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Citation for final published version:

Ahmed, Abdul-Azim 2019. Conceptualising Mosque diversity. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 8 (2) , pp. 138-158. 10.1163/22117954-12341390

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1163/22117954-12341390>

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**Abstract:**

There are nearly 2000 mosques in Britain by some estimates, however there is yet to develop a vocabulary to describe their diversity, akin to the common terms used to describe Christian places of worship (chapel, church, cathedral). I outline here the typology of the interspatial mosque to provide a coherent theorisation of how mosques operate, their priorities, and the ways in which they situate themselves as what are sometimes called “multipurpose” or “multifunctional mosques”. In order to pin the abstract typology to the empirical, I use several case studies, but contend that the findings can be generalised across Britain, with implications for research on mosques in other locations. The article argues mosques can be divided into three tiers, the *fard*, which focuses on the daily prayers, the *fard kifaya*, which hosts communal activities, and the *sunna*, which aims to recreate the prophetic example in the modern period in various ways.

**Key Words:** Mosques, Islam, Britain, Congregation, Religion

## Conceptualising Mosque Diversity

### Introduction

British mosques exhibit enormous diversity, a diversity comparable to the heterogeneity of British Muslims themselves. There is yet to develop a vocabulary to describe this diversity, akin to the common terms used to describe Christian places of worship (chapel, church, cathedral). To develop a vocabulary, however, there needs first be a more thorough conceptualisation of the function and functioning of mosques in order to make it possible to speak meaningfully about their differences. This article attempts to provide such a conceptualisation. I outline here the typology of the interspatial mosque to provide a coherent theorisation of how mosques operate, their priorities, and the ways in which they situate themselves as what are sometimes called “multipurpose” or “multifunctional mosques”. In order to pin the abstract typology to the empirical, I use several case studies, but contend that the findings can be generalised across Britain, and potentially Western Europe and North America. The article begins with a description of the typology, followed by a consideration of mosques as they have developed in Britain thus far, and then offers an articulation of the model of the interspatial mosque by presenting three cases studies. The article concludes by looking at the evolving function of particular mosques in the UK and how they fit into the typology of the interspatial mosque.

### The interspatial mosque

The model of the interspatial mosque provides a three-tiered dynamic description of British mosques, distinguishing between their priority functions and functioning. I have utilised the terms *fard*, *fard kifaya*, and *sunna* to describe them. These are Islamic jurisprudential terms, and generally would be issued by a Muslim scholar skilled in legal pronouncements (*mufti*) in the form of a *fatwa* to describe the status of actions. I use them here not in the jurisprudential sense, but in a sociological sense – to describe how the mosque’s congregation envisage their role and function and how they class their actions.

First is the core function of the mosque, the *fard*, or the compulsory. The core constituents of this category are the five daily prayers. It is the function of the mosque without which there is no mosque. The second tier is the *fard kifaya*, the communal responsibilities, which are largely the rites of passage and educational activities. These are the religious obligations that, rather than falling on the individual, fall on the community to fulfil as a social

whole. The *janaza*, or funeral prayer, is one such example; it is not the family of the deceased who are responsible for organising this but whole Muslim community. In jurisprudence, if a *fard kifaya* is fulfilled by one individual, the responsibility of all is met. If it is left undone, all are blameworthy. The mosque becomes a key mechanism by which such communal responsibilities can be fulfilled. And finally, the third tier is the interspatial *sunna*. *Sunna* means the example of the Prophet Muhammad, and is used interchangeably with *mustahabb* as the legal classification of an action that is “recommended” but not compulsory; essentially, such actions are within the spirit and ethos of Islamic teaching but, in terms of priority, are secondary to the *fard*. In common parlance, when describing the Islamic jurisprudential classification of an action, *sunna* and *mustahabb* are interchangeable terms. In the case of this model, I use the term *sunna* since it describes not only the “optional, but encouraged” nature of the actions as conceptualised by the congregants, but also the important link made with the Prophetic example (also called the *sunna*) indicated through the use of the word.

I adopt the emic language of congregants to underline that a mosque’s activities cannot be easily divided into the secular and the religious since all the actions undertaken are made meaningful within an Islamic paradigm and through Islamic terms. This typology has grown out of my dissatisfaction with the use of terms such as “multipurpose mosques” or “community centre mosques”, and even “cathedral mosques” that are used in academic literature (see Maussen 2009, 14, 214; Es 2012, 154; Zulfikar 2014, 176). Such terms fail to describe the self-conceptualisation of mosques, or to provide a coherent and meaningful insight into the activities of mosques, and they often awkwardly embrace existing operations of the secular/sacred dynamic. The interspatial mosque typology dispenses with these terms and provides instead a conceptualisation produced from the ground-up, through ethnographic data and the congregation’s own language. The term also has the benefit of capturing the dynamic and shifting ways in which larger mosques operate. My argument is that all mosques in Britain are interspatial, and can be classified as operating at the level of *fard*, *fard kifaya*, or *sunna*.

