



The Masjid, Yesterday and Today

Zakaryya Mohamed Abdel-Hady



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Introduction

Throughout history, Muslim communities have always been attached, in one form or another, to the mosque or the *masjid* as it is known in Arabic. The *masjid* was not restricted to being a place of worship, a location for performing rituals, or a social and political dimension of the Muslim community. Instead, it has served as a symbol of belonging and identity. This paper explores the role of the mosque as a social institution in different historical and national contexts. As both a central institution to the formation of Muslim identity and to the functioning of the *ummah*, or Muslim world, this paper demonstrates that the mosque has embodied a resilient dynamism and adaptability—an innovative spirit—while, at the same time, it has remained constant in its central roles and functions.

Worship of God has always been the cornerstone of every religion. Not surprisingly, therefore, places of worship occupy an important position in the daily life of all religious communities. In Islam, the first place of worship ever to have been built was the Kaabah,¹ which was constructed by the Prophet Adam. A verse from the Qur'an, the sacred book of Islam, reads that

The first House (of worship) appointed for men was that at Bakka:² full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings.³

The Kaabah, as the Qur'an shows, was later restored by both Prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismail:

And remember Abraham and Ismail raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer): "Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: for Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing."⁴

It was a place of both safety and worship. The Qur'an says

Remember We made the house a place of assembly for men (people) and a place of safety; and take ye the station of Abraham as a place of prayer; and we

¹ The cubicle building first built in Mecca, which has remained a place of pilgrimage.

² "Bakka" is another name for Mecca.

³ Qur'an 3:96.

⁴ Qur'an 2:127.

covenanted with Abraham and Ismail, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer).⁵

The *masjid* is “any place in which one can perform the acts of *sujūd* (prostration), or acts of worship or devotion; a house of prayer.”⁶ A much larger place for prayers is called *ja'amb* or *jamih*, “the congregational mosque, where the Friday prayers are performed; because it is a place where people congregate for a certain period of time.”⁷

Basim Musallam pointed out that, according to Ibn Khaldun, there is a distinction between the *jamih* mosque and local mosques. He notes that “city mosques are of two kinds, great spacious ones, which are prepared for holiday prayers, and other minor ones, which are restricted to one section of the population or one quarter of the city and which are not for generally attended prayers.”⁸ The functions of the mosque encompass more than a place of worship and are differentiated based on whether it is a large mosque for community gatherings or a smaller mosque for subsets of the community.

Some might claim that Islam took this structure from the Judeo-Christian tradition, as the word *masjid* is found in Aramaic, meaning, in Nabataean, “a stele, a sacred pillar, or perhaps a place of worship.”⁹ The word also referred to a church in Abyssinia, as mentioned by Bukhari and Ibn Khaldun, who used the term to describe any place of worship.¹⁰ Even though the word was used to describe places of worship before Islam, there was no contradiction in Muslims adopting the word *masjid* to refer to their places of worship because Islam is not a new religion but a continuation of previously revealed religions. The Qur'an mentions various places of worship:

[They are] those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, [for no cause] except that they say, “Our Lord is Allah ... did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid His [cause];— for Verily Allah is full of strength, exalted in might, [able to enforce His will].”¹¹

The word *masjid* is mentioned in the Qur'an twenty-seven times: twenty-one times as the singular *masjid*, and six times as the plural *masajid*. Both signify a place

of prostration—a humbling position before God, and a vital part of prayer. Hence, it is referred to as the House of Allah (*bait Allah*), a place where only Allah is worshipped and remembered. The words *bait* and *bu'it* are also used in the Qur'an. When the word *bait* (house) is used in the singular, it frequently refers to the Kaabah in Mecca,¹² but when it is used as *bu'it* (houses) in the plural, it refers to either its literal meaning “houses in which people dwell,”¹³ or, on one occasion, to “houses of Allah,” i.e., *masajid*, as shown in the following verse from the Qur'an:

[Lit is such a Light] in houses, which Allah hath permitted to be raised to honour; for the celebration, in them, of His name: In them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, [again and again], by men whom neither traffic nor merchandise can divert from the remembrance of Allah, nor from regular prayer, nor from the practice of regular charity: Their [only] fear is for the day when hearts and eyes will be transformed [in a world wholly new]...¹⁴

The term *masjid* refers to any place of worship in Islam and specifically to the Kaabah and Masjid al-Aqsa,¹⁵ as in this verse from the Qur'an:

Glory to [Allah] who did take His servant for a journey by night from the sacred Mosque [Kaabah] to the farthest Mosque [al-Aqsa], whose precincts We did bless—In order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the one who heareth and seeth [all things].¹⁶

As to those who have rejected [Allah], and would keep back [people] from the way of Allah, and from the sacred Mosque, which We have made [open] to [all]—equal is the dweller there and the visitor from the country—and any whose purpose therein is profanity or wrong-doing—they will We cause to taste of a most grievous penalty.¹⁷

Prayers in Islam can be performed anywhere, provided that it is clean. Abu Huraira reports that the messenger of Allah said: “...The earth has been made for me clean and a place of worship.”¹⁸ The mosque represents the establishment of a Muslim community; it is the nucleus that creates characteristics of Muslim society. It is a vital cornerstone in the building of any Muslim community, as well as the Islamic state. The significance of the mosque in the life of the Prophet Muhammad is demonstrated by the fact that

⁵ Qur'an 2:125.

⁶ Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (New Delhi: Asian Education Services, 1985), Part 4, 1308.

⁷ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Part 2, 458.

⁸ Basim Musallam, “The Ordering of Muslim Societies,” *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, Francis Robinson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 168.

⁹ H.A. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, eds., *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), 330.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Qur'an 22:40.

