now emerging which is beginning to discuss this transformation of Turkish Islam (Göle 1996; Güllalp 1997; Henkel 2004; Navarro-Yashin 2002; Seufert 1997; Shankland 1999; R. Tapper 1991; Tezcan 2003; Toprak 1996; Vertigans 2003; White 2002; Yavuz 2003; Yavuz & Esposito 2003). The role of religious ritual and its important contribution to maintaining a shared discursive framework among religious Muslims, however, has only cursorily been addressed in this literature. In her recent study of the Islamist movement in Istanbul, for instance, Jenny White notes that

[w]hat binds people together in the Islamist movement is neither ideology (be it political or religious) nor any particular type of organization (whether civil society or 'tribe'). Rather, the movement is rooted in local culture and interpersonal relations, while also drawing on a variety of civic and political organizations and ideologies (2002: 6).

White's observation is in many ways compelling and backed by her subtle and persuasive ethnographic study which shows the complex interrelatedness of a cultural heritage, the sometimes shared and sometimes distinct experiences of groups and individuals, and the particular political processes that have shaped Turkish society over the past decades. Yet it seems to me that she is missing an important aspect in her account. Much of the Turkish Muslim movement's appeal, and certainly much of its social and political relevance, stems from the fact that, by tying its diverse projects and the lives of Muslim practitioners into the wider framework of the Islamic tradition, it transcends 'local culture and interpersonal relations'. Through this association, it provides followers with the means of inserting their lives into meaningful narratives of a common history and cosmology and of a fate ultimately shared by a universal Muslim community. Muslim ritual, this article suggests, has been an enormously important resource for Muslim practitioners in facilitating the generation of community and continuity despite enormous social change.

In his long-neglected study *On prayer*, Marcel Mauss observes that while the meaning of other forms of religious practice often remains opaque, 'every prayer is always to some extent a *Credo* [and thus] a single prayer contains several elements of self-justification, often clearly expressed' (2003: 22). This deliberate conjuncture of action and speech, he argues, makes prayer especially interesting as a social phenomenon as it sheds 'some light on the very controversial question of the relationship between myth and ritual' (2003: 23). The historical details of the discussion that Mauss alludes to need not concern us here. But the broader issue at stake, the question why and under which conditions religious discourses remain authoritative, remains today as interesting and controversial as it was for Mauss. For the purpose of this article, Mauss's observation can thus be reformulated, admittedly with slightly

different implications, as the relationship between the particular discursive tradition of Islam (Asad 1986; 1993) and the highly choreographed bodily discipline of the prayer.³

Saba Mahmood (2001) has shown for the case of an Egyptian female piety movement that the *salāt* plays an important role in a project of 'self-shaping' among Muslim practitioners. By submitting to the discipline of *salāt*, practitioners seek to generate and maintain their capacity to submit willingly to what they see as the guidance offered by the Qur'an. As for Mahmood's interlocutors in Egypt, for many Turkish Muslims the *salāt* is an important body technique (Mauss 1992) through which they aim to generate and maintain their commitment to the Islamic tradition. For my Turkish interlocutors, however, and I suspect for Mahmood's as indeed for Muslim practitioners elsewhere, this aspect of the *salāt* is embedded in a much wider project of generating what Turkish Muslim scholars call *İslam ahlâkı*, a term that refers both to the normative framework of proper personal conduct and to its embodiment as a stable disposition (cf. Karaman, Bardakoğlu & Apaydın 2000: vol. 2, 426). Complementary to these efforts are projects of 'Islamicizing' modern society (*çağrı İslamlaştırmak*⁴), which have taken a central part in Turkey's Muslim revival movement, and which aim at shaping ideally the entirety of the practitioner's lifeworld according to criteria derived from the Islamic tradition. They require a myriad of very particular interpretations of the Islamic tradition and, as I argue elsewhere in more detail, they provide the social conditions that enable the continuing authority of Islamic discourses (Henkel forthcoming).

Given the heterogeneity of contemporary Turkish society and the diversity of interpretative traditions within Turkish Islam, however, these projects of constructing tightly integrated lifeworlds based on particular Muslim interpretations of Islam have a paradoxical effect: as groups and individuals seek to develop the most adequate interpretations and forms of life, the ensuing diversity fractures the Islamic tradition and the Muslim community. At the same time, religious Muslims generally attribute tremendous importance to the unity of the Muslim community, corresponding to the notion of one definite path for achieving a moral life outlined in the Qur'an. The centrifugal effects of these diverse social projects are thus seen as a major challenge. The significance of the *salāt*, I suggest, lies primarily in addressing this challenge.⁵

Taking as axiomatic that practice, especially if systematically integrated into more encompassing forms of life, shapes the practitioner over time, this article suggests that the prayer is part of a matrix of disciplines and institutions in which Muslim forms of subjectivity and social relations are forged and reproduced. My point is not that the prayer itself creates 'Muslimness', nor that those who practise it regularly are therefore more authentically Muslim than others. My point is simply that the *salāt* inserts a sequence of practice into everyday life, prompting practitioners to assert and enact belief (*iman*) as the unequivocal commitment to Islam while at the same time enabling both changing interpretations of the Islamic tradition and the affirmation of Muslim community across different interpretations of Islam. The Muslim ritual of *salāt* is thus important for the reproduction of a particular collective representation, but not necessarily in the form of a shared classificatory system,

an ideology, or common projects of political and social reform. In contemporary Turkish society, and indeed at other times of great social change, the *salāt*'s most important aspect may thus be its capacity to generate and signal the commitment of practitioners to a shared framework of moral reasoning across social dividing lines. In this sense, as Michael Lambek has suggested of ritual more generally, the *salāt* 'provides occasion for the unreserved assumption of responsibility and obligation in which agents, without distinction between the virtuous and the incontinent, acknowledge their agency and commit themselves to bearing responsibility for their actions' (2000: 317).

