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Grounding religious geopolitics: The everyday counter-geopolitical practices of Turkish mosque communities in Germany

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ABSTRACT

Mosques in Europe have been at the center of (geo)political debates about terrorism, radicalism, and the integration of Muslim communities. Mainstream EU political leaders and pundits often express suspicion of the transnational connections of Muslim populations and Islamic organizations in Europe, portraying mosques as foreign territories and mosque communities as vulnerable to foreign influence. At the same time, studies on how Middle Eastern states use mosques as foreign policy instruments also depict mosque communities as simple receptors of influence. Both approaches erase or flatten mosque communities' dynamism, heterogeneity, and critical agency in relation to the geopolitical projects of their ancestral countries and the European countries where they have made their home. More specifically, we focus on mosques affiliated with DITIB, a Turkish-Sunni religious organization in Germany, and demonstrate how mosque communities develop a critical stance towards both German and Turkish states' attempts to domesticate mosque spaces. Drawing on interviews and participant observation conducted between 2016 and 2018 in Germany and Turkey, we trace how mosque members respond to state projects and engage in everyday counter-geopolitical practices to make mosque spaces their own. Through a feminist geopolitical analysis, our grounded focus on DITIB mosques illustrates how mosque communities negotiate and dismantle geopolitical projects rather than accept or implement them wholesale. While posing a challenge to Islamic organizations' geopolitical construction as passive territories under foreign influence, this study also suggests a more robust conversation between geopolitics of religion scholarship and feminist geopolitical theories.

1. Introduction

Mosques in Europe have been contested spaces, often depicted by European mainstream media and political leaders as the source of Islamist terrorism and radicalism and Muslim communities' resistance to integration (Allievi, 2010; Dikici, 2021). These depictions frequently locate the perceived threat in mosques' foreignness and their connections to Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. Recently, several European governments have made statements and taken controversial actions against mosques, focusing specifically on their transnational ties. Many EU countries, including Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and Austria, have been announcing roadmaps to *domesticate* mosques by limiting foreign ideological, financial, and religious influence (Carbonnel and Kalin, 2018; O'Grady, 2018; Piser, 2018). Locating the threat extraterritorially, EU political leaders frequently call for more surveillance and policing of mosque communities and advocate building European institutions to train imams. For example, following the terrorist attacks in Austria in October 2020, the Austrian state shut down a mosque and an Islamic association after it was found that the suspect was a frequenter of that mosque and the association (Gehrke, 2020). Addressing this attack and another one in France in November 2020, Charles Michel, the European Council president, tweeted: "To fight the Ideology of Hatred, we need to set up as soon as possible a European Institute to train imams in Europe" (Reuters, 2020).

These discursive narratives and policy actions about mosques unveil a geopolitical perspective that constructs mosques as *foreign* territories that need to be controlled, monitored, reclaimed, and territorialized by European states. This geopolitical view delineates Muslim migrant communities' countries of origin as the sources of radicalism and mosques as the primary sites for transmitting radical ideologies from outside of Europe into Europe through mosques' transnational connections. This

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narrative also implies that Europe is a safe and liberal territory where radicalism could not exist or stem from, and that imams trained in Europe could not possibly espouse any religious or ideological view that could be deemed radical. Simultaneously, this framework projects a geopolitical perspective on local Muslim communities as *domestic others*. The association of mosques with ethnoreligious identities (as Moroccan, Turkish, etc.) is usually taken as proof of mosque communities' direct alignment with the agenda of their nations of origin. These communities are suspected to be loyal to their countries of origin and readily open to the influence of foreign ideologies and extremism. By presenting the threat originating in foreign territories and spreading to Europe through mosques, this discourse also closes down any questions about anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim racism in Europe while pointing to mosques as contested territories over which state sovereignty needs to be reinstated. However, this geopolitical perspective on mosques is not limited to European governments. Political discourse and practices of some states in the Middle East and Africa form the flipside of the same coin. These countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Turkey, incorporate Muslim populations and their mosques in Europe into their broader foreign policy agenda to use as a geo(political) tool, and ultimately, to "expand their social and diplomatic influence" in Europe (Adraoui, 2019, p. 319).

This study argues that this dominant geopolitical discourse on mosques as foreign and Muslim communities as easily manipulated by foreign influence flattens and ignores the dynamic, heterogeneous, and critical agencies of mosque communities in Europe. Most Muslims arrived in Europe over a half-century ago, if not earlier. Just like many other immigrant communities, they have produced a "third space" for themselves with "new structures of authority, new political initiatives" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211). Studies show how Muslim immigrant communities in Germany and other contexts engage multiple political and social structures to manifest their differences, hybrid identities, and agencies (Boland, 2020; Gale, 2005; Mishra and Shirazi, 2010; Zine, 2001). Yet, less attention has been paid to how these communities negotiate or counter the extraterritorial strategies of countries of origin and transnational Islamic organizations to control, manage, and establish hegemony over diaspora populations. The research on religious diplomacy of states and geopolitics of religious organizations has explored how religious organizations, texts, practices, and discourses have played a crucial part in international politics (Agnew, 2006; Dijkink, 2006; Sturm, 2013). However, how these geopolitical strategies and foreign policies have been received, adapted, or resisted in religious communities' everyday lives are not explored thoroughly. We argue that heterogeneities and critical agencies of immigrant religious communities vis-à-vis extraterritorial political influence and hegemony strategies of origin countries should also be incorporated into academic analyses.

Our focus on DITIB (*Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği;* the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) mosques in Germany demonstrates how mosque communities navigate both German and Turkish states' geopolitical attempts to exert influence over them and engage in everyday counter-geopolitical practices to maintain and build their distinct agency and space. DITIB is a Turkish-Sunni mosque organization established in 1984 through an inter-state agreement between Turkey and Germany. In addition to its cultural, religious, and ethnic affinity with Turkey, DITIB continues to have institutional relations with the Turkish state through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*; Diyanet hereafter), which is a government body in Turkey. The German state has long been concerned about DITIB's links to Diyanet (and, thereby, to the Turkish state) and advocated for weakening or cutting these transnational ties. However, DITIB communities have interpreted the German state's suspicions and requests as part of a broader assimilation policy that aims to eradicate the distinct ethno-religious identification, spaces, and practices of 'German-Turks,' and DITIB has refused to cut its ties to Diyanet and Turkey. Although this resistance to the German state's domestication attempts has been discussed in media and scholarly studies (Arkilic, 2015), the DITIB community's dissent from the Turkey-centered political agenda has been predominantly understudied. While keeping their institutional connections with Turkey, we argue that many DITIB communities also strive to establish and protect their unique diasporic autonomy against Diyanet's attempts to bring DITIB mosques under its direct control. With diasporic autonomy, we refer to mosque communities' self-reliance and self-governance in their everyday practices and decisions. Drawing on Naylor's (2017) conceptualization, we define autonomy as lived experiences, processes, and embodied practices of individuals and communities rather than an organized action for political and territorial independence from a particular state. Yet, we do not argue that DITIB is at an equal distance from Turkey and Germany in maintaining autonomy and agency. DITIB's institutional and ideological proximity to Turkey can be discernable in many instances. However, these connections do not necessarily mean that DITIB mosques are entirely under foreign influence. Instead, DITIB mosque communities assert themselves and deploy multiple strategies to negotiate and resist Diyanet when they feel that the overseas policies or imams of Diyanet (or the Turkish state in general) infringe on their lifestyles or autonomy. They criticize the direct transplantation of religious or political practices from Turkey, limit imams' authority, and, in some cases, even break away from DITIB to establish their independent institutions.