¹² See for example: Qur'an 2:125, 2:127, 2:158, 3:96-97, 5:2, 5:97, 8:35, 22:26, 22:29, 22:33, 106:3.

¹³ See for example: Qur'an 2:189, 3:49, 3:154, 4:15, 7:74, 10:87, 15:82, 16:80, 24:27, 29:41, 33:53.

¹⁴ Qur'an 24:36-37.

¹⁵ The mosque in Al-Quds (Jerusalem) in Palestine, which was considered the first direction of prayers.

¹⁶ Qur'an 17:1.

¹⁷ Qur'an 22:25.

¹⁸ Imam Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 1, Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, trans. (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1984), 265-266.

his first actions after emigrating from Mecca and arriving in Madinah, was to select a suitable location for a *masjid* and to organize its construction.

A brief glance at some of the Prophetic *hadith*¹⁹ on establishing a mosque, attending the mosque, spending time in it, and partaking in its activities—all of which are acts of worship—will demonstrate the lofty position of the mosque during the Prophet's time. According to the *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad, also called the Messenger of Allah, encouraged the building of *masajid* by stressing the great reward of such an act. Imam Bukhari reported that the Messenger of Allah said, "Whoever builds a Mosque, God will build for him a similar place in paradise."²⁰ Similarly, in the Qur'an, it reads:

The mosques of Allah shall be visited and maintained by such as believe in Allah and the Last Day, establish regular prayers, and practise regular charity, and fear none [at all] except Allah. It is they who are expected to be on true guidance.²¹

And the Mosques are for Allah [alone]; so invoke not anyone there along with Allah.²²

In Islam, once a mosque is built, it does not belong to any human. Its owner is God, which makes the expression "house of God" not only figuratively but legally true under Islamic law. There is no such thing as membership in or of a mosque; every Muslim in the world is equally entitled to attend all functions and to use all facilities. This is a practical result of the mosque being a *waqf*—a perpetual trust which the donor relinquished all control of by giving it up to God.²³

In the early period, the building of mosques was a social obligation of rulers as representatives of communities and tribes. As Islam spread, building mosques became a pious work.²⁴ As Islam flourished and developed, Muslim communities felt an increasing need to formalize religious observance. Characterized by a cohesive sharing of common beliefs, and by a carefully regulated common way of life, Muslims demanded what we call today "a community centre."²⁵ According to Oleg Grabar, "the theoretical focus and locus of the Muslim community was the mosque, which was in the past, as today, the most obvious, largest monument in the city accessible to all Muslims."²⁶

¹⁹ A recorded saying of the Prophet Muhammad or a recorded description of his actions or his silent approval.

²⁰ Al-Imam Al-Zubaydi, *Mokhtaser Sahih Al-Bukhari (Abridged Sahih Al-Bukhari)*, Ahmed Zidan and Dina Zidan, trans. (Cairo, Islamic Inc. Publishing & Distribution, 1999), 151. For the narration of ibn Isa "a house like that (mosque) in Paradise" see Imam Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 1, H1084, 269.

²¹ Qur'an 9:18.

²² Qur'an 72:18.

²³ Ismail R. Alfaruqi and Lois Lamya Alfaruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986), 152.

²⁴ Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 335.

²⁵ Oleg Grabar, *The Genius of Arab Civilization: Source of Renaissance*, 2nd ed., J. R. Hayes, ed., (London: Eurabia Publishing LTD, 1983), 82-84.

²⁶ Oleg Grabar, *The World of Islam*, Bernard Lewis, ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), 94.

The Unique Role of the Masjid

Throughout Islamic history the mosque, as an institution, played a central role in cultural and social life. The mosque acted as a focal point of all activities based on the importance bestowed upon it by the Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime and the life of his companions thereafter. The distinctiveness of the mosque is linked directly to the worldview of Islam. As such, it is seen as a way of life rather than as a simple set of rituals to be performed. Because Islam comprises a complete and comprehensive way of life, the mosque, with its positive and constructive activities, is at the heart of the community. The mosque serves the role of a spiritual, educational, social, governmental, administrative, and preventative institution.²⁷

A Spiritual and Religious Institution

Within the mosque, worshipers are to feel satisfaction, attain tranquillity, acquire mercy and devotion, and release daily worries. People are encouraged to interact with one another on the basis of love, equality, cooperation, and by seeking Allah's pleasure. Every worshiper attempts to eliminate the selfishness that isolates him or her from others and to reach a level of harmony with the rest of society. A verse from the Qur'an reads that

...there is a Mosque whose foundation was laid from the first day on piety; it is more worthy of the standing forth [for prayer] therein. In it are men who love to be purified; and Allah loveth those who make themselves pure.²⁸

Within the mosque, one can perform one's five daily prayers as well as any other voluntary prayers at any time of the day or night. It provides an opportunity and means of communication with the Creator, a place for collective submission to Allah, and a place for sharing spiritual experiences and brotherhood. A verse from the Qur'an reads:

And that you set your whole selves [to Him] at every time and place of prayer, and call upon Him, making your devotion sincere in His sight.²⁹

During the weekly Friday congregational prayer, a sermon can address religious, moral, or social issues as well as deal with current affairs that affect Muslims.

A number of scholars are of the opinion that performing congregation prayers at the mosque is a confirmed *sunnah*,³⁰ and that its reward is increased by twenty-five to twenty-seven times in comparison to a prayer performed individually. The Prophet said:

The congregational prayer exceeds that of individual prayer by twenty seven

²⁷ Many works deal with the unique role of the *masjid*. A good study that has covered many of these aspects is Khalid Alavi, *The Mosque, Within a Muslim Community* (Pakistan: Dawah Academy, 2004).

²⁸ Qur'an, 9:108.