Diversity and community

The following episode shows the pertinence of Lambek's observation for the *salāt*'s role in contemporary Turkey. In the spring of 2001, my friend Hakan invited me to spend the evening with him and a couple of friends. We met at Hakan's parents-in-law's apartment in the neighbourhood of Ümrainye, where we ate dinner and watched some television with the family. At about eight o'clock, Hakan, his wife Emine, and I walked the short distance to their own apartment, leaving their small children at Emine's parents' house. When the guests, two married couples, arrived, Emine and the two women retired to one of the apartment's living rooms, where they remained for the rest of the evening. Looking at his watch, Hakan asked his guests, Hüsameddin, a lecturer in history at one of Istanbul's new private universities, and Şahin, an economist, if they had already performed the evening *salāt*. They had not, and so the three men retreated to the bathroom for the ablutions and then to one of the bedrooms of the apartment for the prayer. After a few minutes the three men joined me in the second living room. Given that Hakan had decided to retreat to another room for the prayer, I did not witness the *salāt* that evening. I saw it performed on many other occasions, however, and I will turn to the format of the prayer in a moment. Before I do that, let me return to the evening at Hakan's house.

Note the configuration in which Hakan and Emine entertained their guests that evening. Like many secular Turkish couples of their generation, they invited other couples to their apartment for an evening of informal socializing. Yet the separate socializing of women and men gave the evening a particular *dindar* (religious) Muslim character. This creation of homosocial spaces is a prominent element of urban, conservative Islam (Olson 1982). It is in an important way a form of religious practice, given that it enacts regulations of the *sharia* as interpreted by mainstream Muslim scholars in Turkey (Henkel forthcoming). In contrast to the performance of *salāt*, however, the enactment of *muamalat* ('social duties') and *sunna* practices (emulating the Prophet's way of life) remains mostly implicit.

Similarly implicit references to Islam also permeated the evening's conversation. An example is the discussion of Turkey's dramatically unfolding economic crisis. In the weeks preceding our conversation there had been a steep devaluation of the Turkish lira against the dollar. The resulting loss of purchasing power and economic instability fuelled anxiety among the salary-earning Turkish middle class, and my religious friends were no exception.

Hüsameddin, for one, angrily contended that Turkey's governing parties had made the country's economy far too dependent on the West. Contrasting the policies endorsed by Turkey's main secularist parties with those proposed by the Islamist Virtue Party (FP), he explained that what was needed was a national policy that protected and strengthened the Turkish economy. Mostly for my benefit, I suspect, he added that, in terms of economic policy, the position of the Islamist party was similar to that of classic Kemalism. Indeed, many of my leftist/nationalist acquaintances would have argued very similarly. Şahin, in contrast, argued that economic liberalization, which greatly encouraged Muslim entrepreneurship and which had begun under Turgut Özal's leadership,⁶ was a painful but necessary move to shake up and modernize Turkey's stagnant economy. Secularist Turks with more liberal inclinations would argue the same. Later the quarrel between Şahin and Hüsameddin turned on the contentious issue of the relationship between political and religious authority. Much to our host's discomfort the argument got increasingly animated. Şahin accused the Islamist party of abusing religion to gain political power. Hüsameddin, who quite rightly felt challenged by this remark, turned the argument around and countered with the comment that, on the contrary, the problem in Turkey was that religious leaders continued to interfere in politics, thereby abusing their positions as religious authorities. This, in turn, contained a barely veiled critique of the leader of the Naqşbandi brotherhood's⁷ branch with which Şahin and Hakan were associated. It was only with difficulty that Hakan managed to stop the increasingly heated exchange.

What, then, is the role of the *salāt*? The prayer clearly created neither instant solidarity nor a shared worldview among practitioners that evening. Furthermore my interlocutors' commitment to the Islamic tradition clearly does not explain everything about the way this evening unfolded. It is not more than one aspect of the evening, albeit an important one. What is interesting about my interlocutors' implicit and explicit references to Islam, however, is that they refer at once to diverse social projects and to a shared discursive framework, the Islamic tradition. This framework is shared not only by Turkish Muslims, of course, but by religious Muslims all over the world, and is interpreted and appropriated in different ways. The particularity of this social relation is inadequately described either as a culture or as a civilization or an ideology. It is that of a shared religious tradition, produced and reproduced by the continuing reference to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the *hadith* (the transmitted reports of the Prophet's exemplary life, see Asad 1986: 14). As the conversation sketched above shows, the three young men clearly share neither a coherent ideology nor an organization, and their ways of life are shaped by a multitude of heterogeneous institutions, disciplines, and social networks.

None the less, they are united in a shared, although normally unstated, commitment. It is here, in defining, reaffirming, and making explicit this shared commitment of Muslim practitioners to the precepts of the Islamic tradition, that the *salāt* provides these practitioners with a powerful resource. In the episode sketched above, as on innumerable other occasions, it inserts this explicit and sharply defined commitment to Islam into the flow of social practice. For a variety of reasons this is no small matter. For one, it draws a clear-cut division between those who did and did not commit themselves to Islam in the prayer. Secondly, the commitment to Islam contained in the *salāt* takes

place notwithstanding Şahin and Hüsameddin's differences. While it did little to ameliorate their quarrel, it inserted a shared commitment to a discursive framework, and, as Lambek notes, to a horizon of responsibility. There is yet another aspect. On another occasion Hakan had confided to me that he and a number of friends were worried because they suspected that Şahin, who had recently returned from serving his obligatory term in the *Jandarma* (Turkey's paramilitary police force), had become somewhat lax in his religious commitment. Hakan had added that he hoped that the influence of his friends would again strengthen this commitment. Initializing the communal *salāt* that evening, Hakan may thus also have hoped that it had a 'therapeutic', indeed disciplining, effect on Şahin. Incidentally, the *salāt* may have played a somewhat similar role that evening in Hakan's relationship to Hüsameddin. Like others of my religious acquaintance outside the Islamist party, Hakan was suspicious of the real level of religious commitments among the Virtue Party's cadres. Performing the communal prayer may not altogether quell such suspicions but it introduces an objective criterion for assessing virtue (cf. MacIntyre 1980) as it marks the dividing line between believers (*müminin*) and others.