Drawing on feminist geopolitical analyses, we conceptualize DITIB communities' practices as a counter-geopolitical praxis through which mosque communities (re)claim their diasporic autonomous spaces against both nation-states' geopolitical attempts of territorialization. While resisting the supremacy of inter-state politics as the primary object of analysis in international relations, feminist scholars have shown how geopolitical discourse and practices are made, unmade, and challenged in everyday spaces. We also revisit the concept of "religeopolitics" (Nyroos, 2001) and religious foreign policy discussions through an ethnographic feminist geopolitical approach. Our grounded focus on DITIB mosques illustrates how geopolitical strategies operate in the quotidian spaces of religion and reveals that these strategies are negotiated, challenged, and dismantled by mosque communities rather than directly accepted and implemented. As such, while posing a challenge to the flattening geopolitical construction of mosques as foreign territories under the direct influence of other nation-states and transnational organizations, our study also suggests a more vigorous dialogue between the scholarship on religious geopolitics and feminist geopolitical theories.

2. The political field of organized Turkish-Sunni Islam in Germany

DITIB is Germany's most prominent Islamic organization, with more than 900 affiliated mosques and tens of thousands of members across the country. When DITIB was founded in 1984, there were already over 250 mosques established by the first-generation Turkish migrants who arrived in Germany during the 1960s, primarily as part of Germany's guestworker programs. These first-generation Turkish-Muslims "were pretty much on their own in matters of ritual and worship" (Stowasser, 2002, p. 60). Initially, there were no imams to travel with or provide religious services to the predominantly Sunni-Muslim workers from Turkey in Germany. The Turkish laborers were not trained to lead prayers and perform religious rituals during Friday prayers or funerals (Karakasoglu, 1996).

This gap in religious authority and service was first recognized by Turkey-origin Islamic organizations, including *Milli Görüş* and *Süleymancılar*. These religiopolitical groups started organizing in Europe during the 1960s and 1970s. As Sunier and Landman (2015) explain, Islamist organizations' activities were restricted in Turkey due to the state's strict implementation of secular principles. Yet, Islamist organizations gained strength in Europe and provided significant financial and political support to their headquarters in Turkey, undermining the

official Sunni-Islamic doctrine of the Turkish state. During the 1970s, Turkey's Diyanet started sending imams to mosques of Turkish-Sunni communities in Europe for short periods to lead collective prayers during *Ramadan,* the holy month of Islam. In the 1980s, as a reaction to the growing influence of rival Islamic organizations, Diyanet also began establishing permanent organizations in Europe and sent full-time imams through bilateral agreements with European states, including Germany. For Germany, being a partner with an Islamic organization that was thought to be under the Turkish state's 'moderate Islam' was also a strategic decision (Sunier, 2005, p. 47). In the face of Turkish "bad Muslim" organizations (Yurdakul and Yükleyen, 2009), such as *Milli Görüş*, which was considered more religiously conservative and anti-assimilationist –and thereby as a threat– by the German state, DITIB was perceived as a reliable and *non-political* interlocutor. In addition to this transnational religious politics favoring DITIB, the "offer of full-time salaried imams" (Sunier and Landman, 2015, p. 50) (Sunier and Landman, 2015, p. 50)has further secured DITIB's position and made it a strong player.

After the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or Justice and Development Party), a pro-Islamic political party whose founding leaders –including the current President Erdoğan– originate in the *Milli Görüş* movement, came to power in Turkey in 2002, the fierce competition and rivalry between Diyanet and other Islamic groups gradually decreased. This political change in Turkey also impacted the attitudes of Islamist groups towards Diyanet and, by extension, DITIB. While previously seen as the arms of a secularist state, with the AKP in control, Diyanet and DITIB gained legitimacy. Today, DITIB and the other Turkish-Islamic organizations in Germany, such as *Milli Görüş, Türk Ocakları, Süleymancılar,* and *ATIB*, continue to operate. However, DITIB seems more active in social and religious services due to its institutional and financial power. Earlier ideological tensions and rivalries seem to have eased recently, and today many other Islamic organizations apply to DITIB to request imams from Diyanet.

2.1. DITIB's contested position between Germany and Turkey

DITIB's legal status and organizational structure have always been complicated. DITIB's high-level management is very close to the Turkish state. Diyanet appoints, sends, and pays the salaries of DITIB imams from Turkey. DITIB is also chaired by Turkey's Attaché of Religious Services in Germany. Furthermore, DITIB's Religious Advisory Board consists of Diyanet members. Both DITIB's chair and the advisory board members are headquartered in Cologne. DITIB's affinity with the Turkish state has become further complicated along with the AKP's political trajectory from an earlier pro-EU stance to a critical attitude towards the EU and deepening right-wing authoritarianism. When the AKP implemented pro-EU reforms during the early 2000s, Diyanet disseminated the idea of a 'moderate' Turkish-Islam compatible with European values. However, the pro-EU foreign policies slowed down at the end of the 2000s. In this period, the party shifted its foreign policy strategy to a so-called neo-Ottomanism with ambitions to position itself as a leader of Muslim-majority countries of the Middle East and of the post-socialist countries of Central Asia and the Balkans that share an Ottoman heritage. During this period, Diyanet has become Turkey's soft-power institution (Öktem, 2012).