²⁹ Qur'an, 7:29.

³⁰ *Sunnah* is a collection of the Prophet's traditions, sayings, and practices.

degrees. Whoever performs ablution properly then goes to the mosque, every step that he takes erases one of his bad deeds and elevates him a degree (in Paradise). If the person enters the mosque and starts praying, the angels will implore Allah to forgive him and have mercy on him saying: 'O Allah! Have mercy on him and forgive him.' And one remains [receiving an equal reward as if he is still] in prayer as long as he is awaiting [the coming] prayer.³¹

Moreover, praying in congregation at the mosque teaches people unity. The mosque also serves as a meeting place where people discuss their problems and try to find solutions for them. During the last ten days of the month of Ramadan, the Prophet and his companions stayed in the mosque, preserving their fast and performing night prayers.

An Educational Institution

The *masjid* was an educational center in which different educational activities took place. The mosque was the first organized collective school for men, women, and children in Arab history.³² The Prophet taught the Qur'an and explained its verses. The Prophet would sit in the *masjid* surrounded by a *halaqa*³³ and instruct his listeners who would repeat Qur'anic verses and *hadith* three times until they had learned them.³⁴ This was an informal method of teaching, which was ultimately organized in a systematic way. Scholars originally taught Qur'anic studies, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *sharia*, language, and literature, followed by chemistry, physics, engineering, and medicine, among other subjects.³⁵

Prophet Muhammad was a teacher and educator, and his foremost duty was to direct, teach, and guide people to live in accordance with the rules of their Creator. The *masjid* is a place where Muslims learn and educate themselves on both Islamic teachings as well as general knowledge of current issues that are relevant to their lives. In fact, the very first teachers were commissioned by the Prophet to teach for free.³⁶

Learning institutions in Muslim lands developed to take on a variety of forms. These ranged from mosques, to *madrasas*,³⁷ to *kuttab*,³⁸ and *zawaya*.³⁹ Colleges with permanent teachers and pupils were first housed in mosques, and classes were held between prayers. Colleges later came to occupy independent buildings attached to mosques. Unless someone was appointed to head the college, the imam of the mosque assumed the responsibility.⁴⁰ These institutions, as Scott notes,

composed voluminous treatises on surgery and medicine. They bestowed upon the stars the Arabic names which still cover the map of the heavens. Above the lofty station of the muezzin, as he called the devout to prayer, were projected against the sky the implements of science to whose uses religion did not refuse the shelter of her temples—the gnomon, the astrolabe, the pendulum clock, and the armillary sphere.⁴¹

It is well-known that institutions such as al-Qayrawan,⁴² al-Qarawiyyin,⁴³ and al-Azhar,⁴⁴ were among the first universities in history. Another great body of

³⁷ *Madrasa* is the Arabic term for school.

³⁸ Plural *katatib*, a type of beginners' or primary school, it was formerly widespread in Islamic lands, although the name was almost universally applied to Muslim beginners' schools. There is no precise indication as to when they were first established, although it is known that they spread during the Umayyad era in the wake of conquering armies, and that the *kuttab* system was already widespread in early Abbasid times. It is normally attached to a mosque and located in any sort of room available, a tent in the desert, or even in the open. For more information see C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, and Ch. Pellat, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 5 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 567.

³⁹ Zaouia ("corner"), also spelled *zawiya*, *zawiyah*, *zaouiya*, *zaouia*, or *zwaya*, is a Maghrebi and West African term for an Islamic religious school or monastery, roughly corresponding to the Eastern term "madrasa."

⁴⁰ Alfaraqi and Alfaraqi, *Cultural Atlas*, 152.

⁴¹ S.P. Scott, *History of the Moorish Empire in Europe*, Vol. 3 (Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1904), 468.

⁴² Al-Qayrawan Mosque (*Jamii Uqba*) was built sometime between 670 and 680 by Uqba ibn Nafi, the founder of the city of Qayrawan. It witnessed transformations by a succession of rulers and is one of the most prestigious and oldest religious shrines in western Islam. In 845, al-Qayrawan became one of the main cultural centers of Islam, attracting students from all over the world, including Muslim Spain. At the end of the 9th century, a *Bayt al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom) was established there rivaling its counterpart in Baghdad in the study of medicine, astronomy, engineering, and translation. At Qayrawan and Zaytuna in Tunisia, alongside the study of the Qur'an and jurisprudence, grammar, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine were also taught. At Qayrawan, classes in medicine were delivered by Ziad B. Khalfun, Ishak B. Imran, and Ishak B. Sulayman, whose works were subsequently translated by Constantine the African in the 11th century. They were taught in the first faculty of medicine in Europe: Salerno, in the south of Italy, which became the first institution of higher learning in Latin Europe. Public education and al-Qayrawan were so deeply intertwined that even women actively participated in the pursuit of learning there, and scholars, reigning monarchs, and men from all walks of life eagerly supported the library of their town's grand mosque. See Al-Hassani, *1001 Inventions, Muslim Heritage in Our World*, 54-58.

⁴³ Al-Qarawiyyin mosque remained, until the twentieth century, the foremost educational institution in Fez, Morocco. See Musallam, "The Ordering of Muslim Societies," 168.

⁴⁴ Al-Azhar is today the most important religious university in the Muslim world with as many as 90,000 students studying there at any one time. It is arguably the oldest university in the world. When Jawhar the Sicilian, commander of the troops sent by the Fatimid Caliph Almuiz to conquer Egypt, founded Cairo

³¹ Al-Zubaydi, *Mokhtaser Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 158.

³² Al-Nahlāwī, 'Abd al-Rahmān, *Uṣūl Al-tarbīyah Al-Islāmīyah Wa-asālibuhā fī Al-bayt Wa-al-madrasah Wa-al-mujtam'* (*Origins of Islamic Education and its Methods at Home, in School and the Community*), 3rd ed. (Damascus: Dar AlFikr, 2005), 1302.