The choreography of prayer

The *salāt* is a highly formalized prayer, consisting of a number of clearly defined components. The four universally recognized juridical schools of *sunni* Islam (*madhabs*) differ slightly in their definition of the correct performance of the *salāt*, and within the Hanafi *madhab* (which is followed by the great majority of Turkish *sunni* Muslims) there are slight differences in the performance as it is prescribed for men and women. Strictly speaking there are, of course, also nuances in the performance that vary between one person and another and even from one performance to another. It seems to me, however, that within the Turkish context these are minor and often unintended differences. The large majority of practitioners assume that they follow universally accepted guidelines, readily available in the Turkish *ilmihal* literature, the Muslim 'catechisms',⁸ as closely as possible.

The remarkable stability of the *salāt*'s format in contemporary Turkey (and to a lesser extent across Muslim communities worldwide, cf. Parkin & Headley 2000) can partly be explained by the historical commitment of most Turkish *sunni* Muslim communities and scholars to the Hanafi *madhab*.⁹ A different, albeit related, factor is the joint endeavour of the religious establishment and the Ottoman/Turkish state since the late nineteenth century to purify and systematize the ritual practice of Turkish Muslims as part of a wider project of creating an 'educated' population (Deringil 1998: 96).¹⁰ Various motives and institutions thus converge here in their endeavour to maintain a ritual format that transcends local particularities. More pronounced are differences in the regularity of the *salāt* and the precise *modus* in which it is performed. For instance, one young man told me that older members of his *cemaat* (congregation) often assumed that younger members were less vigorous in their religious commitment. If the younger generation sometimes performed shorter

prayers, however, my interlocutor contended, this was by no means due to slackness. On the contrary, younger Muslims like himself were often simply more knowledgeable about actual requirements, such as the exemptions from ritual obligations during travel. Therefore, he added half-jokingly, it was really the younger generation which, by demonstrating its superior knowledge, was the more virtuous. Given the political sensitivity of religious issues in Turkey, no statistical data are available to indicate the actual level of the *salāt's* performance¹¹ but my guess is that about one quarter of Turkish Muslims perform the ritual regularly, and a good deal more do so irregularly.

Each of the five-times-daily prayers consists of a number of prayer-cycles (*rekāts*), which in turn consist of a sequence of stations. The night *salāt*, which Hakan and his friends performed on the evening described above, has four obligatory (*farz*) and six recommended (*sünnet*) cycles. In its basic form, each prayer-session, despite its intricate format, takes just a few minutes to perform for those accustomed to its practice. However, practitioners can expand the prayer-session by additional prayer-cycles or by adding a more personalized prayer (*dua*). During one daily sequence of the five obligatory prayer-sessions, practising Muslims like Hakan and his friends perform at least seventeen cycles and may complete the recommended thirty-eight prayer-cycles or more. The time-slot in which the night *salāt* is valid – each of the five prayers has a precisely defined window of time when it has to be performed – is defined as the time between the disappearance of the evening sky's redness and the 'true dawn', which signals the onset of the morning *salāt*. Prayer times thus change with the cycle of the seasons and with geographical location. The exact beginnings and endings of the five slots in which each of prayers has to be performed are meticulously calculated by religious scholars (although results may vary by a few minutes) and published daily in the religiously minded newspapers and on Islamic websites. In 2001, a small, Windows-compatible computer program, not only showing the prayer times for that particular day at a particular location but also counting-down the remaining minutes for the current prayer slot, was widely distributed among those of my interlocutors who used the computer.

Table 1 shows the prayer times for 22 March 2001, as published by the Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs. The time-slots begin at the times given and end just before the following time-slot begins. The communal prayer in mosques commences normally at the beginning of the prayer times; those who come late perform the prayer individually at the back.

TABLE 1. Time-slots for the five obligatory *salāt* performances.

Morning Prayer	Sunrise	Noon Prayer	Afternoon Prayer	Evening Prayer	Night Prayer
from 4:32	6:04	from 12:11	from 16:29	from 18:17	from 19:44
until just before →	no prayer from sunrise until→	until just before →	until just before →	until just before →	until just before morning prayer

The prayer times are distributed over the course of the day, creating a recurring, albeit gradually changing, pattern in each day. This pattern inserts the prayer's performance into the different spheres of life that the practitioner traverses during a day and in the course of his or her life (the home, the workspace, travel, or, as in my example, time spent socializing). With it comes the opportunity, in fact, the obligation, to assert Muslim community in many different social settings. The steeply rising number of mosques in Istanbul (from 1984 to 2003 the number of mosques rose from 1,471 to 2,562¹²) provides a public and highly visible infrastructure for this – at least for male practitioners, given that in Turkey women generally do not use mosques to perform the *salāt*. The obligatory performance of the *salāt*, however, also poses the challenge of performing the prayer in indifferent or even hostile settings such as, for instance, many workplaces. Many of my interlocutors mentioned this as the main reason to seek employment with explicitly religious employers.

Despite the posting of prayer times in the media, the traditional call to prayer (the *ezan*) is still important in Turkey. From the mosques a *muezzin* announces the beginning of each prayer time by singing *ezan* in a stylized manner which, fortified by sound systems of varying aptitude and quality, renders it widely audible across town. With the exception of a brief period in the early Republic, the 'cantillation' (Özdemir & Frank 2000: 110) of the *ezan* has always been in Arabic in Turkey. The main themes of the prayer are already introduced in the *ezan*: the affirmation of God's magnificence and singularity, and the truth of the revelation received by Muhammad. Below, the *ezan* is given in its Turkish transliteration of the Arabic original in the left column and in English translation on the right.¹³

The Muslim Call to Prayer

<i>Allāhü ekber</i>	God is magnificent
<i>Allāhü ekber</i>	God is magnificent
<i>Allāhü ekber</i>	God is magnificent
<i>Allāhü ekber</i>	God is magnificent
<i>Eşhedü en lâ ilâhe illallâh</i>	I know and affirm without doubt:
<i>Eşhedü en lâ ilâhe illallâh</i>	there is no god but God (twice)
<i>Eşhedü enne Muhammeden Resûlullah</i>	I know and affirm without doubt: Muhammad
<i>Eşhedü enne Muhammeden Resûlullah</i>	is God's messenger (twice)
<i>Hayye ale's-salâh</i>	Come, to the <i>salât</i>
<i>Hayye ale's-salâh</i>	Come, to the <i>salât</i>
<i>Hayye ale'l-felâh</i>	Come, to work
<i>Hayye ale'l-felâh</i>	Come, to work
<i>Allāhü ekber</i>	God is magnificent
<i>Allāhü ekber</i>	God is magnificent
<i>Lâ ilâhe illallâh</i>	There is no god but God