As the AKP leaned more towards Islamist-nationalist authoritarianism during the 2010s, Diyanet's role also shifted (Öztürk, 2016). This ideological shift has also found repercussions in Germany. First, Turkey's relations with the German state deteriorated due to diplomatic issues and Turkey's gradual secession from the EU. Moreover, the Turkish government accused Germany of not condemning the coup attempt in Turkey in 2016. Furthermore, Germany's generous attitude towards asylum seekers from Turkey, who are thought to be coup attempters by the Turkish government, has further frustrated Erdoğan. In retaliation, Turkey did not allow German officials to visit the NATO military base in Turkey and randomly arrested several German citizens, accusing them of helping terrorists. While these developments almost halted bilateral relations between Turkey and Germany, a 'spy-imam' crisis erupted in 2017: The German police raided the apartments of four DITIB imams suspected of conducting espionage on behalf of the Turkish government. These inter-state tensions have affected DITIB deeply. Previously perceived as the representative of 'moderate Islam' in Germany, DITIB came to be seen as a possible national threat and 'the external arm of the Turkish state.'

However, portrayals of DITIB as simply an extension of the Turkish state overlooks its socially and politically complex structure. DITIB is legally a civil society organization subject to German laws and responsible for raising its funds, the financial and institutional administration of its network of affiliated mosques, and electing its administrators. The bilateral agreement between Turkey and Germany stipulates that DITIB's only official tie to the Turkish state is Diyanet imams' temporary appointment to serve in DITIB mosques. While DITIB's headquarters include members with direct ties to the Turkish state, most other high-level administrators are born and raised in Germany, and tend to see DITIB as *an organization of German-Turks* rather than a solely Turkish organization. Moreover, DITIB's local associations are founded, funded, and built by local communities (many of whom were born or raised in Germany and are German citizens) that continue to exercise significant control over their mosques' day-to-day operations and decision-making. Local DITIB mosque communities elect the chair of their association, decide on sub-committees (such as youth and women's branches) and select their leadership. These local associations are autonomous in their daily activities and are not hierarchically under DITIB headquarters' direct control. Affiliated mosques pay a monthly fee to DITIB in return for the right to request imams from Turkey, whose salaries are paid jointly by DITIB and Diyanet and an institutional support network and a sense of unity with other affiliated mosques across Germany. This complex institutional and political structure renders DITIB a contested organization within Germany and between Germany and Turkey.

3. Grounding religious geopolitics

We approach the debates over the transnational connections of mosques within the framework of religious geopolitics. Research on the relations among religion, geography, and politics, or "religeopolitics" (Nyroos 2001), examines how modern states, religious organizations, and politicians "employ political-theological vocabulary, symbols and action" (Sturm, 2013, p. 135) in foreign policy or relations. In debates around the "fusion of geopolitics and religion" (Dijkink, 2006), there has been an increased scholarly and popular attention to Islam's discursive and practical place, particularly following 9/11 events and the "war on terrorism." This research has analyzed the geopolitical discourse and activities of transnational Islamic organizations and leaders (Haynes, 2009; Nyroos, 2001; West, 2006) and how Islam was incorporated into the foreign policy practices of nation-states (Kourgiotis, 2020; Mandaville and Hamid, 2018; Wastnidge, 2015).

Recent scholarship has examined how mosques in Europe have become sites central to interstate diplomacy and soft-power strategies within this framework. Political discussions around the visibilities and symbolic values of mosques within European cities' urban textures have already been well-documented by geographers (Eade, 1996; Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg, 2005; Shmueli et al., 2014). A series of other studies have positioned these mosque debates into an inter-state terrain through geopolitical and foreign-policy discussions (Laurence, 2006; Öcal, 2020; Öktem, 2012; Öztürk and Sözeri, 2018). For instance, Laurence's (2006, 2012) research reveals how mosques have been diplomatic spaces since the early 1970 s between European states and many migrant-sending Muslim-majority countries to control and monitor migrant Muslim communities. Research on Turkey's religion-based foreign policy stands out among these studies due to Turkey's recent active diaspora engagement (Adamson, 2019; Aydın, 2014; Mencutek and Baser, 2018; Yanasmayan and Kaşlı, 2019). For instance,

Korkut (2009), Gümüş (2010), Çitak (2010), Öktem (2012), and Öztürk and Sözeri (2018) take Diyanet as a foreign policy instrument of the Turkish state and detail Turkey's soft power engagements, including its new diaspora strategy, in Europe, and across the world.

Overall, this work depicts how religion and transnational religious organizations are either the sources of geopolitical strategies or discourses or have an essential place in nation-states' foreign policies. However, less attention has been paid to how religious communities have received and reacted to these geopolitical strategies and how state policies have territorialized their everyday lives. Geopolitical discourse and practices do not happen in a vacuum. When they operate through, or over, religious institutions, like mosques, they impact religious communities' quotidian spaces. Yet, an ethnographic approach to religion-based geopolitics and foreign policy has been limited in scholarly works. But still, several studies provide significant exceptions. For example, Habashi's ethnographic study (2013) draws attention to children's geopolitical agency in the tense geography of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Likewise, Hoesterey's study (2020) provides a bottom-up perspective on religious soft-power by focusing on the reception and implementation of the Indonesian state's religious soft-power discourse on the ground. In this study, Hoesterey reveals how "religious diplomacy (…) do not easily conform to on-the-ground realities" (Hoesterey, 2020, p. 19). We aim to extend these works by attending to the lived realities of religeopolitics in DITIB mosques and communities.

3.1. Agencies of migrant communities

Overlooking "on-the-ground realities" of religeopolitics not only treats ordinary people as passive recipients of geopolitical strategies but also misses their reactions and complex engagement with these strategies. As Mitchell and Sparke (2020, p. 1048) argue, "how people negotiate geopolitics on the ground can challenge the top-down territorialization of state space and open new opportunities for examining political autonomy and resistance relationally." We argue that ordinary people exercise agency against grand narratives and geopolitical designs. Focusing on their grounded reactions also reveals the disparity between foreign policy and on-the-ground reality. Our focus on DITIB mosques in Germany examines mosques as spaces torn between and positioned against two geopolitical narratives, either as foreign territories or diasporic areas. Both of these narratives are part of state strategies that seek to establish control over the same population. Our analysis of mosque communities' reactions to these geopolitical strategies reveals the counter-geopolitical positions and practices that challenge state-centric, top-down territorializations and instead aim to build autonomous spaces that reflect the diverse and unique identities of German-Sunni-Muslim-Turks.