³³ Students sit in a circle with their teachers.

³⁴ Al-Bukhari, "Baab 8, 30, 35, 42," in "Madrasa," Vol. 5, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. J. Pedersen (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 1123.

³⁵ Shadid, Muhammad, *Manhaj Al-Qur'an Fī Al-Tarbīyah (Method of the Qur'an in Education)*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1977), 63; See also: Mustafa Sibai, *Some Glittering Aspects of the Islamic Civilization*, Sharif Ahmed Khan, trans. (Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Students Organizations, 1984), 165-166.

³⁶ A. L. Tibawi, *Islamic Education* (London: Luzak, 1972), 24. See Salim T.S. Al-Hassani, *1001 Inventions, Muslim Heritage in Our World*, 2nd ed. (London: FSTC LTD, 2007), 50-53.

institutions initiated by the Muslims were the *madrasas*, or colleges.⁴⁵ Ibn Jubayr (d. 614H/1217CE) counted thirty on his visit to Baghdad. The spread of the *madrasa* was so rapid that at some point in medieval times, according to Tawtah, there were seventy-three colleges in Damascus, forty-one in Jerusalem, forty in Baghdad, fourteen in Aleppo, thirteen in Tripoli, nine in al-Mawsil, and seventy-four in Cairo, in addition to numerous institutions in other cities.⁴⁶ An author, writing around 1500 CE, counted about 150 *madrasas* in Damascus alone.⁴⁷

The *masjid* was the central focus of intellectual activity, and a medium for the distribution of books. In the mosques, writers and scholars recounted the results of their studies to audiences of young people, other scholars, and interested laymen, and because the cultural basis of the intellectual activity was common to all, anyone and everyone could take part in discussion.⁴⁸

This intellectual activity spurred the diffusion of books through mosques as explained by Sardar and Davies when they note that “When a writer wished to publish a book, he first made notes and then wrote out an original manuscript (*asl*) which was initially called the ‘draft’ (*muswadda*).”⁴⁹ While such a draft naturally had value, it did not constitute a publication. The word used for publication, *kharraja*, means “let (it) go out” or even “come out” or “be published.” The author was thus required to present his book to the public. He did this in the mosque through oral reading or dictation. Scholars would dictate numerous volumes of their work in mosques where the general public gathered to hear them, and professional *warrags* copied and turned dictations into books.⁵⁰ Mackensen and Pinto wrote extensively on Islamic libraries of the Middle Ages, highlighting their place and role in Islamic society.⁵¹ Public book collections were so widespread that it was impossible to find a mosque, or a learning institution of any sort, throughout the Islamic world without a collection of books placed at the disposal of students or readers.⁵² Pedersen explains that it was normal for people to give their libraries to mosques, and an entire book

collection might be transferred to a mosque as a self contained library or *dar al-kutub*.⁵³

A Social Institution

One unique aspect of the mosque in Islam is its social and community role. All individuals, men and women, and young and old, are linked to the mosque. The *masjid* is seen as an information center for political, social, cultural, and ritual life. Besides the *adhaan*, or the call for prayer, all important news is announced in the *masjid*. The *adhaan* is both an indication of the time of prayer and a method of drawing people’s attention to the important issues of the day.

People participate in this institution for consultation and the exchange of views and ideas. An oath taken within the *masjid* is particularly binding. As such, the contract of matrimony is often made there. Sporting competitions even took place there.⁵⁴ Aisha said: “Once I saw the messenger of Allah at the door of my house while some Ethiopians were playing with their spears in the mosque. The messenger of God screened me with his wrapper to enable me to watch their display.”⁵⁵

The Messenger of Allah reserved a corner of the *masjid* as a shelter for the poor who were known as the people of As-Suffah.⁵⁶ The mosque was even used to care for the wounded and injured. Aisha said: “On the day of the battle of the trench Saad suffered an injury to his arm and the Prophet pitched a tent in the mosque to care for him.”⁵⁷

The mosque was a place for the whole family. Accompanied by their children, women would partake in the congregational prayers in the *masjid*. Abu Qutadah said: “The Prophet said: ‘When I stand for prayer I have the intention of extending it, but when I hear a child crying I shorten it, as I dislike to cause difficulty for the child’s mother.’”⁵⁸

Children were made to feel welcome in the *masjid*. The grandsons of the Prophet used to climb on his back while he was leading the prayers. Abu Qutadah reported: “I saw the messenger of Allah leading the people in prayer with Umama, daughter of Abulas, on his neck; and when he prostrated he put her down....”⁵⁹

People attend prayers in their best clothes that are not extravagant, as Allah says

“O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: but waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters.”⁶⁰

This injunction against excess serves to equalize worshippers at the mosque.

in 969 AD, he built Al-Azhar originally as a mosque. The mosque was completed within two years and opened for its first prayers on 7th Ramadan 361 AH/June 22, 972 CE. Al-Azhar University is a natural expansion of the great mosque of Al-Azhar. It is the oldest and most celebrated of all Islamic academic institutions and universities all over the world.

⁴⁵ For a summary of the role and impact of the madrasa, see George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), and Bayard Dodge, *Muslim Education in Medieval Times* (Washington, DC: The Middle East Institute, 1962).

⁴⁶ Dodge, *Muslim Education*, 23.

⁴⁷ Ibn Jubayr in Johannes Pederson, *The Arabic Book*, Robert Hillenbrand, ed.; Geoffrey French, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 128.

⁴⁸ Z. Sardar and M.W. Davies, *Distorted Imagination* (London: Grey Seal Books, 1990), 97

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 98.