### **The *fard*: a place of prostration**

The first tier of the model of the interspatial mosque, as indicated, is the *fard*, or the obligatory. In this sense, the primary function of the mosque is the completion of the obligatory performance of the prayer. The purpose of a mosque, many congregants told me matter-of-factly, is the *salah* – the daily prayers of Muslims. Mosques are meant for the *salah* and without the *salah* no place can claim to be a mosque. In practice, mosques may be set up for countless

reasons. I have come across examples of mosques set up as a result of theological or personal disagreements between congregations, or to provide a geographical centre for a dispersed community of rural Muslims, or sometimes even to create a job for a popular and well-trained imam. These practical motivations, however, exist parallel and subservient to the stated purpose of a mosque – as a place of prostration, the key religious obligation of the pious Muslim.

At the centre of Muslim worship, and indeed of any mosque, is the ritual prayer, the *salah*. This is indicated by the Arabic word for mosque, *masjid*, which means a place of prostration. *Salah* takes place five times a day, determined by the sun's ascent and descent through the sky. *Fajr*, the first prayer, takes place at dawn. *Duhr* occurs just following the midday zenith. *Asr* takes place during the sun's descent, *maghrib* immediately following the sunset, and *isha* begins once twilight ends. In Britain, located as it is at an extreme northern latitude, the timings of these prayers vary significantly through the seasons. In the winter, the first will be around 7am, and the last, 6pm. During summer, the first can begin as early as 2.30am and the last at 11pm. (See Ali 2014 for an overview of these variations, and the theological issues it raises.)

While the *salah* is fundamental to the mosque, the mosque is not fundamental to the *salah*. In an oft-quoted hadith, the Prophet Muhammad told Muslims “the whole world is a masjid” (Sahih Bukhari 335) and, when the time for prayer arrives, they should simply face the direction of prayer (*qibla*) and perform the prayer. Provided a space is ritually clean (free from a list of specific impurities such as faeces or blood, and prohibited iconography, such as religious idols or any statue placed in the direction of prostration), it can be used for prayer. That said, the allocation of a specific area for prayer in which these conditions can be met is not uncommon. This has led to the emergence of prayer rooms or prayer spaces. These might be a “multifaith prayer room” or “quiet room” in institutions, airports and shopping centres. The *musalla* (literally, a place for prayer) is a common term for such a space in Arabic-speaking Muslim countries and is anywhere demarcated for prayer but one that is without a regular imam and not used for the Friday prayer. In other countries, such as South East Asia, the term *surau* is used for a similar type of space. The distinction between a *musalla* and a small *masjid* in practice and colloquial usage is blurred. However, Muslim legal jurists have generally argued that the distinction is that the *musalla* is privately owned whereas a *masjid* is endowed by a trust or *waqf* in perpetuity; thus a *masjid* should never cease being a *masjid*, whereas a *musalla* indicates a temporariness (see Mangera 2004; Munajjid 2011). The temporality implied in the *musalla* applies well to hired and rented properties, and the communal ownership implied in

definitions of the *masjid* echoes Durkheimian descriptions of sacred spaces as “belonging not to the priest or any other single person but to the whole tribe” (Pals 2006, 91). Moving away from the theological descriptions, practice is less clearly defined. There are a diverse range of legal arrangements behind sites described as mosques in Britain; they may be rented space or privately owned, run as a charity, or sub-let from a larger charity or trust. The *fard* mosque typology includes the theologically defined *musalla* and the small *masjid*, as well as those that fail to neatly fit into these categories.

It remains significant to acknowledge however that the ritual prayer is the most important activity in any mosque; it gathers people together in the mosque – sometimes half a dozen, sometimes hundreds – fulfilling the description of the mosque as a “place of prostration”. This gathering of a congregation is central to facilitating the next tier, the *fard kifaya*.

### **The *fard kifaya*: communal responsibilities**

The prayer is an individual responsibility that can be fulfilled communally, but there are certain acts of worship that require the involvement of wider Muslim society – either because of the capital necessary to complete them, or simply because of the need for the presence of more than a single individual. While the prayer is an integral part of the mosque, the mosque’s gathered congregation is an integral part of the *fard kifaya*, and such activities are seldom reproduced outside the mosque. So, while the daily prayers, in absence of a mosque, can be completed at home, many of the *fard kifaya* activities require a communal semi-public space of sufficient capacity. In a sentence, the daily prayers are fundamental to the identity of the mosque, but the mosque is fundamental to the completion of the *fard kifaya*. Mosques at this tier of the typology are larger, more focused on the communal religious responsibilities, especially the education of children.

The *madrasa* is perhaps the most significant of the *fard kifaya* activities. Jonathan Scourfield’s project on Muslim childhood identified the central role played by mosques in religious upbringing (Scourfield et al. 2013), and the programme of almost every mosque has an educational element for young children. Prior to this, the more common method would be small group teaching by parents in domestic environments, a poorly researched area of Muslim education but one that has received attention from Farah Ahmed (2012) in consideration of pedagogical models in use by Muslim mothers educating their children through *halaqas*.