Mosque communities have exercised and continue to exercise political agency in establishing, maintaining, and transforming their own spaces and identities as part of local, national, and transnational dynamics. These communities negotiate their dual identities, identify themselves with more than one national orientation (Ozyurt, 2013), and "challenge conceptions of bounded national citizenship (…) in which one nation-state is conceived as the primary source of identification and community" (Leitner and Ehrkamp, 2006, p. 1630). This is especially the case for second-and-third generations who feel attached to the countries they live in more than their parents' countries of origin (Yukleyen, 2009). These generations do not readily embrace home country assimilation policies or give into ancestral origin country's overseas domination attempts. Today, second-and third-generation Muslims are increasingly active in mosques. They are transforming these spaces to articulate their ethnoreligious identities while simultaneously differentiating themselves from their parents and grandparents and asserting their distinct claims, experiences, and expectations that result from growing up in Europe (Boland, 2020; Bridges-Webb, 2009; Cesari, 2002). Many Islamic organizations have also adapted to the shifting character of new generations and "localized" their practices to comply with the host societies' socio-political texture (Yukleyen, 2009). Such localizations are present in other contexts and reflect the dynamism and agency that belie depictions of Muslim communities in Europe as naive subjects which can be easily manipulated by and operate as tools of foreign enemies.

3.2. A feminist geopolitical perspective on religious geopolitics

To theorize how mosque communities in Europe enact their agency and develop counter-geopolitical practices, we turn to feminist geopolitics scholarship. Feminist geopolitics intervenes in the classical understanding of geopolitics that refers to power relations, interactions, and strategies among nation-states or supranational organizations over a territory. Instead of viewing the world as a board game with "big men moving big guns across a big playing field" (Koopman, 2011, p. 274), feminist geographers have extended the meaning of geopolitics by *peopling* it and showing its "exceptional role in the everyday lives of real people" (Massaro and Williams, 2013, p. 567). Feminist scholars demonstrated how ordinary people's quotidian experiences, strategies, and interactions are vital to geopolitical processes. In this analysis, mundane life, domestic spaces, and intimate relations do not only come into play as the sites of geopolitical power but any presumed division between "public and private, global and local, formal and informal, ultimately blur, overlap and collapse into one another in the making of political life" (Secor, 2001, p. 193). While geopolitical practices of dominant powers attempt to "order and regulate space" (Sharp, 2019, p. 76), feminist geographers have also revealed "how intimate relationships and negotiations are also struggles over geopolitical power and meaning" (Williams, 2020, p. 1203). Studies demonstrate how ordinary people produce counter-geopolitical tactics, narratives, and practices using humor (Fluri, 2019), love (Marshall, 2014), silent protests (Ranjbar, 2017), everyday neighborhood interactions (Secor, 2001), and collective action (Brickell, 2014; Lynch, 2019; Vasudevan and Smith, 2020). Drawing on these feminist geopolitical analyses, we understand DITIB through a quotidian geopolitical framework. While DITIB is on the target of both the German and Turkish states' geopolitical discourses and practices, our study focuses on how DITIB communities formulate and enact everyday counter-geopolitical praxis.

4. Methodology

This study draws on research conducted by the first author between 2016 and 2018 in Germany. This research includes in-depth interviews with the broader DITIB community, including six interviews with senior managers at DITIB's headquarters, twenty-six interviews with members (17) and chairs (9) of DITIB-affiliated local mosque associations in multiple cities in Germany. The first author also conducted fourteen interviews with imams. Interviews were conducted in Turkish and translated into English by the first author.

DITIB member interviewees were primarily first- and second-generation men and women aged between 40 and 70. Both senior managers in DITIB's headquarters and the local associations' chairs were predominantly second-generation males aged between 30 and 45. The imams the first author interviewed were also in this age range. The first author also conducted multiple interviews with women in DITIB's local associations. These women direct the women and family branches of local associations. Finally, the first author interviewed youth between 18 and 25 who were organizers or active participants of DITIB's youth activities, including one informal focus group with ten young men and women, two in-depth interviews, and multiple informal conversations. This research also draws on extensive ethnographic field observations conducted by the first author in various DITIB settings, from *iftar* meals to award ceremonies of DITIB community members and charity organizations. These observations allowed us to see the relations between DITIB's headquarters and local associations and their perspectives on

and interactions with the German and Turkish states.

The following two parts provide a grounded ethnographic analysis that reveals how immigrant mosque communities mobilize different strategies to maintain their distinctive position that is neither assimilated into the host country nor entirely controlled by countries of origin. Instead, they carve out an autonomous space for themselves and resist local or overseas attempts to limit their geopolitical agency.

5. Resistance to territorialization: Diasporic agency and counter-geopolitical practices

5.1. Mobilizing connections to Turkish-Islam as a counter-geopolitical strategy against Germany's territorialization attempts

In October 2020, Germany launched a pilot project, the Islamic College, funded by the Interior Ministry to educate imams locally after intensive debates over the adverse effects of importing imams from abroad. However, the largest Islamic organization in Germany, DITIB, as well as *Milli Görüş,* refused to participate in this initiative. In 2006, DITIB launched an International Divinity Program partnering with Diyanet. Through this Program, Turkish-origin German youths are recruited to receive divinity education at universities in Turkey (Erşahin, 2015). Following training, youths may potentially be employed by the Turkish state in their home countries (Bruce, 2018, p. 3). In 2020, a few months before the Islamic College project, DITIB added a new phase to the Program for raising Turkish-origin Germans as imams through its training curriculum in Germany. Given this context, DITIB's refusal to participate in the Islamic College is intriguing because the Islamic College project could have enabled collaboration with the German state to support its goals.

DITIB officials explained that DITIB was not participating in the Islamic College because of concerns over the quality of imams' training. According to Zekeriya Altuğ, the chair of DITIB's foreign relations, DITIB has a "different quality standard and expectation for raising imams" (Özcan, 2019). How does DITIB understand *quality,* and why is it resisting this initiative? Our interviews with DITIB officials and members and a closer look at DITIB's project reveal that DITIB's refusal to participate in the Islamic College project reflects DITIB's concerns about integration, belonging, and territorialization, as well as DITIB's emphasis on an Islam rooted in Turkey and inseparable from an ethnoreligious identity. We suggest that DITIB's stance against the Islamic College is a resistance act to the German state's perceived homogenization attempts; it is a counter-geopolitical praxis to pursue its diasporic agency and transnational territoriality.