Before being able to perform the *salāt*, the practitioner has to be in a state of ritual purity. The ritual cleaning preceding the *salāt* (the *abdest*) is in itself a painstakingly detailed procedure consisting of an elaborate but partial cleaning of the body's extremities (Headley 2000). After the ablution, the practitioner finds a ritually clean space (for instance in a mosque) or produces one with a prayer rug or simply a piece of newspaper, and turns in the direction of Mecca, the geographical centre of Islam. Women wear a headscarf, and some

male practitioners wear a prayer cap, to show their particular devotion. At the outset of the *salât*, the practitioner is required to state his or her intent (*niyet*) to perform the particular prayer: for example, the obligatory morning prayer and two additional recommended *rekâts*. As Muslim scholars point out, the formulation of the practitioner's intent links the physical act of the prayer to the conscious intent of the practitioner.

The prayer itself begins with the *tekbîr*, the ubiquitous formula *allâhü ekber* – 'God is magnificent' – that frames each of the subsequent stations of the prayer. In the first station, the *kıyam*, the practitioner recites a sequence of partly fixed, partly variable prayer formulas and verses from the Qur'an (the *sübhâneke*, the *eûzü-besmele*, the *fatiha sura*, and then a shorter *sura* or a few verses from the Qur'an). Like all other recitations during the prayer, these are recited silently in Qur'anic Arabic by moving tongue and lips but without actually voicing.¹⁴ The use of Arabic is important because it provides Muslim practitioners with a universal language, similar to the role played until recently by Latin in the Roman Catholic Church. Unlike Latin in the Christian tradition, however, Arabic is seen as the language in which God revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad. Given the Qur'an's status as God's unadulterated message and the fundamental significance given to the very wording of this revelation, renditions of Qur'anic verses into other languages always remain problematic. Thus, while local translations and understandings may vary, the Arabic *Urtext* remains the principal referent.¹⁵ The *sübhâneke* can be rendered into English as follows:

My God! I declare that you are free of any shortcomings. I praise and glorify you. Your name is exalted. Your existence is above everything. Your exaltation is glorious. There is no god apart from you.

Then a verse called the *eûzü-besmele* is recited:

I seek protection in God from the accursed Satan. In the name of God, the all-Merciful, the all-Compassionate.

This is followed by the *fatiha*, the Qur'an's famous opening *sura*:

In the name of God, the Benificent, the Merciful.
Praise be to God, Master of the Day of Judgement,
the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds;
We serve only you, and we ask only you for help
Show us the straight path, the path of those that are blessed,
and not that of those who accrue God's wrath and who go astray.
Amen.

A short section from the Qur'an is then recited, for example, *Sura* 112, *el-İhlâs*:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Benevolent!
Say: He is God, the One.
The everlasting God.
He neither procreates nor is He created.
Nothing is like Him.

This concludes the prayer's first station.

In the second station of the *salāt*, the *rikkū*, the practitioner is still standing but now bows the upper body until it reaches a horizontal position. The hands are placed on the knees, and in this position, after a *tekbir*, a series of short formulas is recited.

My God, you are almighty and perfect. (Repeated three to seven times)
 God listens to those who praise Him.
 Our Lord, praise be only to you.
 God is magnificent.

The worshipper then rises again to an upright position, and from there enters into the two prostrations (the third and fourth station of this *rekāt*). In these prostrations the practitioner drops to his or her knees and bends the upper body down so that nose and forehead touch the ground. The open hands are placed on the ground right beside the head. In this position the practitioner recites further praise of God. Between the first and the second prostration the worshipper sits upright for a short while to collect his or her thoughts. With the second prostration the first *rekāt* of the night prayer is concluded. It is followed by three further obligatory (*farz*) cycles, slightly different from the first. These four *rekāts* can be preceded by four recommended (*sünnet*) cycles and followed by an additional two. Like all other *salāt* performances, the night prayer ends with a greeting over the right and left shoulders. The prayer can be extended by adding a *dua* (a more individualized prayer) and/or the *tesbihat*, the meditative repetition of certain formulas in praise of God (*zikir*), in which the *tesbih* (a chain with beads, not unlike the Christian rosary) is used to keep track of the number of recitations. The prayer-session ends when the practitioner rises to his or her feet again.

The ritual process

As this sketch of the night prayer shows, its message could hardly be more explicit and straightforward: the practitioner affirms his or her commitment to the truth of the Qur'anic revelation and submission to the command of God. This invocation is made in Arabic, in which few Turkish practitioners are fluent, but translations of the Arabic original are well known and everywhere available. The prayer, however, does more than simply affirm the practitioner's commitment to Islam; it is an invocation of central concepts of the Islamic tradition (more precisely of Islamic *akaid* or 'dogma'), such as the perfection, exaltation, mercy, and all-powerfulness of God. Parts of the prayer's verses are taken directly from the Qur'an, and the only real variant in the prayer's rigid format is the practitioner's (or prayer leader's) choice of a suitable passage of the Qur'an after the recitation of the *fatiha*. Numerous of God's 'beautiful names' are evoked (the Merciful, the Benevolent) and the practitioner pleads for God's protection against 'the accursed Satan'. The prayer's recitation is paralleled by the bodily movements of the practitioner; the ritual cleansing of the body, the careful preparation of the prayer space,

the direction of the body toward Mecca, the solemn standing at the outset of the prayer, the bowing toward Mecca, and, most dramatically, the multiple prostrations of the *salāt* all enact and emphasize the spoken affirmation of submission and alliance.