Rites of passage also form a large part of the *fard kifaya* activities. After the birth of a child, Islamic teachings instruct the parents to celebrate with a communal feast – the *aqiqa*. Weddings, especially the *niqah*, the formal religious ceremony, are often held within a mosque, not only to facilitate access to an imam but also for the *baraka* or blessing associated with the space. Depending on the size and facilities of the mosque, the *fard kifaya* mosque may also offer the *janaza* prayer. All these actions fundamentally require communal involvement. In order for the *janaza* to be valid, public attendance is essential. Weddings must have at least two witnesses present, the union must be widely announced, and the *aqiqa* should involve sharing sacrificed food. The education of children is most effectively and efficiently delivered through group, rather than individual, tuition.

Important to highlight too is the *jum'a* prayer. Historically, and indeed today in many Muslim-majority countries, the majority of mosques do not host the Friday prayer. Pedersen et al. (2012, 657) comment that, with the advent of institutions such as the *jami* mosque and *madrasa*, “the use of the word *masjid* becomes limited ... [w]hile, generally speaking, it can mean any mosque ... It is more especially used of the smaller unimportant mosques”. The Friday prayer also remains the prerogative, in classical Islamic *fiqh* texts at least, of a small number of “chief” mosques rather than everyday prayer spaces (see Calder 1986). By contrast, in Britain, the *jum'a* is held in almost all mosques – especially the *fard kifaya* mosques (whereas prayer rooms may or may not host a *jum'a*). The symbolic meaning of the *jum'a* has morphed in the diaspora, and has become an important demonstration of religious commitment of the individual and the community (as opposed to the public-political ritual of the *jum'a* as described by Calder (1986)).

The *fard kifaya* mosques underline the importance of the *umma*, the religious community of Muslims, for being Muslim. The responsibilities completed at the tier of the *fard kifaya* reaffirm the social responsibilities and relationships between individual Muslims. The next tier of mosque activity may extend beyond the immediate Muslim community and begins to conceptualise the mosque in a wider civic and public sphere. It is also the tier that most distinctly represents the activities of what are commonly called “multipurpose mosques”.

### **The *sunna* mosque**

The *sunna* mosque is final and third tier. As mentioned above, the *sunna* is an action that is recommended but not obligatory. It is interchangeable with the term *mustahabb*, but the use of term *sunna* often indicates a link back to the Prophetic example. *Sunna* actions are traditionally

those that are not the essential pillars of Islamic practice, but are exemplary. To pray the *fajr* prayer is obligatory. To pray the *duha* (a mid-morning prayer) and *tahajjud* (a pre-dawn prayer) prayers is *sunna*. The *sunna* is the Prophetic example, and I should pause to stress that all mosques see themselves as being part of this example. Akel Kahera identifies the significance of the Prophetic mosque when he discusses the centrality of the “spatial sunna” (2002) in organising modern mosques in America. Shahab Ahmed, in his epic work *What is Islam?* (2015) also cites discursive engagement with the Prophetic example as a constructive and constitutive element of being “Islamic”. Activities at this level are *sunna* because they are not essential to a mosque’s identity, but a good mosque (like a good Muslim) fulfils the *sunna* when and where possible. Ismail Serageldin and James Steele (1996, 9) tie in the typology of “the community centre complex mosque” as reminiscent of the Prophet’s Mosque, which was “more than a prayer space; it was the seat of temporal power, the place where people learned from the Prophet and the centre of civic activity in Madinah”. The *sunna* mosque reflects the model in operation when mosques devote their energies and resources beyond the fulfilment of the *fard* and *fard kifaya* duties, and seek to be of benefit to wider society in other additional ways. It is worthwhile to visit Seán McLoughlin’s analysis of mosques from 2005:

Indeed, some mosques in the diaspora could be seen as re-inventing an Islamic tradition by slowly taking on a range of community functions that would be more or less unheard of in Pakistan today. So, while primarily being places of prayer and devotion, since the 1980s at least, some mosques in Britain have also functioned as advice centres for the unemployed, Members of Parliament’s surgeries, homework clubs, youth centres, elderly day-care centres, and spaces to prepare food for communal gatherings such as weddings. (McLoughlin 2005, 1048)

Mosques that can be categorised as *sunna* mosques would disagree with McLoughlin that they are “re-inventing the Islamic tradition”, however. Rather, every mosque tends to see itself as a “revival” of the Prophet’s Mosque as it functioned in his lifetime. The example of the Prophet Muhammad confers a superlative religious sanction (and even a mandate) for the actions of Muslims and, thus, the Prophet’s Mosque occupies a similar role in relation to how other mosques should operate (Spahic 2016).