The place of mosques and the integration of the Turkish community have been long-standing sociopolitical issues in Germany (Ehrkamp, 2005). As the notion that Turkish migrants were in Germany only temporarily as guest-workers gave way to the realization that many had settled in Germany with "their [own] visions of culture and belonging" (Soysal, 2003, p. 493) during the 1980s, concerns over integration took central stage in political debates. During the late 1990s, calls for *Leitkulture* (leading German culture), which asked for more strict assimilation of migrants into German cultural practices and ideals, generated an intensive public debate (Ehrkamp, 2010; Ewing, 2003). Suspicions about the German state's intentions in assimilating Turks have remained strong among Turkish communities (Ehrkamp, 2006). Measures taken by the German state, such as the adjustments made to German citizenship laws during the 1990s and the 2000s to open the path to citizenship by non-ethnic Germans, did little to alleviate the skepticism about assimilationist attitudes. This is especially true for the Turkish-Islamic and nationalist circles in Germany, who articulate their ideologies through an anti-assimilationist discourse. As Yurdakul and Yükleyen's study (2009, p. 223) shows, construing the German state's policies as an expectation of "assimilation instead of integration" is a common impression among conservative and nationalist Turkish groups in Germany. The foundation of the German Islam Conference (DIK-*Deutsche Islam Konferenz*) in 2006 by the Interior Ministry of the Federal Republic to regulate Islam has furthered some of these suspicions. The Ministry regularly organizes the DIK, selecting the participant Islamic organizations and determining the discussion topics. As Bayrakli et al. (2018, p. 142) indicate, rather than being an institutional umbrella for Muslims, the DIK "can be seen as the main tool of the German State to create a national Islam." Similarly, Müller (2017, p. 57) states that the DIK has never aimed at "grating equal rights and recognition to Islamic organizations." Therefore, many Muslim communities cast doubt on the conference's purposes and ability to represent Muslims.

This research reveals that these suspicions are still influential among the broader Turkish-Sunni community. Even among the top DITIB managers, who also have a critical stance against Turkey's interventionist policies, the German state's attempts are usually suspected as practices to erase connections with Turkey. For instance, Atakan, a high-ranking manager at DITIB's headquarters, explained that DITIB could not get the public law corporation status (given to churches and Jewish congregations and endows them with social, educational, and financial privileges), despite the reforms DITIB undertook over the last decade to comply with the German state's standards.[1] According to Atakan, the reason behind this negative attitude is DITIB's connections to Turkish culture and Sunni religious practices. Atakan refrained from making bold statements due to his position at DITIB. However, he explained the German state's reason for not approving DITIB's application for public entity status as insufficient secularization: "they say 'if you secularize, we can accept you more easily.'"

Atakan construes this advice for "secularizing" as a call for disconnecting from Diyanet and Turkish Islam. DITIB and its community are usually suspicious of the calls for rupturing ties with Diyanet as an assimilationist move and thus resist them. For many Turkish-Sunni Muslims, connections with Diyanet mean maintaining ties to Turkish culture and *Turkish-type of Islam*. It is also a way to keep the links of new generations with Turkey. The following statements from Sümeyye, a senior DITIB officer, and Niyazi, the chair of a local association in Wuppertal, describe the need for connections with Turkey as follows:

> Sümeyye: Our roots must be protected. If we live only a Germany-based life here, we may forget our past in a decade. (…) We can integrate into German society; that is not a problem. But if we ignore our language, culture, and religion for the sake of integration, then our identities will be gone before long.
> Niyazi: Our connection to Diyanet is essential for our community's trust and link to our association. Our imams guarantee to bring Turkish culture and Anatolian-Islam here. This is what makes DITIB. We are disconnected from Turkey politically. But we can never give up our imams.

In this conversation, stating "we can integrate into German society; that is not a problem," Sümeyye implies that what is asked from DITIB is assimilation rather than integration. Sümeyye expresses her concerns about living a life based only on Germany and presents DITIB as an institution that occupies a transnational position and is key to maintaining a diasporic agency and identity across generations. Niyazi's words similarly emphasize the importance of DITIB's connection to Diyanet in Turkey. While underscoring the correlation between Turkish culture and imams, he underlines that the link to Diyanet is a requisite of diasporic identity, culture, and religious needs. Furthermore, he points

[1] The public entity status gives religious organizations rights to collect taxes from their communities and teach religious courses in schools. Each federal state has right to determine which religious organizations will be entitled this status. To be recognized as a public entity, religious organizations must fulfil some criteria such as representing the entire religious community and having a centralized organized structure. Bayrakli et al. (2018) states that "because of the non-unified nature of Sunni Islam, it is extremely difficult for Muslims to achieve these requirements" (p. 141).

to the distinctiveness of an 'Anatolian-Islam' or Turkish-Islam that Diyanet represents and teaches. Therefore, any attempt to stop the transfer of imams means cutting ties with Turkish culture *and* Anatolian-Islam.

Sümeyye and Niyazi's words, echoed in many other interviews, reveal that DITIB's decision not to participate in the Islamic College project is more than a concern over the quality of imams' training. When Zekeriya speaks of the German state-sponsored Islamic College not meeting DITIB's 'quality standard,' he refers to the training given by Diyanet. Accordingly, to raise qualified imams, divinity training must be provided by experts of Diyanet in Turkey or by Diyanet-authorized experts in Germany. Our interviews show that DITIB communities see connections to Turkey as essential to their ethnoreligious identity and heritage. They remain suspicious about Germany's assimilationist policies and discourse and are wary of being cut off from Turkey. Therefore, DITIB's refusal to participate in the Islamic College is a strategic move to protect its autonomous diasporic identity. As Naylor (2017, p. 28) defines, autonomy in everyday practices and decisions refers to the rights of "peoples/groups to determine their economic, political, and cultural practices." Since DITIB communities usually define themselves through their connection to Turkish culture and Turkish-Islam, this resistance to the Germany-based Islam project is a counter-geopolitical step to maintain "ethno-cultural practices and internal decision-making power" (Naylor, 2017, p. 28) and to resist being confined in Germany. Both DITIB's headquarters and local DITIB associations seek to protect their autonomy through transnational territoriality localized in Germany and connected to Turkey –without being dominated by either state.

These counter-geopolitical practices are neither one-dimensional nor only against the perceived domestication attempts of Germany. DITIB is also formulating counter-geopolitical strategies against the Turkish state's territorialization attempts. Now we turn to how DITIB is mobilizing to counter Turkey's influence via Diyanet.