The linguistic and non-linguistic elements of the prayer form part of the minutely choreographed ritual process that creates a ritual sphere with a clearly demarcated interior. Entry into this time-space requires from the candidate-practitioner the fulfilment of a rigid set of preconditions for which prayer manuals provide long lists. These are conditions that have to be met before the practitioner is allowed to enter the *salāt*, as well as lists with things that invalidate (*bozmak*, lit. destroy) the *salāt*. Fulfilment of these preconditions not only prepares the practitioner for the performance of the *salāt* and orientates him or her toward the geographic centre of the Muslim community within a particular temporal matrix; it also ties the practitioner into a wider regime of care for the body and the soul. The rigid boundaries of the ritual time-space of the *salāt*, however, are not only visible in the elaborate entry procedures. Once within the ritual time-space the practitioner must not abort the *salāt* prematurely or leave it by way of distraction until it is concluded. It must not be entered by anyone not properly prepared. As Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994: 260) suggest for the Jain *puja* ritual, in the *salāt* the practitioner steps into the bodily discipline of a ritual which he or she cannot alter; components may be varied, but the whole must be performed in accordance with a minutely prescribed format. Thus the *salāt* is not simply a homogeneous time-space but one which obliges the practitioner to traverse it in a particular way; in this sense it is akin to a *parcours* that can only be successfully traversed in one correct mode.

The immediate effect of the ritual process of the *salāt* is that the practitioner temporarily turns any office, any living room, any street-corner, into a mosque as well as any office-clerk into a Muslim. This is not to say, however, that the *salāt* works wonders. What it seeks to ensure is that, in the clearly demarcated time-space of the prayer, a person becomes a Muslim practitioner and ceases to be an office-clerk just as the office-corner is transformed temporarily into a mosque. At least five times a day practitioners become essentially Muslims while the secular and heterogeneously constituted spaces of the lifeworld are re-defined as Muslim spaces.

Within these demarcations the *salāt* is a space of Islamic practice, clearly defined, spatially and temporally bounded, and set apart from everyday activity. This separation calls to mind the break – the establishment of a radical duality between the profanity of everyday life and the domain of the sacred (Durkheim 1995: 39) – that Durkheim saw as constitutive of ritual. In the case of the *salāt*, however, the sacred-profane dualism is somewhat misleading. Neither is the time-space of the *salāt* itself sacred (a destroyed *salāt* is not seen as a sacrilege but simply as an invalid *salāt* which thus has to be repeated) nor is the world outside of it necessarily profane. The *salāt* introduces a break between the flow of everyday life (characterized by a variety of different kinds of social disciplines, Muslim and other) and a time-space ideally characterized by pure Islamic practice. In this sense the rigidly controlled boundary surrounding the *salāt* demarcates a sphere – and thus a

context – in which the practice of the *salāt* is embedded. Once there has been a transgression of this boundary that sets off this context from the world in which it is inserted, the *salāt* is by definition invalid and has to be repeated. In other words, the context established by the elaborate arrangements surrounding the prayer may not be infringed upon by the immediate social context. When the boundary is upheld, and the practitioner has fulfilled the manifold conditions thus required, the *salāt* is not simply a particular kind of practice that is inserted into the flow of everyday life but a practice that provides its own context.

It is undoubtedly the case, as John Bowen (1989) has noted in his discussion of the *salāt* in Indonesia, that individual performances of the *salāt* take place within different social settings and, more to the point, in the context of particular religio-political projects. These contexts shape the way the prayer is understood by practitioners as well as observers, and sometimes even change aspects of the prayer's format. However, the 'social meaning' of the prayer is not, as Bowen suggests, entirely defined by this social context. Rather, by distancing the enunciation of the prayer formulas from its immediate social context and by seeking to integrate each individual performance into an elaborately evoked discursive context of Islam, the ritual of *salāt* responds to the fact that Muslim practitioners interpret the Islamic tradition within different and changing social contexts – a diversification which, of course, continuously threatens to undermine the unity of Islam as a coherent discursive framework. Bowen's argument rests on his assertion that '[t]he *salāt* is not structured around an intrinsic propositional or semantic core. It cannot be "decoded" semantically because it is not designed according to a single symbolic or iconic code' (1989: 615). In contrast, I find it difficult to imagine any practice more clearly structured 'around an intrinsic propositional or semantic core' than the *salāt*. Nevertheless, Bowen is certainly right to point out that the meaning of utterances (even apparently straightforward ones) is not strictly speaking inherent in the text of such an utterance (inherent, in other words, in the signifier) but depends upon the way in which it is understood, both by the person making the utterance and by the listener. Again, however, what the ritual of *salāt* does is to offer a sophisticated response to precisely this predicament of human existence by providing a minutely choreographed body technique by which a particular, sharply delineated message can be inserted into the most diverse social contexts and made as unambiguous as possible.

Bowen's argument concerning the *salāt* is mirrored more broadly in the conceptualization of ritual in the anti-Durkheimian current of British anthropology, suspicious of claims that the significance of ritual lies in its reinforcement of collective representations. Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw's *The archetypal actions of ritual* (1994), which focuses on Jain ritual but seeks to develop a general theory of ritual practice, is an eloquent example of this current. Citing with approval Bowen's study of the *salāt*, the authors suggest that Jain ritual – and indeed ritual in general – has no underlying meaning and thus must not be seen as a social technique stabilizing a particular classificatory system (1994: 81). It is, they suggest, only in a further act, unrelated to the ritual itself, that practitioners give meaning to the rituals they perform (1994: 260). As a general proposition, this is not very persuasive given that a

central aspect of the prayer's importance and effectiveness is its ability to address religious Muslims as it engages them in a pledge of alliance and submission. Humphrey and Laidlaw nevertheless have a point when they assert that the particular format of ritual makes it impossible for religious authorities to define any particular interpretation of the ritual; indeed, the meaning of the *salāt* cannot be defined entirely by any one of the Muslim *cemaats* with their diverse interpretation of Islam. However much the practice of *salāt* is integrated into these local Muslim projects, the rigid and universal format of the *salāt* inevitably refers beyond any particular interpretation of Islam to a more widely shared discursive framework.