Whereas the tiers of *fard* and *fard kifaya* are relatively fixed, the tier of the *sunna* mosque can and does adapt dynamically to suit the changing needs and circumstances of the congregation and the immediate community. The activities of *sunna* mosques in the UK are no



doubt influenced by the British context, inspired by other faith groups, and responding to new challenges of migration and diaspora, but they are understood and made meaningful on Islamic terms. The conceptions of *fard*, *fard kifaya* and *sunna* are staples of Islamic orthopraxis, and its abstraction to mosques follows an important ontological and epistemological worldview in which every action has religious significance. *Fard* mosques, *fard kifaya* mosques and *sunna* mosques are all found in Britain. Of the last, examples include the East London Mosque (Eade and Garbin 2006; Ansari 2011), Birmingham Central Mosque, Edinburgh Central Mosque and several more across the country, all operating a diverse, shifting and complex range of activities. One important aspect of the *sunna* mosque is that the activities are indeterminate, and vary between mosques. They will be dictated by several factors ranging from the denominational background of the mosque to available resources. Some mosques conceptualise themselves primarily as places of *da'wa* to non-Muslim society. Others see themselves largely as places of spiritual respite for Muslims. Others yet will consider the mosque's primary function to be about education. These priorities will be shaped and influenced by the context of the mosque. Mosques are co-operative as well as competitive, and will often seek to develop a niche for themselves in the marketplace of religious institutions and services provided. Having introduced the typology of the interspatial mosque, this will be mapped onto the landscape of British mosques, and presented through an in-depth case study of three "mosques" in Cardiff.

### **British mosques**

Estimates of the number of British mosques vary. Some place the figure as anywhere between 850 and 1,500 (Gilliat-Ray and Birt 2010), whereas Mehmood Naqshbandi (2017) estimates 1,975. Hidden behind these statistics, and partly the reason for their variation, is the diversity of mosques themselves. Some may be humble, small converted terraced houses, others are purpose-built landmarks such as London Central Mosque. A recent and notable addition to the literature on British mosques is *British Mosques: A Social and Architectural History* by Shahed Saleem, who offers his own typology in his architectural study of British mosques. The typology outlines the "house mosque", the "non-domestic conversion" and the "purpose-built" mosque (Saleem 2018, 11–13). While accurate in its descriptive function, Saleem presents the typology as one of linear progression, with the "purpose-built" mosque acting as the "culmination" of the Muslim community's mosque-development trajectory, a journey that generally starts with "a house mosque or converted building that is eventually found to be

insufficient to cater for the needs of a growing Muslim population, and is then replaced with a larger purpose-built facility” (Saleem 2018, 13). The determinative element of Saleem’s model is misleading. If it were true, the purpose-built mosque in an area would make the house mosque and the “non-domestic conversion” defunct, but this is not what is observed in practice. I argue that the interspatial mosque typology conceptualises different mosque buildings as providing different, often complementary, functions. Thus, chronologically, the house mosque (which usually falls within the first, or lower, two tiers of the typology I present) may be established more recently than a purpose-built mosque (which generally operates at the top tier of the typology).

The first mosque in Britain was the Liverpool Muslim Institute founded by Abdullah Quilliam in 1887 (see Geaves 2010). This was closely followed by a purpose-built mosque, Woking’s Shah Jahan Mosque founded in 1889 (see Salamat 2008). Both were sites of organisation and religious activism beyond the performance of daily prayers. There is an academic interest in early mosques, which evidenced by the publication of accounts dedicated to their origins; in addition to those just cited, there is Ansari’s *The Making of the East London Mosque* (2011) and several smaller case studies of mosques in Wales and elsewhere (Ansari 2002; Gilliat-Ray and Mellor 2010; Gilliat-Ray 2010; Petersen 2008). The emergence of this genre reflects a wider desire to stake out the claim of Islam in British national imagination and history. Apart from the efforts of early pioneers, the bulk of Britain’s mosques were established following migration from the Indian subcontinent after World War II. This period of migration and settlement has been documented by researchers such as Caroline Adams (1987), Muhammad Anwar (1979; 1993) and John Rex (1991; 1994). The increase in the Muslim population of Britain led to a substantial growth in the number of mosques. McLoughlin has observed:

“In 1963 there were just 13 mosques listed with the Registrar General ... estimates suggest that there may now be 1,000 including those that are unregistered ... This mushrooming of numbers since the late 1970s and 1980s indicates that the reuniting of Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi families across continents was decisive in catalysing the reconstruction of Islam in diaspora. (McLoughlin 2005, 1045)

What prompted these migrants to begin establishing mosques? Settlement is a compelling factor. There is a recurring theme in the literature that, when the itinerant Muslim migrants settled in Britain long-term, they established families, and it is this that acted as a catalyst for

the establishment of mosques. The link between the legal status of migrants and the building of mosques is indicated by Richard Gale (2008, 23), who describes how the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 had the unexpected result of encouraging migrants to establish families in Britain, which in turn led to mosque-building efforts. Andrew Geddes (2003, 35) makes the same point, observing the irony that laws designed to limit settlement “actually stimulated ‘beat the ban’ migration from people who feared that they might be affected by the restrictions and separated from their family members as a result”. The link between migration law and the establishment of mosques is also observed by Gerdien Jonker (2005, 1069) in his study of mosque conflicts in Germany, as well as by Ural Manco and Meriem Kanmaz (2005, 1107) in their study of mosque conflicts in Belgium. The mosque is a symbol of settlement. The more invested Muslim migrant communities are in their new homes in the diaspora, the greater the likelihood that they will invest resources and capital into building institutions that meet their religious (in the broadest conceptualisation of the term) needs. The fulfilment of needs is a strikingly uniform motivating factor for the establishment of mosques in diaspora. This period is aptly described by Jonathan Birt (2006, 687) as a “mosque-building-phase”.