5.2. DITIB's counter-geopolitical strategies to resist Diyanet's hegemony

Accusations that DITIB operates as an overseas extension of the Turkish state are not new. However, such comments render DITIB and the communities it serves as passive and easily manipulatable subjects without agency. The Turkish state undoubtedly has been interested in maintaining its ties to German-Turks and has seen DITIB as an institution that would enable it to exert influence over this community. However, an in-depth analysis reveals that DITIB communities are not homogenous, and not every member is aligned with the AKP ideology. Instead, some DITIB members engage in everyday practices of resistance against Diyanet's overseas control attempts. DITIB communities negotiate their difference from the managerial, religious, or political practices transplanted from Turkey when they feel that their diasporic agencies and autonomous spaces are threatened. This section analyzes how various segments of DITIB communities contest, criticize, and resist Turkey's religious foreign policy strategies through Diyanet rather than readily accepting or being easily manipulated by them.

During the interviews at DITIB's headquarters in Cologne, it became clear that some of DITIB's senior-level managers were critical of Diyanet's control attempts. For instance, Atakan, who had been working at DITIB as a senior officer for a long time, described tensions between DITIB and Diyanet officials and Turkish state representatives:

> Our regional unions were questioned by Diyanet and religious attachés with the worry that "they are *Germanizing*!" Our good relations with the German society generated anxiety about us breaking away from Turkey. Some progressive steps [towards integration in Germany] brought about reactionary results [from Turkey] (June 4, 2018).
>
> If we say that our connections to Diyanet and Turkey are more important than anything…, we cannot function in Germany. If we rely on the Turkish state just like we did in the past, the German state will no longer tolerate it. If that happens, we will lose all the gains we have had in Germany.

Atakan was referring to a series of structural and programmatic reforms DITIB started to implement during the early 2000s to integrate with the broader German society and achieve the public entity status. In 2002, German language and cultural orientation courses were provided for Diyanet imams. DITIB also ended the practice of directly receiving Friday sermons from Diyanet in 2006, and imams started to prepare speeches to address mosque communities' local needs and circumstances. Moreover, DITIB shifted its hierarchical organizational structure towards a decentralized model (Rosenow-Williams, 2012, p. 211) and established regional unions to participate in decision-making. A quota for women among delegates in DITIB's federal assembly was also introduced during this period (Rosenow-Williams, 2012, p. 212). Although DITIB could not gain the official public entity status, as a result of these transformations, DITIB signed state agreements (*staatsvertrag*) in Hamburg and Bremen respectively in 2012 and 2013, which promoted DITIB's country-wide prestige (Simsek, 2013).

These reforms brought some structural changes that differentiated DITIB from Diyanet's organizational structures and practices in Turkey. Diyanet criticized DITIB reforms and construed them as *Germanization.* Atakan did not elaborate on the internal DITIB debates about this process. However, his words provide hints at tensions by the contrast he makes between DITIB's progressive steps towards greater autonomy and Diyanet's reactionary response. It also appears that, for many DITIB administrators, keeping DITIB as a Diyanet-focused organization could threaten DITIB's existence and social functions in Germany. Imam Hidayet, who served in a DITIB mosque in Berlin between 2006 and 2011, also indicated that during this process, several second-generation DITIB directors wanted to distance DITIB from Diyanet leading to intense intra-institutional debates.

Sümeyye, a senior DITIB officer, defined the Turkish government's DITIB policy as a political campaign, explicitly pointing to the Turkish government's new electoral policy that granted Turkish citizens living abroad the right to vote in Turkish elections in 2012. Consequently, DITIB's organization across Germany gained further political significance for reaching out to potential voters (Yener-Roderburg, 2020). Sümeyye expressed her criticism of the AKP's attempts to "benefit from DITIB's power" and use it as a "communication instrument." Adding that "we are torn between the pressures of both sides," Sümeyye was not just criticizing the German state's attitude but also developing a critical stance towards the Turkish state and underlining DITIB's critical geopolitical position between the two powers. Although Atakan and Sümeyye were cautious when articulating their criticisms, Onur, another senior DITIB official, was more direct during the interview:

> Those who find DITIB's self-sufficient structure in Germany inappropriate have begun to define DITIB as "European Diyanet" [*Diyanet Avrupa*]. So, without mentioning the name of DITIB, they tried to say that "you are our [Diyanet's] overseas branch." So, Diyanet tries to make DITIB its overseas branch.
>
> This approach paralyzes us! We say that we want religious expertise from Diyanet because of their well-established divinity tradition. But we do not want them to intervene in everything!

Onur criticized Diyanet's overseas control attempts throughout the interview. He was also agitated and angry about Diyanet's involvement in planning DITIB's new monumental mosque in Cologne. According to him, Diyanet was trying to bring the "one-man regime," referring to Erdoğan's authoritarian regime, to Germany.

Despite these critical attitudes of DITIB's senior-level officials, DITIB's headquarters is still predominantly sympathetic to and supportive of Diyanet's influence due to its managerial structure that places a Diyanet appointed chair at the top of its organization and Diyanet officials on its High Religious Advisory Board. For some Diyanet officials, serving in the DITIB management is a steppingstone to enter

politics in Turkey. For instance, DITIB's general secretary, Bekir Alboğa, resigned from DITIB in 2018 to be a parliamentary member in Erdoğan's AKP. During the interviews, Alboğa's decision was criticized by some DITIB managers without mentioning his name because this decision strengthened the general perception that DITIB *is* an institution under Erdoğan's influence. Within this structure, developing a counter-hegemonic stance is not always possible for senior managers at DITIB's headquarters (and to get explicit or detailed information about intra-institutional debates and resistance acts in interviews). However, the accounts of our interviewees reveal how intra-institutional resistance has been operating against Diyanet. For instance, as Onur, a senior DITIB official, articulates, during a meeting at DITIB's headquarters, a Diyanet official came to talk about a project Diyanet wanted to start in Germany. Onur says how he was annoyed and countered him during the meeting by saying, "we are already doing this project; why don't you ask us before set to work!?" Critical statements from senior DITIB officials point to multiple strategies deployed to counter Diyanet's and the Turkish government's influence over DITIB. During the interviews, we also learned that several senior DITIB officials resigned in protest of Diyanet's growing attempts to control DITIB.