⁵¹ Olga Pinto, “The Libraries of the Arabs during the time of the Abbasids,” in *Islamic Culture* 3, F. Krenkow, trans. (April 1929), 211-243.

⁵² Ahmed Shalaby, *History of Muslim Education* (Beirut: Dar Al Kashaf, 1954), 95.

⁵³ Yaqut: Mu‘jam in J. Pederson, *The Arabic Book*, p.126. See Al-Hassani, *1001 Inventions, Muslim Heritage in Our World*, 60-64; see also <http://www.muslimheritage.com> (accessed April 5, 2010).

⁵⁴ Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 338.

⁵⁵ Al-Zubaydi, *Mokhtaser Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 152.

⁵⁶ The *suffa* was a place situated in the mosque, covered with a roof, but with open sides. It was a place where students lodged.

⁵⁷ Al-Zubaydi, *Mokhtaser Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 154.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 215-216.

⁵⁹ Imam Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 1. 274.

⁶⁰ Qur’an 7:31.

Meeting one another five times a day, standing in one row without any distinction of social class, standard of living, or race, and praying to the same God forms the feeling of equality, brotherhood, fairness, and mercy. It cleanses the individual from the envy and hatred that he or she might have otherwise experienced, and unites them all. Abu Musa reported that the Prophet said that "A faithful believer is to another faithful believer as the bricks of a wall, each enforcing the other."⁶¹ A verse from the Qur'an says

O mankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other not that ye may despise [each other]. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is [he who is] the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted [with all things].⁶²

An Administrative Institution

During the time of the Prophet, the mosque was the place where all political, judicial, and social decisions were made. It was a center for collecting for the needy, for discussions of important matters with companions through consultation and exchanging of views and ideas, for meetings with envoys and tribal delegations, for signing agreements, and for judging disputing parties.⁶³ The Prophet conducted political negotiations and made decisions and contracts in the mosque. Whenever he wanted to draw attention to a special issue, he would call people to the mosque and deliver a speech explaining the matter.

The *khalifah*⁶⁴ would outline his guiding principles and policies by addressing and debating with people in the *masajid*. Abu Bakr (R.A.), the first *khalifah*, after having been selected to lead, delivered his first address in the mosque. It became the practice of rulers later in history to address people in the mosque before attending to the administrative affairs of the State. Leading the prayer and addressing from the *minbar* was considered to be a symbol of authority. Almost all the Umayyad and 'Abbasid *khalifah* and governors gave policy speeches in the mosque. "In general the Mosque and particularly the *minbar*⁶⁵ was the site where official proclamations were made, of course, as early as the time of the Prophet."⁶⁶

A Preventative Institution

A person who purifies himself, cleanses himself, and then performs five daily prayers for his Creator in congregation, and who tries to follow God's commands, and to feel close contact with God and seek forgiveness, must feel relieved from the burden of sins. These actions, in turn, will protect society from all kinds of evil practices. The Qur'an says

Recite what is sent of the Book by inspiration to thee, and establish regular prayer: for prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds; and remembrance of Allah is the greatest [thing in life] without doubt. And Allah knows the [Deeds] that ye do.⁶⁷

Further, the Qur'an states that:

The believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is exalted in power, wise.⁶⁸

In fact, some of the mosques developed Islamic group therapy to combat loneliness, depression, and substance abuse as shown in research done by Abul Azayem.⁶⁹

The Mosque at Present

After addressing all the remarkable roles that mosques have played throughout history, we can now see that there is a huge limitation in its role and function. Today, mosques primarily function as places where aspects of worship are performed and only occasional educational activities take place. Compared to the past, the social and administrative roles of mosques are severely abbreviated.

In general, the role of mosques in countries where Muslims are the majority is more limited in function, since there are separate institutions and establishments that carry out tasks that used to be within the boundaries of the mosque. Today, mosques have a diminished educational role since there is a separate ministry of education, under which universities, colleges, schools, and sometimes even *madrasas* function. Mosques also tend to have fewer important social and welfare roles since there is a separate ministry for social welfare and other community organizations that deal with community welfare. The same separation of functions is true for ministries of health, administration, and so on.

On the contrary, in countries where Muslims are the minority, mosques have taken up different and more comprehensive roles. For example, in some places the mosque performs the role of community center. Recent research in European countries demonstrated that mosques form an important and necessary element in the social network of Muslims. Moreover, with the necessary support and infrastructure, they have a positive influence on the socialization and integration of Muslims into western, secularized societies. Within the context of immigration, European mosques have more impetus, as compared to the ones in

⁶¹ Al-Zubaydi, *Mokhtaser Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 159.

⁶² Qur'an 49:13.

⁶³ Hassan Ibrahim Hassan, *History of Islam*, Part 4 (Cairo: Maktabat AlNahda, 1964), 422.

⁶⁴ Head of the Islamic State.

⁶⁵ The stepped platform from which the imam in the mosque delivers his sermons.

⁶⁶ Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 347-348.

⁶⁷ Qur'an 29:45.

⁶⁸ Qur'an 9:71.

⁶⁹ There are about 75,000 mosques in Egypt, out of which around 1,000 are community mosques where different social, educational, therapeutic, and rehabilitative activities are conducted. See Jamal Madi Abul Azayem, "Role of the mosque in confronting the epidemic of substance abuse," *Islamic Medicines* (May 2008) <http://www.islamicmedicines.com/forum/265-post1.html> (accessed April 5, 2010).