Louis Althusser (1971) pointed out that the interlocutory force of addressing individuals, or, in his terms, the power to interpellate, is the necessary condition for the transmission of ideology. Althusser rightly saw ritual (in his case the rituals of the Roman Catholic Church) as a particularly effective form of such interpellation. With regard to the transmission of 'ideology' it is, however, necessary to make a crucial distinction. The *salāt*, like other forms of prayer, can become part of particular political projects and specific occasions, like political rallies. Indeed, the sermons read as part of the communal Friday prayer in Turkey are centrally composed by Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Kara 1999; Prator 1985). The performance of the *salāt* may support these projects, mobilize their supporters, and 'transmit' particular messages but, to the extent that the *salāt* maintains its rigid and virtually universal format, it transcends these specific projects by confirming the practitioners' commitment to what I called the fundamental concepts of the Islamic tradition – the existence of God and the truth of the Qur'anic revelation. In this sense, the *salāt* 'serve[s] to contain the drift of meanings', to use Douglas and Isherwood's formulation (1997: 43).

It is perhaps this rigidly defined format that Bowen has in mind when he observes that 'the prostrations and recitations in the *salāt* do not have the intrinsic symbolic richness of the Ndembu milk-tree, Trobriand spells, or any circumcision rite' (1989: 615). Indeed, the richness of the *salāt* does not lie in a complex symbolism; its main message, as we have seen, is unequivocal and straightforward. While the *salāt* may not, however, be particularly rich in symbolism (even its main dramatic gesture, the repeated prostration, is indexical rather than symbolical), it is ripe with references to fundamental concepts of Islam, most centrally to God's unity, magnificence, and absolute authority. The *salāt* thus affirms the absolutely fixed point of the Islamic tradition – the fundamental truth of the existence of God and his revelation. Roy Rappaport (1999: 6) has noted that without God the religious tradition of Judaism would be impossible. The same is true of the Islamic tradition. It is this fundamental concept at the centre of the Islamic tradition that practitioners are prompted dramatically to reaffirm in the five-times-daily practice of the *salāt*.

In a conversation I had with Dr Tasin Görgün, a Muslim scholar based at the Islam Araştırmalar Merkezi in Istanbul, this point was underlined with reference to Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action.¹⁶ The Habermasian concept of *gewaltfreier Diskurs* (violence-free discourse), Görgün insisted, is very much in keeping with Muslim principles. As in the Habermasian theory of communicative action, uncoerced consensus in the

Islamic tradition ultimately forms the only way to generate legitimate knowledge and social norms. After all, as a saying attributed to the Prophet clearly states, ‘there is no compulsion in Islam’. Görgün added that without a common, universally agreed upon starting point this Habermasian model cannot possibly work. For religious Muslims, Görgün maintains, this universally agreed starting point is the Qur’an and its indisputable status as divine revelation. It is the commitment to this starting point, this article suggests, that the practice of *salāt* dramatically reaffirms five times each day.

‘Between belief and unbelief lies the performance of *salāt*’

My argument so far has been that the *salāt* provides a protected space in which practitioners first disengage with their immediate social context and then engage with and commit to the foundational concepts of the Islamic tradition. I have argued that this stylized commitment is not bound to any particular interpretation of Islam. It is now time to modify this proposition. When asked about the significance of the *salāt*, my Turkish interlocutors often told me that the *salāt* helped them to strengthen their belief (*iman*). Their explanation resonates with the often quoted saying, attributed to the Prophet, that ‘between belief and unbelief lies the performance of *salāt*’. However, if it is the aim of the *salāt* to signal and strengthen ‘belief’, what exactly does belief mean in this context? One important aspect of the *salāt* is surely, as Mahmood (2001: 828) notes, its role as a Muslim discipline or self-discipline which, through continuing practice, shapes certain dispositions of religious Muslims.¹⁷ As such, the *salāt* is part of particular social projects of Muslim communities or movements and, at the same time, constitutes a central part of a much more widely recognized matrix of instituted practices that define a transnational Muslim community. The practice of *salāt*, however, has another, more immediate effect, which is also reflected in the saying cited above. By affirming and defining the practitioner’s ‘belief’, the *salāt* establishes a web of social relations mediated by commitment to a shared discursive framework.

It is instructive in this respect to explore the concept of belief as it is defined by contemporary Muslim scholars. Arguing within the tradition of the Hanafi *madhab*, a well-known contemporary Turkish Muslim ‘catechism’ (*ilmihal*) introduces the concept of *iman*: ‘As a Muslim term, *iman* means to acknowledge the fundamentals of the religion, which were brought in unadulterated form by the Prophet from God the Exalted, to accept without doubt the things about which he brought news, and to believe them as real and true with one’s heart’ (Karaman, Bardakoğlu & Apaydın 2000: vol. 1, 68). The authors then elaborate this dynamic concept of belief by presenting a sequence of levels of abstraction. At the most abstract level, the *ilmihal* explains, the essence of belief is captured in the Muslim *şahadet kelimesi* (the Muslim ‘confession of faith’) and the *tevhid kelimesi* (the ‘confession of unity’), which, in slightly different words, assert that ‘there is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger’. Belief is here defined simply as the acknowledgement of God’s unity and of the Qur’anic revelation. At the opposite pole of abstraction, the

ilmihal formulates a more concrete definition of belief and its implications. Here, to believe means

to acknowledge and accept all those messages and traditions, which came to us from God through the blessed Muhammad and on the path of secured transmissions. ... To believe each and all of the explicit verses of the Qur'an and the transmitted Hadith, with all the details in which they were announced by God and the Prophet (Karaman, Bardakoğlu & Apaydın 2000: vol. 1, 71).

Central to this message, formulated by the Qur'an, elaborated by the Prophet, and further elaborated by centuries of Muslim scholarship and interpretation is the stern advice to Muslims to live their lives according to these divine precepts.

The concept of belief, as it is elaborated in the *ilmihal*, thus has two poles which are in constant dynamic relation. At one pole, belief/*iman* pertains to the unreserved commitment to the divine rules laid out in the Qur'an and the *sunna* of the Prophet as interpreted by Muslim scholars and ideally encompassing and shaping the entirety of the believer's existence. In practice, however, such total belief is problematic in at least two ways: firstly, as most religious Muslims are well aware, given the constraints of an imperfect world a life fully determined by Muslim piety is scarcely ever achieved; and, secondly, it is hardly possible for a large community to agree upon which shape this total commitment should take given the famously opaque aspects of the Qur'anic revelation. The other pole of *iman* is thus much more abstract and simultaneously much more specific in its commitment to believing in God and accepting the Qur'an as the revealed word of God. In contrast to its opposite pole, this is a limited, unambiguous, and very sharply defined commitment, and one that is easy to fulfil. Formally, a single utterance of the *şahadet kelimesi* gives access to the community of Muslims. These two poles of belief are closely related and constantly refer to each other. On the one hand, submission to God's command, even in its most abstract form, always refers beyond the act of submission in that the Qur'an urges readers to shape their lives and society according to its precepts so as to achieve redemption and avoid God's wrath in the afterlife. This is notwithstanding the fact that these precepts can only be deduced from the Qur'an by way of interpretation. On the other hand, the myriad ways in which Muslims interpret these precepts to shape their lives according to God's commands always refer back to the other pole, the practitioner's submission to God's authority.