In addition to senior DITIB officials, local DITIB community members also take critical stances against Diyanet's practices. For example, in 2018, DITIB's Lower Saxony and Bremen State Organization managers announced their resignation from DITIB due to the intervention attempts of religious attachés sent by the Turkish state. The following statement of Yılmaz Kılıç, then chair of the organization, incorporates vital details of the Turkish state's control attempts and how DITIB resisted:

> In our general assembly, Turkey's religious attaché in Hannover did everything to prevent our election victory. The attaché initiated a defamatory campaign against us. We filed a complaint to DITIB's headquarters and said that we had excellent relations with the German state here and these interventions can ruin this situation. But we could not get the result we wanted. (…) Then, we decided to resign.
> DITIB's federal unions did not exist in the past, and religious attachés were coordinating everything. This situation has changed recently, and now we have very active federal unions who thoroughly engage in negotiations with Germans. Unfortunately, the attachés could not accept this situation. (…) They should not intervene in the domestic affairs of our local associations. They should stay as a religious authority (DW, 2018).

Kılıç's words highlight multiple points. First, the attaché's attempts to intervene in DITIB's *domestic affairs* reveal Diyanet's ambition to exert its transnational influence through political strategies. In the face of these strategies, Kılıç and others develop strategies to "push back, challenge, and rewrite geopolitical relations" (Massaro and Williams, 2013, p. 567). Second, Kılıç's emphasis on 'excellent relations with the German state' is somewhat similar to what Atakan mentioned above. Many community members are concerned that the Turkish state's extraterritorial hegemony attempts might ruin DITIB's position within broader German society. Third, when Kılıç connects the attaché's intervention to DITIB's structural changes, he underscores that the strengthening of DITIB's autonomy through federal unions disturbs the Turkish state. Finally, arguing that Diyanet "should stay as a religious authority," Kılıç draws a boundary between Diyanet and the DITIB community; the former is a religious authority while the latter is an autonomous German-Turkish civil society organization.

DITIB community members also engage in everyday counter-geopolitical practices similar to Kılıç's. For instance, during field observations in a local DITIB mosque in Cologne, the first author witnessed how the association chair fought fiercely against the agents of the International Democrat Union, a pro-Erdoğan lobbying organization in Germany. The agents were aiming to disseminate some flyers to the mosque community after the crowded Friday prayer. Yet, the chair confronted them, saying, "this is not a place for politics!" Our interviewees indicated that DITIB is considered the most politically neutral Turkish-Islamic institution in Germany, in comparison to others, such as *Milli Görüş*, *ATIB*, and *Türk Federasyonları*. Therefore, DITIB community members try to keep out direct attempts to align their mosques with a political group like the AKP. For example, during our interview, Sezer, the chair of a local association in Berlin, explained:

> They think that whatever Erdoğan says, DITIB does that. They know that we are not acting like that.
> *First author*: So, they see DITIB as an AKP branch?
> Yes, but this is wrong! For instance, when I get a phone call from DITIB's headquarters asking me to do something, I don't have to do it. I am not a state employee. Whatever our people [local mosques community] say, we do it. We do not have to do what the Turkish state says.

These everyday struggles are also visible in the community's interactions with imams. During field research, we observed that mosque communities' relations with imams were complicated. In general, community members are respectful of imams. However, as the official employees of the Turkish states, imams usually see themselves hierarchically above mosque communities but under the religious-attachés. Although it was difficult for us to decipher the complex relations between imams, attachés, and the broader DITIB community, as we understood from the interviews and field observations, attachés want to align DITIB organization with Diyanet-based institutional practices and hierarchies. As Onur, a senior DITIB manager, states, attachés try to keep the DITIB community "within the [Diyanet] system." Thus, autonomous organizations and localized practices, such as the federal DITIB unions, are construed as "*Germanization*" by attachés.

In this political configuration, imams also seem to be the key actors of this Turkey-based status quo within mosques. Yet, our study findings reveal a visible disparity between hierarchy and authority-based religious and social practices transplanted from Turkey by imams, and the lifestyles and expectations of the community members, particularly the second-and-third generations. For instance, in a DITIB-mosque in Berlin, imam Adem's traditional and conservative masculine embodiment of authority and insistence on gender segregation at mosque events did not agree with the youth's sensibilities. According to the first author's observations, as an employee of the Turkish state who was appointed in one of the most prestigious mosques in Germany in 2016, Adem regarded himself not only as a religious leader but also as the administrative leader of the community. His hierarchical leadership style demands that he must know about, approve and control every organization or event. During his multiple visits to the mosque, the first author witnessed that Adem did not leave any room for the youth to undertake any initiatives independently. When the youth wanted to organize an event independently, Adem was agitated, interpreting it as disrespectful of his authority as the imam and/or the community leader. Once Adem even reprimanded a young woman in front of many people for her *self-ordained* actions. Days after the event, in an interview with Zübeyde, the mother of the young women, she stated that:

> Our children are raised here as bi-cultural. Imams from Turkey do not understand this. They cannot speak to our children just like they do in Turkey. But those imams who grew up here and went to Turkey for theology education make a perfect connection with our children. Our children stopped communication with the imams from Turkey and embraced the imam raised here.

When Zübeyde says that imams from Turkey do not understand their children, she is not solely criticizing Diyanet-trained imams but taking a position against the direct transplantation of imamate practices from Turkey to Germany. Due to the German-Turkish youth's bi-cultural orientation, Zübeyde expects imams to adapt to diaspora realities.

Zübeyde's emphasis on the imams who grew up in Germany and went to Turkey for theology education is also essential. Zübeyde is not against connections to Diyanet, as she sees it as the appropriate religious authority that can provide the training imams need. She sees the perfect combination in imam Serhat in the same mosque, who was born and raised in Germany and trained in Diyanet's theology school in Turkey. Serhat is bilingual and can easily switch languages when needed. She thinks that Serhat understands the youth's culture, challenges, and needs. That's why she believes that the youth connected with Serhat. In fact, during our interviews with the youth of the association and Serhat, we realized that young members of the mosque community resisted or took steps to limit imam Adem's authority. For instance, both imams organize weekly religious discussions with the youth. However, the youth participate only in Serhat's.

These tensions and struggles between the community members and imams have also been confirmed during interviews with imams. As explained through imam Mustafa's account, who served in Berlin mosques, most imams articulated how youths or parents challenge them:

> The [German-Turkish] youth are very different in Germany in terms of culture. We say [they are] 'Turks,' but they express themselves differently. They say, "we are European Turk." They say, "I was born and raised in Germany, and I will not leave Germany; this is my homeland, my country. Therefore, if you will accept me, accept me as a European Turk and Muslim." This is a new identity.