Muslim countries, to act as multi-functional meeting places. In other words, besides being places for performing religious activities, mosques have developed into centers offering a complete range of cultural and social activities as well.⁷⁰

Mosques Around the World

In central Asia, during the Soviet era, scholars described attitudes towards Islam as viciously and destructively hostile at worst and schizophrenic at best. Following Mikhail Gorbachev's promotion of openness and restructuring, a revival has continued since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Disused mosques have been brought back into operation, and many new ones have been built; thousands of pilgrims perform the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) every year; public expressions of piety have increased; and considerable publishing activity has put many Islamic texts in print. Additionally, religious education is again permissible.⁷¹ There are an estimated fourteen to twenty-three million Muslims in Russia today, constituting approximately fourteen percent of the population, and forming the largest religious minority.⁷²

The first group of Muslims arrived in South Africa in 1658, soon after the first Dutch settlement at the Cape of Good Hope. They were followed by a larger number of Asian and African Muslim slaves owned by the Dutch East India Company, as well as a number of Muslim political prisoners that the Dutch exiled from the Indonesian archipelago to the Cape. The first mosque, Awwal Mosque, was founded at the turn of the nineteenth century and with its popular school it served the social and religious needs of the emerging Muslim community. The success of the Awwal Mosque was followed by the development of similar mosques that acted as social centers for attending to Muslim needs. According to the 2001 South African census, Muslims number only 1.5 percent (around 654,064) of the population.⁷³

After Iran's Islamic revolution of 1979, the mosque became the public secretariat of Ayatollah Khomeini where he performed his official duties. Nevertheless, it still retains a particular educational and political role within Iranian society. In many other Islamic countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, Indonesia, and Malaysia, current affairs and political affairs are regular topics of discussions in mosques.

In Pakistan, there was an estimated 25,000 mosques in united India at the time of partition in 1947. About 500,000 mosques in Pakistan are now registered with the government, and about the same number remain unregistered. Considering Pakistan's total population of 174 million, this means that there is approximately one mosque for

every 174 people. In Pakistan, the mosque was the center of communal activities up until the 1970s. As was the practice across the Indian subcontinent, mosques were run by local Muslim communities through private donations. The day-to-day affairs of a mosque came under the jurisdiction of a committee that was elected from the local populace. *Punchayats* (local committees that settled differences and issued decrees in controversial matters) were responsible for mosques and all their activities. Very few mosques fell under government control through its Department of Awqaf (religious endowments).⁷⁴

In China, one of the first mosques was established fourteen centuries ago. Currently, there are some 28,000 mosques in the People's Republic of China.⁷⁵ According to the 1990 national census of China, the total Muslim population was 17.6 million.⁷⁶ Other sources mention figures between twenty and 100 million.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Aijazz Ahmed, "Pakistan's Wonderlands with Little Wonder," *Asia Times Online* (February 19, 2003) http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/EB19Df02.html (accessed April 5, 2010); See also John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Essex: Westview Press, 1982).

⁷⁵ Even though there are only sparse records of the event in Arab and Chinese history, *The Ancient Record of the Tang Dynasty* describes a landmark visit to China by an emissary from Arabia in the seventh century. Saad ibn Abi Waqqas, one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad, led the delegation in 650 CE, which brought gifts as well as the belief system of Islam to China. According to the traditions of Chinese Muslims, this event is considered to be the birth of Islam in China. Although the emperor of the time, Yung-Wei, found Islam to be a little too restrictive, he respected its teachings and considered it to be compatible with the teachings of Confucius. For this reason, he gave Saad complete freedom to propagate the faith among his people. To show his admiration for Islam, the emperor ordered the establishment of China's first mosque at Ch'ang-an. The mosque still stands today, after more than thirteen centuries. Since religious freedom was declared in 1978, the Chinese Muslims have not wasted time in expressing their convictions. See Yusuf Abdul Rahman, "Islam in China," <http://members.tripod.com/worldupdates/islamintheworld/id3.htm> (accessed April 5, 2010).

⁷⁶ Dru C. Gladney, "Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism?," in *Islam in World Cultures*, Michael Feener, ed. (Oxford, UK: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 163.

⁷⁷ According to the *CIA World Factbook*, about one to two percent of the total population in China is Muslim, while the U.S. Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* shows that Muslims constitute about 1.5% of the Chinese population. Recent census counts imply that there may be up to 20 million Muslims in China. However, the last three national censuses (1982, 1990, and 2000) did not include questions about religion. The number of religious believers can be inferred indirectly from census counts of the number of people who identify themselves as belonging to particular nationalities, some of whom are known to be predominantly members of certain religious groups. The BBC gives a range of 20 million to 100 million (1.5% to 7.5% of the total) Muslims in China. The figure of 100 million is based on a 1938 statistical yearbook placing the number of Muslims at 50 million, as well as census data from the 1940s, which recorded roughly 48 million Muslims. Demographers at the University of Michigan contend, in contrast, that the only way the Muslim population of China could be substantially higher than the 20.3 million members of traditionally Muslim nationalities in the 2000 census is if there were a very large hidden or uncounted number of Muslims in China, but a large undercount of Muslims has not been documented and remains speculative. The accuracy of religious data in China from non-census sources, such as surveys, can also be questioned. While official data estimated 100 million religious believers in China, a survey taken by Shanghai University declared a dramatic increase of 300 million believers. The survey also found that the major religions are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity. The number of followers of Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity accounted for 240 million people. Islam, the other major religion, accounted for a larger part of the remaining 60 million people along with any other faiths in China. See <http://www.themodernreligion.com/convert/china.html> (accessed April 5, 2010). See also Sybil P. Parker, *World Geographical Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 3 Asia, (US: McGraw-Hill Inc, 1995), 169.

⁷⁰ Meryem Kanmaz, *Scientific Research of Islam in Europe, Islam in Flanders: The Social Role of Mosques, Social-Geographic, Political, Social and Religious-Cultural Aspects*, Center for Islam and Europe, Ghent University, <http://www.flwi.ugent.be/cie/CIE/kanmaz1.htm> (accessed April 5, 2010).