This brief survey of literature on the roles of mosques gives an insight into why mosques are increasingly being described as a “community centre” (McLoughlin 2005). The mosque becoming a “community centre” or “multipurpose” is a claim that, though often made, is seldom explored in any depth. What does this multipurpose-ness look like? To what ends is it put? Why has it emerged? What does the “mono-purpose” mosque look like? The interspatial mosque typology aims to answer these questions more definitively and meaningfully than hitherto. The next section presents three empirical case studies drawn from a single city. The choice of a single city is made in order to emphasise how the interspatial mosque typology helps describe a “mosque eco-system” in which a number of mosques addressing different needs operate within a specific geographic space. However, reference will also be made to mosques across Britain in order to show the applicability of the model beyond Cardiff.

### **The question of diversity**

There are three buildings in Cardiff that are actually called mosques. There are in fact nearly 26 mosques in total (give or take a few ambiguities), but these three will form the basis for an empirical presentation of the interspatial mosque. The first mosque described is one that operates at the level of *fard*, according to my typology. It is one that may not be recognised as a true “mosque” but nonetheless designates itself as one. The second is a house mosque that

operates as a *fard kifaya* mosque, and the third is a *sunna* mosque. It is hoped that the reader is able to see the diversity of mosques, as well as their similarities, and thus better understand what the terms *mosque* and *masjid* refer to when used.

The first mosque is located in Saray Restaurant, on Cardiff's busy City Road. Up and down City Road are a range of restaurants, takeaways and shisha bars, interspersed with fried chicken shops. One of the larger restaurants on this road is the Saray, offering mainly Turkish food. It differentiates itself from the several other Arab and Mediterranean restaurants on City Road by offering more uniquely Anatolian dishes (such as Imam Beyaldi), baklava made on-site, and the existence of a large room in the basement, accessible from the main floor, which it calls the *masjid*. Whether or not the space is in fact a *masjid* is up for debate, of course, but the owners of this particular space are keen to identify it as such, placing a sign saying "MASJID" on the door leading to the room. The mosque is a large room ornately decorated. There is the rich carpet on the floor such as one would usually find in a mosque, with the rows for prayer marked out indicating the *qibla*. On the wall there is calligraphy, and in one corner, a *mihrab*. The *mihrab* is purpose built and elegantly designed. There is a small barrier to allow division between the genders, and there are heaters and fans and several shelves for copies of the Qur'an. In total, the mosque can accommodate perhaps twenty worshippers at a time. In general, this is more than enough for the restaurant (which has a maximum capacity of about 120). The presence of a place for prayer makes the restaurant popular with diners during the summer months (when prayer times may run into the evening), and during Ramadan, when the restaurant offers a unique menu for the *iftar*, the meal at which Muslims break their fast. This self-described *masjid*, some might object, is more like a prayer room or *musalla*. As a privately owned space with irregular prayers, it fits the definition of *musalla* more neatly. Nonetheless, the space is similar to many other prayer rooms found across the United Kingdom – some institutional (such as the "quiet rooms" in universities), others commercial (the "multifaith prayer room" in shopping centres such as Manchester's Arndale), and those found regularly in airports and train stations. Its primary purpose is to allow customers to the restaurant to fulfil their religious obligation to pray.

The second mosque in question is a common site in almost any Muslim community – a "house mosque" in a residential area. Masjid Uthman was formerly the *Islami Shikka Pratisthan*. The *Islami Shikka Pratisthan*, or the Islamic Educational Foundation, was a mosque run primarily by Bangladeshis, serving the large Bangladeshi community in the Riverside area of Cardiff. Riverside is a stone's throw from the city centre, a small area but tightly packed with terraced homes. On football match days, the roar of the crowd from the nearby Principality