Mustafa's account reveals how the youth in DITIB mosques draw lines and ask Mustafa to accept the diaspora realities and this 'new identity.' In addition to social relations with the youth, imams' traditional Quran teaching methods to children hit a barrier within the DITIB community. In Turkey, scolding and reprimanding students are common strategies used by imams in Quran courses, and it is not uncommon to use corporal punishment (Altinyelken and Sözeri, 2019). However, these methods are unacceptable to most parents in the DITIB community, and imams feel compelled to change their practices and behaviors in Germany. The following words of imam Ergün, who served in a DITIB mosque in Cologne, give an example of this situation:

> Once, I told the father of a boy, who was a student in the mosque, that "if he engages in mischief, I will pull his ears [to punish him]" He [the father] responded me, "hodja [meaning imam] if you do that, I will never let him come to the mosque again."

Ergün did not expect this reaction from the father, as he had only meant to show paternalistic authority and care for the child, albeit veiled as a lighthearted joke. However, the father's immediate response made it clear that corporal punishment was unacceptable to him. His objection was abrupt, signaling that he would not stay silent or submit to imam's exercise of authority in this suggested manner over his son and himself. Ergün's retelling of this interaction underscored the cultural differences in the diaspora and how he and other Diyanet imams faced pushback from community members when they assumed they could operate in Germany just like they did in Turkey. Community reactions forced imams like Ergün to adjust their behavior and carefully consider what they could do and say in German-Turkish spaces. The following dialogue between imam Mehmet, who was serving in a DITIB mosque in Kiel, and a group of mosque community members, further demonstrates how imams felt compelled to adjust to the sociopolitical environment of the diaspora:

> Mehmet: This is a cosmopolitan place. There are all kinds of people here. So, you have to pick your words carefully. Every word you say might be used against you.
> *First author*: In what sense?
> Mehmet: For instance, if I recite, "and the Jews will not be pleased with thee, nor the Christians unless thou follow their religion" [citing Al-Baqarah, 120], what happens?
> Hüseyin: It wouldn't be right, hodja [means imam].
> Mehmet: You cannot say all the truth everywhere.
> Erkan: Sometimes, some people even say that "hodja is praying only for Turks."

The dialogue between imam Mehmet and this group reveals how imams are aware of the different sensibilities and expectations in mosques in Germany and feel bound to speak and act differently so as not to offend and drive away community members. For example, Imam Mehmet says that he cannot recite these passages from the Quran in his sermons because they would be considered offensive, and the group confirms his assessment. Erkan's point about 'praying only for Turks' is also noteworthy. With this account, Erkan refers to reactions against the nationalist propaganda of some imams by community members who believe that these practices might insult the broader German society and, ultimately, jeopardize the community's overall image.

6. Conclusion

> Although our community established this organization [mosques] using its own resources, they [Diyanet] come in from the outside and tell us: 'you will do this!' Who are they!? Has this community waited for them!? This community has been here since the 1960s! [Personal interview with Onur, a senior DITIB officer].

Focusing on DITIB communities, we examined how German-Turkish-Sunni Mosque communities engage in everyday acts of resistance against both the German and Turkish states' geopolitical narratives and policies to control and exert power over them. The German state has long been concerned about integrating its large Turkish-Muslim communities. Consequently, it seeks to domesticate and securitize this population and mosques. Simultaneously, the Turkish government has ambitions to ensure political and ethnoreligious loyalty of this population to its brand of Turkish-Islam. This study examined how mosque communities develop everyday acts of resistance to stand up to these geopolitical constructions and practices and maintain their autonomous transnational spaces. DITIB communities are skeptical of the German state's domestication strategies that target them. At the same time, they do not readily accept but negotiate, mediate, and resist Diyanet's transnational hegemony attempts. As such, this study cautions against the geopolitical narratives and strategies that represent local communities as victims of religious geopolitical strategies and foreign policies and show that diasporic communities "do not experience [these] passively but make meaning of these representations in their own ways" (Lynch, 2019, p. 1155).

Drawing on feminist geopolitics, we conceptualized these practices as counter-geopolitical praxis that "destabilize dominant and often disembodied geopolitical discourse" (Hyndman, 2007, p. 36). We argued that paying attention to these counter-geopolitical praxes is essential for providing nuanced analyses of diasporic Muslim communities' heterogeneity and agency and revisiting religious foreign policy and geopolitics studies through a feminist perspective. For instance, mainstream media outlets, politicians, and some academic studies often equate extremism with transnational ideologies and point to foreign imams as the agents who spread extremism in mosques across Europe. Such perspectives assume that imams have absolute and unmediated power and influence over the communities they serve and fail to consider the interactions and negotiations between imams and mosque communities and how mosque communities might challenge, push back against, and demand change in imams' ideas and practices.

Mosques in Europe consist of heterogeneous communities with hybrid identities, critical stances, and autonomous agencies. Shutting down a mosque association due to one mosque frequenter's alleged extremism or portraying mosques as spaces under the foreign influence due to their transnational connections are manifestations of geopolitical reasoning based on a "simple model of the world" (Dodds, 2007, p. 4) structured by a series of binaries, blocs, and overgeneralizations. The

portrayal of Islamic associations as the external arms of some Muslim-majority countries and blaming imams for radicalizing Muslim communities reproduces the Huntingtonian geopolitical paradigm of civilizational clash. It fails to account for diasporic Muslim communities' diverse, critical, and autonomous subject positions. These communities engage in a process for autonomy that aims to create a self-reliant social space where they are "not being told what to do from the outside" (Naylor, 2017, p. 24) –whether by the German state or the Turkish state. There are certainly some DITIB members closely aligned with the AKP ideology in Turkey, and the active negotiations of DITIB members analyzed here might not amount to a complete rebellion. However, this study reveals that DITIB is an important site of geopolitical struggle, a complex terrain of contestation that complicates the depiction of mosques and mosque communities as controlled entirely by foreign powers in mainstream European political discourse, as well as the claims that DITIB mosques serve simply as extensions of the Turkish state and its control over the German-Turkish population.

Feminist geopolitics forges the space for accounting for "the agency of marginal non-state actors and their situated abilities to contest dominant discourses" (Lynch, 2019, p. 1158). As such, a feminist geopolitics analysis draws attention to how ordinary people and their lived experiences participate in the production of geopolitical narratives and strategies. Introducing a focus on the role of religion and religious organizations in geopolitics, this article has deployed a feminist geopolitical framework to ground religeopolitics and demonstrated how religious communities negotiate, contest, and dismantle grand geopolitical discourses/practices of two states. Incorporating feminist geopolitical analyses into other sociopolitical settings and living spaces of other ethnoreligious communities might open new perspectives on religeopolitics and religious foreign policy analyses.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Devran Koray Öcal: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft. **Banu Gökarıksel:** Writing – review & editing.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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