⁷¹ Adeb Khalid, "Islam in Contemporary Central Asia", in *Islam in World Cultures*, Michael Feener, ed. (California, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc. 2004), 144.

⁷² U.S. Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report 2007*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90196.htm> (accessed April 5, 2010).

⁷³ *Census 2001: Primary Tables South Africa, Census 1996 and 2001 Compared*. Report No. 03-02-04 (2001). (Pretoria: Statistics South Africa, 2004), VI, 27-8. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/RSAPrimary.pdf> (accessed April 5, 2010).

In the United States, contemporary Muslim communities are divided not merely by race but by language, ethnicity, class, and religious orientation as well. Other Muslim communities, especially that of southern California, offer different models of communal formation, working to create an explicitly inter-ethnic, inter-racial community of believers that relies on English as a common language. According to Edward Curtis, this racial nature of US mosques reflects larger trends in the US and within Christian churches in particular.⁷⁸ There are well over 1,200 mosques in US inner cities, towns, and suburbs, which express a wide variety of architectural styles, often housing schools and recreational areas.

Islamic schools, which are often connected to the mosque, serve as a place where Muslim children and adults construct their Muslim identities. Most mosques feature some kind of weekend religious educational programming, especially on Sundays. Also, as of 2004, there were two US Islamic colleges, one Shi'ite and one Sunni, that provided advanced training in Islamic Studies. In addition, there are over 200 full-time primary and secondary Muslim schools now operating in the United States.⁷⁹

For much of European history, the concept of "us" and "them" dominated the scene. There is an underlying discursive structure whose principle has been described by Edward Said as an ideological construction of culture as a source of identity geared to "differentiate 'us' from 'them,' almost always with some degree of xenophobia."⁸⁰ According to Said, Orientalism led the West to see Islam, or the East, as static both in time and place, and as "eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself."⁸¹ Outside of the imperial context, western Europe is very new to the experience of multi-religious and multi-cultural existence. The Middle East, on the other hand, as the cradle of the three major monotheistic religions, would be unthinkable without the co-existence of synagogues, churches, and mosques, however contentious that coexistence might still be. Until very recently, according to sociologists, Muslims in Europe were usually perceived as transient immigrants, refugees, or negligible ethnic minorities, rather than part of communities deserving their own places of worship or cultural institutions.⁸² Jorgen Nielsen explains that Europeans, reluctant to accept people who are different, except on European terms, have certainly contributed to Muslims' assertion of their own distinctiveness in response. But, it is really Muslims' own attachment to their traditions which has forced local communities, politicians, and academics to take them seriously and forget about the original naïve assimilation scenarios.⁸³

⁷⁸ Edward E. Curtis, "Peril and Possibility: Muslim Life in the United States," *Islam in World Cultures*, Michael Feener, ed. (California, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc, 2004), 283-308.

⁷⁹ Curtis, "Peril and Possibility: Muslim Life in the United States," 302.

⁸⁰ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), xiii.

⁸¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Re-edition with Afterward (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 15. See also Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

⁸² Nebahat Avciglu, "Identity-as-Form: The Mosque in the West," *Cultural Analysis* 6 (2007), http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~caforum/volume6/vol6_article4.html (accessed April 5, 2010).

⁸³ Tariq Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, (Leicester, UK: Islamic Foundation, 1999), xi-xii.

Muslims in Europe make up about five percent of Europe's population of 425 million. Islam is also the fastest-growing religion. In the United Kingdom, Muslims make up about three percent of the total population. In a 2004 ICM poll of 500 British Muslims, fifty-one percent said that they pray every day. According to a report by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, a 2005 survey found that about eighty percent of Muslims in London say they attend mosque regularly.⁸⁴

In Europe, there is general concurrence that Muslims need to integrate into the wider society. There is also concurrence that they should be able to practice their faith in mosques and Islamic centers that are built with local funding and led by imams certified and educated with knowledge of both Islamic teachings and European culture. The problem that naturally follows is the question of funding mosques through public money. Despite the perception that most countries in Europe are secular, privileges have been given to churches for centuries, including public funding for religious schools, tax support, maintenance of buildings, clerical salaries, cemeteries, and even training of clergy. As none of these are available to Muslims, these biased policies become noticeable only with the increased visibility of other immigrant religions and their customs.

Until recently, many Islamic places of worship in Europe were for the most part invisible and hidden away in basement apartments, garages, old schools, and abandoned factories and warehouses, with small rooms and without signage indicating the presence of a mosque. These places fulfilled two main functions: they provided basic needs for religious practice, notably prayer, as well as the need for places of "purity" and of "certainty" where immigrant communities were able to reconstitute themselves socially.⁸⁵

According to the report "Muslim Youth and Women in the West: Source of Concern or Source of Hope?" there are a few mosques that have existed in some Western countries for many years.⁸⁶ The first significant mosque in Britain was built in Cardiff in 1860, and the Grand Mosque of Paris was opened in 1926. Officially, the Paris mosque was built as a gesture of thanks by the government to those Muslims who had fought and died for France in the First World War. However, it also served the much broader purpose of building a strong French presence in the Muslim community. As a result, the French government subsidized the construction and maintenance of the mosque and combined it with a cultural center to conform to the 1905 law on the separation of church and state.

The Paris mosque notwithstanding, Muslim houses of worship were rare in Western countries until about twenty-five years ago. However, according to a study conducted by the Spanish magazine *Alba*, more mosques and prayer centers than churches have been built in France over the last century, with over 4,000 mosques currently serving the

⁸⁴ Ibid. 121. Ramadan, in his book *To Be a European Muslim*, quoted much lower figures than shown above.