Stadium can be heard. The former *Islami Shikka Pratisthan* is a converted end-of-terrace residential property and, aside from historic mosques in Butetown, it is among the earliest in Cardiff. Before it reopened as Masjid Uthman, the congregation was almost exclusively made up of first-generation migrants who largely worked in the catering trade, and it served this congregation's specific needs. During Ramadan, it offered the *tarawih* prayers (a recommended prayer of twenty cycles offered during the sacred month) twice in the evening. The first would be at its usual time after the *isha* evening prayer but, given that the majority of the mosque's congregants worked in restaurants and takeaways at this time, it was poorly attended. A second *tarawih* would be offered around 1am, so that the men could finish work, return home, eat, shower and travel to the mosque in time for the long prayer. Likewise, it was not unusual for a *waaz* (sermon) by an itinerant preacher to be planned for past midnight, a suitable time for a congregation who largely worked in the service industry. In the early 2000s, the congregation grew large enough and wealthy enough to purchase a church that was for sale only a few hundred metres away. While it would have made financial sense to sell the existing property as a house, or instead perhaps convert it back to accommodation that could be rented, the congregation and committee found it difficult to come to terms with the idea of their mosque no longer being a mosque. Instead, an arrangement was made with a local imam, a young Deobandi *dar ul-uloom* graduate, to purchase and take over the running of the mosque, and in the mid-noughties, the mosque re-opened as Masjid Uthman. There were already a Masjid Abu Bakr and a Masjid Umar in Cardiff, named after the first two Rightly-Guided Caliphs. Uthman, the third Caliph, was thus the obvious choice, according to the *imam*, for the name of this new mosque. Both Masjid Abu Bakr and Masjid Umar are Deobandi<sup>1</sup> in orientation, as is Masjid Uthman, which is an indication of the wider landscape into which the mosque fits.

The mosque is in the same square-mile as Masjid Jalaliya, the newly opened Bangladeshi mosque, the al-Falah Centre, Markaz at-Tawheed, the Rabbaniyah *madrasa* and mosque, and Masjid Abu Bakr – the largest and most important Deobandi mosque in Cardiff, often called “the mothership” (with tongue firmly in cheek) to indicate its hierarchical seniority. With so many mosques nearby, and indeed the primary congregation of the *Islami Shikka* moving to the newly refurbished church, what does Masjid Uthman offer and whom does it serve? The five daily prayers take place without fail, as do the Friday prayers, as it has

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<sup>1</sup> The Deobandi movement can be traced to South Asia, and is one of the most important denominations in Britain, especially due to the large number of full-time seminaries in runs in the United Kingdom, which produce hundreds of graduates annually. See Gilliat Ray (2011) for more.

a strong local congregation. It includes elderly men who prefer to walk to their local mosque rather than making a journey elsewhere by public transport or car. The after-school madrasa is also popular with parents in the area; the high proportion of Muslim homes near the mosque means local parents prefer their children to go to a mosque with a qualified *alim* almost within earshot of their houses. On a weekday evening, it is common to see many young children (boys and girls) walking to the madrasa and back, some as young as five. In addition to the madrasa and the daily prayers, there are occasional additional classes. The most common is an introductory *fiqh* course, running through the religious literacy needed for Muslims to pray, fast and perform basic acts of worship and recitation of the Qur'an. There is no space for women for the daily prayers, though the madrasa is segregated, and women teachers are included. Masjid Uthman provides a valued function in the locality and a base for the work of its imam, Mufti Tariq, who, aside from running the mosque, is in demand as one of Cardiff's senior Deobandi muftis (scholars able to issue religious legal rulings). It is, however, like many other house-mosques, small and with modest ambitions. It knows what is needed in the local area (a place to pray within walking distance for retired older men, a place to educate children in the basics of Islamic literacy) and it meets this demand. There are similar "house mosques" with a similar scope of operation that fit the *fard kifaya* model across the United Kingdom, such as the Shah Jalal Mosque in Newcastle and Dawtul Islam in Glasgow.

The last of the three mosques to be introduced in this sample is Dar ul-Isra. This is a converted church hall, located in the student area of Cathays. The deceptively large building was renovated in 2008, creating a second floor and doubling its capacity. The members of the mosque leadership are equally from Pakistani and Middle-Eastern backgrounds, though its congregation is more diverse, and drawn heavily from the university students who live and study nearby. In addition to the mosque building, there is a scouts hall and an activity centre (also renovated) behind the mosque. The scouts hall was part of the original building complex, and was used by the St Mark's and St Teilo's churches. The scouts hall has continued serving the same purpose, providing a sense of continuity to the building. The mosque also houses a large commercial kitchen, a front office, a library, a room for the ritual washing of the deceased, and large ablution room, disabled access toilets and a shower room. There is a large prayer space for women, though smaller than the men's prayer area. The congregation is large – informally estimated at about three thousand who regularly visit the mosque, and easily gathering close a thousand for the weekly Friday *jum'a* prayer.

Dar ul-Isra's daily activities are sprawling and multiple, but it is the cycle of five daily prayers that structures all of them. The mosque's events fall into several categories. They may

be educational, such as the daily Qur'an School, sometimes referred to as the madrasa, which provides children between the ages of six and around sixteen with instruction in reading and reciting the Qur'an. There are also a range of *halaqas* – small groups offering religious education by a single teacher. The mosque holds a youth *halaqa* on Friday evenings, led by Shaykh Yacoub. In addition, there is an Arabic language *halaqa*, an Urdu *halaqa*, a Malay *halaqa*, and occasionally a Bengali *halaqa*. Alongside Islamic education, GCSE and A-Level tuition is also offered on Saturday mornings between 10am and 1pm in core subjects such as science and maths.