The *ilmihal's* authors emphasize that these 'levels' must not be understood as successive stages in an increasing belief. Abu Hanifa, founder and eponym of the Hanafi *madhab*, emphatically states that *iman* is not quantifiable and that there can be no increase or decrease in belief but only belief and unbelief. While the passage from unbelief to belief can be made in a single utterance of one's acceptance of the divine revelation, this passage is reversed neither by negligence nor even sin but only by 'denying the creed that put [the believer] inside it' (Sharif 1963: 265). By defining belief in this way, Hanafi Muslim scholarship draws a demarcation line around the Muslim

community that is broadly inclusive and well defined. It is decisively anti-sectarian, in explicit contrast to the historical example of the Kharijites, a Muslim movement in the late seventh century CE, which, by considering only its own narrow interpretation of Islam as Muslim belief and any diverging interpretations as unbelief, destroyed the viability of the *'umma* as a universal community of believers (Johansen 1999: 19; Watt & Marmura 1985: 133). Apart from its role in the arduous, ill-defined, and never fully achieved projects of generating Muslim subjectivity (*İslam ahlâkı*), the *salât* offers practitioners the opportunity to enact their membership in the Muslim community in an immediate and unambiguous way.

This Muslim concept of belief does not exist in a vacuum, of course, and its significance greatly depends upon the social context in which it is evoked. Since the mid-nineteenth century, a wide range of reforms in the Ottoman Empire, many of them prompted by the increasing ability of the European great powers to exert pressure on the Ottomans and project hegemonic forms of reordering social and political life, led to significant changes in the way Turkish Muslims interpreted Islam (Kara 1985; Mardin 1989; Somel 1987). This, Asad notes for the Egyptian case, helped 'create new spaces for Islamic religion and morality' (2003: 215). With the abandoning of the millet system, which tied the individual's legal status to membership in an ethno-religious community, a legally homogeneous population was created, and increasing importance was given to the individual citizen as the basic unit of the nation state's population. At the same time, influencing and shaping individuals became the aim of competing social projects. The 'culture war' (Gürdoğan 1996: 12) that pitched the Muslim movement – based in the early decades of the Republic mainly in the institutional and geographical periphery of Turkey's modernizing society – against the Kemalist project of social reform can be seen as a battle for the institutional spaces that shape these subjects. In this context the concept of a community of Muslims gained two distinct meanings. On the one hand, the concept of Turkey as a Muslim nation became a central part of the state's nationalist project, where it became synonymous with the 'properly' Turkish, conveniently glossing over the diverse ethnic backgrounds of Turkish Muslims and marginalizing the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish minorities (Seufert 1997). This emphasis on the Muslim character of the Turkish nation was central to integrating the hostile projects of Kemalism and Muslim revivalism. At the same time, however, the effectiveness of this formula was undercut by a different meaning of the term 'Muslim'. In the Muslim movement, the term was often used interchangeably with the term *mümin* (believer), which highlighted the importance of a person's belief/*iman* and commitment to Islam.

Since the 1970s, the strongly hegemonic position of the Turkish state and its Kemalist legacy has considerably weakened and, with far-reaching reforms under the stewardship of Turgut Özal, Turkish politics has taken a distinctly neo-liberal turn (Keyder 1987; Öniş 1991; Yavuz 1997). As in the earlier authoritarian era, the liberal turn is embraced by secularists and religious Muslims alike. In this new era, the classification as *mümin* is still crucial for religious Muslims like Hakan and his friends but its significance is changing. As religious Muslims have moved from the periphery into the centre of

Turkish society, they increasingly share economic interests and consumer patterns, workplaces and neighbourhoods, middle-class life-styles and sensibilities with their secularist peers. In this context, the *salāt* gains particular significance as it offers a highly mobile body technique with which the particular social relationship between practitioners can be affirmed and the individual's disposition as believer can be shaped within the heterogeneous lifeworlds of contemporary Turkey.

Conclusion

Although I disagree with my friend Ayşecan in her assessment of the *salāt* as irrational and archaic, I can hardly quarrel with her over the fact that she feels provoked by it. It is, after all, a practice that marks commitment not only to the central dogmas of mainstream interpretations of Islam in Turkey and to the revealed nature of the Qur'an but also to social projects to which she feels strongly opposed. Moreover, the *salāt* generates forms of solidarity from which she is explicitly excluded. As a secularist Muslim, she feels, not altogether unreasonably, that her way of being a Muslim is challenged by the performance of *salāt*. But what the *salāt* does not do, and this is what I hope to convince my friend of, is to commit practitioners to any particular political project or interpretation, say, of the place of women in society. On the contrary, the enacted commitment to a sharply defined consensus offered by the performance of *salāt* enables religious Muslims to experiment with new interpretations of Islam and new ways of life without abandoning the shared discursive framework of a community of believers. At the same time that the *salāt* provides a powerful resource, however, it also poses a considerable challenge to religious Muslims in calling upon them to organize their lives in such a way that the propositions of the *salāt* remain meaningful. The *salāt* itself is not enough to maintain these conditions. The context in which the revealedness and absolute truth of the Qur'an remain a convincing proposition is created by a much more encompassing project of inserting Muslim institutions and practices into modern lives. So far, Turkish religious Muslims seem to be very successful in this project.

NOTES

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¹I have used pseudonyms for all my Turkish interlocutors.