Social activities are common. The widescreen televisions used during *jum'a* prayer to broadcast the imam's sermons throughout the mosque are often appropriated for games console competitions. During the World Cup and other major football tournaments, the televisions are also used to watch matches. Additionally, three parties are held after each *Eid*, a "brothers' party", a "sisters' party" and a "children's party". Other social events might be organised solely to foster opportunities to create new friendships between congregants, such as quiz nights, board game evenings, and tea and coffee mornings. The mosque hosts regular fundraising activities led by national charities such as Islamic Relief. An example might be a lecture by a popular preacher, followed by a call for donations. Similar events are held by Human Appeal, Muslim Aid, Interpal and Syria Relief. In addition to the events led by the charities, there are opportunities for the charities to visit and fundraise during a regular mosque activity.

As for political events, politicians regularly make use of the gathered congregations of the mosque. Political visits are attempts at "public engagement" by politicians and include holding open meetings with Muslims at the mosque on issues ranging from parking to organ donation. Dar ul-Isra generally has an open-door policy to politicians, viewing such visits as a civic duty and a key way of empowering its Muslim congregation.

Sporting activities within or organised through the mosque are common. On Monday evenings, the basement of the mosque is transformed into a makeshift gym for boxercise classes for adult men. The same happens on Saturday evenings for young children. The mosque has a football team that plays in the local league. There is an ethos of what can be described as "muscular Islam" at Dar ul-Isra, comparable to "muscular Christianity" (see Hall 2006 for more) – an ethos of physical strength and an idealised masculinity entwined closely with spiritual piety. Being physically fit and active are woven into the mosque's activities and teachings.

Rites of passage also constitute a significant proportion of the mosque's events. The *aqiqa*, a feast to celebrate the birth of a child, alongside weddings and funerals dot the mosque's

annual calendar. This, alongside occasional interfaith events, the large Muslim Scouts Group at Dar ul-Isra, and those informal events that do not fall easily into a single category make Dar ul-Isra one of Cardiff's most active and busy mosques. Many mosques fit this *sunna* mosque typology, some of which will be discussed shortly, but it is worth noting that the term that is the clearest indicator of a mosque which aspires to be a *sunna* mosque is "central" – such as Birmingham Central Mosque, Glasgow Central Mosque, Manchester Central Mosque, and so on. Mosques that call themselves "central" also tend to be purpose-built mosques and to claim to be the primary mosque of a city or locality, rhetorically placing other mosques as "peripheral" to their centrality. This rhetorical action is to be read and understood by a non-Muslim audience differently from the way it is understood by a Muslim audience. The latter will be more than aware of the contested nature of such claims, and of the fact that there is no religious merit that elevates a central mosque above a "house mosque". To the wider non-Muslim public however, such claims hold more weight, and will act significantly to establish that mosque as a key mosque for those wishing to engage with Muslims. This distinction underlines the forward-facing attitude of the *sunna* mosque, which often places a greater emphasis on public engagement.

These three mosques, Saray's basement mosque, Masjid Uthman and Dar ul-Isra Mosque, demonstrate a significant challenge that is present when one discusses and studies mosques – the sheer diversity of them. All three places are referred to as mosques, and similar examples of all three can be found across the United Kingdom, but they are dramatically different from one another. They are certainly related, but the growth of this diversity has increasingly put the term "mosque" under strain. If there are somewhere between 1,500 and 1,975 mosques in the United Kingdom, how do we understand them and the diverse roles they play in society? My argument is that it is helpful to consider each mosque in relation to the purposes it fulfils, the *fard*, the *fard kifaya*, and the *sunna*.

### **The evolving *sunna* mosque**

The case of the *sunna* mosque is indicative of the way that mosques consciously and conspicuously locate themselves in a diverse landscape of mosques and religious institutions, providing the services the mosque in question considers needed in their local context. Alongside this, however, the larger and more successful of these mosques are looking beyond the local and city landscape, and instead locate a niche for themselves in the national context.



In the following section, I provide a consideration of some mosques that I believe operate on this national scale.

What is the most important mosque in Britain? The question of the most important place of worship is not easily answered, even in the more established Christian tradition, but Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral and Canterbury Cathedral are likely contenders. I would argue that the East London Mosque is operating interspatially to establish itself as the leading British mosque in terms of political significance (here I use the term political in the colloquial sense of related to parliamentary politics and current affairs). It has developed an informal relationship with the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), producing joint press releases, running joint conferences, and often hosting the MCB's annual general meetings. These events place the East London Mosque in a symbolic space as a site of national civic action for British Muslims. Its location in Tower Hamlets, which the mosque describes on its website as "home to the UK's largest Muslim community", further cements its importance beyond the immediate locality. A dated but insightful article by John Eade and David Garbin highlighted how East London Mosque leaders sought to define it as the area's "central mosque" (2006, 184) and more generally forged alliances with local governments and civic partners to achieve this. In the intervening twelve years, it has developed this further, forging alliances with national groups and the government to become, if such a thing is ever possible, Britain's "central mosque". This is far from uncontested, but here I only intend to demonstrate the intention of the mosque, rather than whether or not it has achieved this goal.

Two further mosques demonstrate how the symbolic significance of a city can also be adopted by a mosque within it. They are the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (OCIS) and the Cambridge Mosque Trust. Oxford and Cambridge are in the national imagination Britain's foremost educational cities, a training ground for the elite and future leaders, and this, like London, has an impact on the national ambitions of the mosques there. The OCIS has built a multi-million-pound building to house its teaching and research, designed in an architectural style that is inspired by existing Oxford colleges, with a quadrangle included. Where a traditional Oxford college would place its chapel, there is a mosque – and its grand design promises to make it a national landmark. As the home of the OCIS, it is making a statement about itself as being a leading institution for the academic study of Islam in Britain. In shaping its architecture to reflect both Oxford's tradition and Islamic norms, it is making a statement about integration and belonging. It is, quite literally, Islam in British stone.

The same can be said of the Cambridge Mosque Trust, a mosque that is currently under construction, with Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad (also known as Timothy Winter) involved in

the project, and often fronting fundraising campaigns. It claims to be “Europe’s first purpose built eco-mosque” and argues on its website that “as a major international city, Cambridge deserves a proper facility for Muslims which will enhance its prestige and provide an architectural focus attracting new visitors”.<sup>2</sup> Both the Oxford and the Cambridge mosque are appealing to the reputation and symbolism of the cities in which they are located and carving out a unique niche in the national Muslim landscape. The OCIS mosque intends to be part of a wider institution of learning, a landmark, and a statement about Islam and Britain. The Cambridge Mosque seeks to capitalise on the international reputation of the city and its eco-mosque innovation. What further distinguishes the Cambridge Mosque is that its association with Abdal Hakim Murad, a Muslim scholar strongly associated with what Sadek Hamid (2016) describes as “traditional Islam”, a resurgent Sufism appealing to a younger generation of Muslims. Should the mosque continue its association with Abdal Hakim Murad, it may also develop into a national denominational home for the emergent “traditional Islam” movement Hamid identifies.

Two final mosques to consider are Dar ul-Uloom Bury, which contends with Dar ul-Uloom Dewsbury to be amongst the foremost Deobandi seminaries in Britain. Both are primarily educational institutes, a madrasa, educating *alims* in Britain. The *dar ul-ulooms* have mosques attached to them and are easily amongst the most influential Muslim institutions in Britain, yet they avert the attention and publicity that the East London Mosque courts, and instead more quietly dedicate themselves to educational goals. Dar ul-Uloom Dewsbury is the European headquarters of the Tablighi Jamaat, and so differentiates itself from its sibling in Bury on those terms. These two mosques-cum-madrasas are of inestimable importance to British Muslims, having been a powerhouse of British Muslim intellectualism. By producing scholars and *alims* who go on to establish their own mosques and educate lay Muslims, they have become important institutions in shaping the development of British Islam, but are largely below the radar of the mainstream public discourse on Muslims. These mosque-cum-madrasas confidently embrace their Deobandi denominational identity and make no apologies for it. These centres of Deobandi leadership can be placed alongside other mosques of importance to other movements. The Green Lane Mosque in Birmingham and Masjid Tawhid in London for example, are currently the foremost Salafi mosques in Britain.

All these mosques either have carved out or are carving out a role for themselves in the national rather than just the local landscape. In a decade from today, I would expect there to be

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<sup>2</sup> <http://cambridgemosquetrust.org/>.

more clearly and less contested “capital” mosques (such as the East London Mosque, and also for each of the nations of Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Northern Ireland). There are already denominational mosque “headquarters” for the Deobandi movement and the Salafi movement and similar headquarters may emerge in the near future for other denominations. While the earliest mosques in Britain focused on the local, serving an immediate congregation, future mosques are responding to regional and national needs and indeed congregations.

## Summary

The question posed at the beginning of this article addressed how academics can conceptualise the diverse functions and activities of British mosques in a coherent way. The answer provided is the model of the interspatial mosque, with its three tiers, the *fard*, the *fard kifaya*, and the *sunna*. It is interspatial in that the mosque fits into and locates itself in a space, in the widest sense of the word. This may be a geographic space, a symbolic space, a marketplace of welfare services, or a denominational landscape. It is tiered since mosques in Britain follow a system of priorities that structure the activities. It begins first with the ritual prayer, the fundamental religious duty that brings the mosque into purposeful existence. The second tier, that of the *fard kifaya*, involves those religious obligations that are most effectively met communally. The final tier, that of the *sunna*, is dynamic and shifting, but always related back to the Prophetic example and the Prophet’s Mosque. Case studies of mosques fitting each model have been presented to show how the theory works in practice. With thousands of mosques across Britain and indeed Europe, the importance of these institutions should not be underestimated, nor should the influence and importance they will have in their respective nations. It is hoped this article has provided some conceptual tools to better understand mosques, and to encourage other scholars to turn their attention to them.

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