²The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which emerged in 2001 from the reformist wing of Turkey's banned Islamist Virtue Party (FP), won 34.1 per cent of the vote. The 10 per cent threshold for entering parliament meant that the party gained a dominating majority of

seats, eclipsing the presence of Turkey's entire political establishment in parliament. Ironically, another regenerated classic of Turkish politics, the post-Kemalist People's Republican Party (CHP), re-entered parliament as the sole opposition party.

³One of the limitations of Mauss's brilliant exposé is that, like many subsequent anthropologists, he saw prayer, like ritual in general, as 'above all a means of acting upon sacred beings' (2003: 56). The realm of efficacy is thus very limited. If we couple Mauss's insights on the important role of prayer with another of his brilliant insights, the importance of 'body techniques' (Mauss 1992) in shaping and socializing individual bodies, the realm of efficacy is considerably expanded.

⁴The phrase is taken from an editorial of the journal *İslam* by Seyfi Say (1997). It is a pun on the secularist use of the term *çağdaş* (contemporary), implying a presence that has overcome its outdated and unenlightened religious past. *Çağın islamlaştırmak* is thus a contradiction in terms within this view, although not for the editors of *İslam*.

⁵David Parkin and Stephen Headley's edited volume *Islamic prayer across the Indian Ocean: inside and outside the mosque* (2000) addresses some of the issues addressed in this article. Headley's afterword especially provides a stimulating and rich comment on the significance of the *salāt*. The main conceptual axis around which the volume is organized, the dualism of 'inside and outside the mosque', is much less prominent in Turkey than 'across the Indian Ocean'.

⁶Turgut Özal served as economic adviser for the last civilian government before the 1980 military *coup d'état* and was for some time prime minister under military rule. After the return of civilian rule in 1983, Özal's Motherland Party (ANAP) won the general elections and he again became prime minister until 1989. Özal was president from 1989 until his death in 1993.

⁷Various branches of the Naqşbandi Sufi brotherhood have played important roles in the Turkish Muslim revival movement. Chief among them the so-called *İskenderpaşa cemaat*, named after the *İskenderpaşa* mosque in Istanbul that long served as its centre. In Turkey, *cemaat* is the term that refers to the congregations or religious communities to which many religious Muslims belong. These *cemaats* often gather around the leadership of a spiritual leader (a Sufi sheikh, for instance) or his legacy. For an excellent overview of the recent role and history of the Naqşbandis see Çakır (1995) and Yavuz (2003).

⁸The Muslim *ilmihals* are somewhat similar to Christian catechisms in that they compile what are seen as the most central tenets of Islam and of proper Muslim conduct. These descriptions of correct Muslim practice are today available from a variety of sources (written by Turkish scholars or translated from the Arabic). In the Ottoman/Turkish context, *ilmihals* became widely distributed in the later nineteenth century as part of an attempt to regulate popular Muslim practices (Kelpetin 2000).

⁹The Qur'an already mentions *salāt* (a term used for prayer in Arabic even before the ascent of Islam) but does not offer a systematic description. The two major Bukhari and Muslim *hadith* collections, compiled in the ninth century CE, transmit a great number of comments attributed to the Prophet concerning the importance and the right performance of *salāt*. It was during this period that the standardized format of the prayer took shape (Monnot 1995: 927). Monnot's entry on the *salāt* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* contains considerable useful detail, most of which is pertinent for the *salāt* as it is performed in Turkey.

¹⁰Such standardization is by no means characteristic of all Turkish Muslim rituals. Sufi rituals, for instance, take different forms in different circles, although here a certain standardization seems to have taken place as well. As N. and R. Tapper (1987: 77-82) note, the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, which is very popular in Turkey, has a very fluid format. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the quasi-official *İlmihal* (Karaman, Bardakoğlu & Apaydın 2000) published by the Turkish Diyanet Vakfı mentions the *mevlud* not under 'ritual' (*ibadet*) but under the theologically insignificant category of 'ceremonies'.

¹¹For instance, David Shankland's informative study *Islam and society in Turkey* (1999) and Özdemir and Frank's *Visible Islam in modern Turkey* (2000) give no estimate of religious adherence.

¹²Numbers for the 1980s and 1990s are given in *İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi* (n.d.: 60). The number for 2002 is given on a webpage called Camiler Kenti Istanbul on the site www.Istanbul.com.

¹³The Arabic transliteration is taken from Karaman, Bardakoğlu & Apaydın (2000: vol. 1, 267), who also provide a Turkish translation. For a useful account of the *ezan* and other central aspects of Islamic worship in Turkey, see Özdemir & Frank (2000).

¹⁴This silent performance seems to be specific to the Turkish case (cf. Monnot 1995: 928).

¹⁵The English rendering of the prayer formulas poses the dilemma of whether a translation directly from the Arabic should be used or a translation of one of the commonly used Turkish translations. I have opted here for the latter, but I have found that the differences are not very significant. I am here relying mostly on the Turkish renditions of the prayer formulas as they appear in Tavaslı (n.d.).

¹⁶Conversation with Dr Tasin Görgün at the Centre for Islamic Research (ISAM), Istanbul, February 2001.

¹⁷Asad (1993) suggests that this is paralleled in the case of medieval Christian practices.

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**« La pratique du *salāt*, entre croyance et incroyance » :
signification et efficacité d'un rituel musulman**

Résumé

À partir d'un travail de terrain à Istanbul, l'auteur analyse le rôle des cinq prières qui marquent la journée des Musulmans (*salāt*), dans le cadre de la tradition islamique. Il affirme que la prière, avec ses règles rituelles complexes, fournit aux pratiquants un puissant moyen de renforcer leur engagement dans l'islam et d'affirmer leur appartenance à une communauté de croyants, tout en permettant aux croyants de rechercher des interprétations nouvelles et différenciées de l'islam. Le caractère « mobile » du *salāt*, qui permet sa pratique dans les modes de vie les plus divers, revêt une importance particulière avec l'insertion croissante des musulmans religieux dans la société libérale turque au cours des dernières décennies.

Heiko Henkel received his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 2004 and currently teaches anthropology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. His work is concerned with various aspects of the Islamic tradition in Turkey and Germany, and with secularist critiques of Islam in Europe.

The University of British Columbia, Institute for European Studies, 1855 West Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2, Canada. hhenkel@interchange.ubc.ca

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