⁸⁵ Marcel Maussen, "Making Muslim Presence Meaningful: Studies on Islam and Mosques in Western Europe," ASSR working paper, Amsterdam School for Social Science Research (May 2005), 7.

⁸⁶ "Muslim Women and Youth in the West: Background Paper," Report of Salzburg Global Seminar, New York University Center for Dialogues (Salzburg, Austria: May 15-17, 2007). http://islamuswest.org/publications_islam_and_the_West/Muslim_Youth_Women_West/MIW_23.html (accessed April 5, 2010).

largest Muslim population in Europe.⁸⁷ Despite the fact that there is rapid growth in the construction of mosques, still there are proportionately far fewer houses of worship for Muslims than for Catholics, Protestants, or Jews.⁸⁸ The number of mosques remains relatively small in France, and is roughly mirrored in the United States (see Table 1). Of the 1,685 Islamic prayer spaces in France, there are only twenty that can hold 1,000 or more worshipers, with another fifty-four that can accommodate between 500 and 1,000 people. In contrast, there are about 20,000 churches for a Catholic population of about twenty-five million.

Table 1: Mosques in the United States, France, United Kingdom, and Germany

Country	Estimated Number of Mosques/Prayer Spaces	Ratio of Muslim Population to Mosques/Prayer Spaces
United States	1,250	2,400
France	1,685	2,463
United Kingdom	1,669	959
Germany	2,300	1,304

Sources: Estimates from Laurence and Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France*, p. 83; and from the Salaam Network in the United Kingdom (www.salaam.co.uk/mosques/index.php).

There is approximately the same number of prayer spaces in Britain as in France, and though they serve a much smaller community, they are larger and better established. The number of mosques in Germany is far greater than anywhere else in Europe, and in proportion to the size of its community; Muslims are far better served there than in either the United States or France. In the United States, however, the number of mosques is growing, as more affluent Muslim immigrants move from cities to the suburbs.⁸⁹

Challenges to Overcome

The needs of British Muslims have been poorly resourced from the public purse. As the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR) states that

The building and maintaining of mosques, Islamic schools, Muslim community centres and facilities and the wide range of Muslim institutions that help to cater for British Muslim needs, preserve Muslim identities and keep the Muslim community together, are essentially an achievement of Muslims themselves with little support from mainstream funding sources.⁹⁰

Larger mosques serve as the heart of the community to a greater extent than is presently the case in Muslim countries. There are teashops, barber shops, bookshops, cassette stores, perfume shops, and *halal* food stores. Youth associations and women's associations affiliated with the mosque may meet at the mosque outside prayer time to organize sporting events and other activities.

Recently, Europe has witnessed a row over building new mosques, and, across the continent, responses have been hostile. In Italy, members of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's ruling coalition have proposed a law to effectively block construction of mosques because of concern they may be used to "spread hatred for the West." Dutch populist parliamentarian Geert Wilders has called mosques "palaces of hatred," and, in France, a national body has been created to monitor the construction of mosques. In Germany, right-wing politician Markus Wiener fears the Cologne mosque will empower the Muslim population too much. His Pro-Cologne party has made opposition to the mosque its main political issue.⁹¹

Martin van Bruinessen clarifies that the mosque, as an institution, and the Imam officiating in the mosque are the most easily visible Muslim authorities in western Europe.⁹² However, his finding is that reports of the respect that Imams enjoy in their own communities are contradictory. Some educated informants complain of the ignorance of most Imams and the irrelevance of their lectures to the lives of Muslims in Europe. The demand for better education for Imams has been the key to social and cultural integration of Muslim communities into wider society. On the other hand, in the Netherlands, there are also reports of men—often Moroccan—changing their behavior and attitude under the influence of an Imam. Many of the Imams and community leaders who work on a voluntary basis receive little or no compensation for their services. Moreover, while many of them have attended college and may have even completed postgraduate degrees, less than half of mosque leaders in the United States have received any type of formal Islamic Studies education.⁹³

⁸⁷ Kevin McCandless, "Islam Could Become Europe's Dominant Religion, Experts Say," CNSNews.com (March 2, 2007), <http://guardduty.wordpress.com/2007/03/03/report-islam-could-become-europes-dominant-religion-experts-say/> (accessed April 5, 2010).

⁸⁸ See, for example, Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2006), 83. They estimate a ratio of just over 1,000 Catholics for each church, 671 Protestants for each church, and 238 Jews for each synagogue. Quoted from the report of a conference organized by New York University's Center for Dialogues: "Islamic World-U.S.-The West."

⁸⁹ See Andrea Elliott, "Between Black and Immigrant Muslims, an Uneasy Alliance," *New York Times* (March 11, 2007). <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/11/nyregion/11muslim.html> (accessed April 5, 2010).

⁹⁰ Zakaryya Abdel-Hady, "British Muslims...A Challenge," *Journal of College of Sharia & Islamic Studies* 25 (2007).

⁹¹ Emily Harris, "Two Mosques, Two Different Reactions in Germany," *National Public Radio*, (February 24, 2008). <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=15043704> (accessed April 5, 2010).

⁹² Martin van Bruinessen, "Making and Unmaking Muslim Religious Authority in Western Europe," the Fourth Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Florence & Montecatini Terme, the Mediterranean Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute (March 19-23, 2003), http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/making_authority.htm (accessed April 5, 2010).

⁹³ Curtis, "Peril and Possibility: Muslim Life in the United States," 302. No doubt that such a unique

Speakers at “The Status of Imams in Europe” dialogue held by the European Policy Centre and its strategic partner the King Baudouin Foundation agreed that the size and circumstances of Muslim communities in European Union member states varied widely. The situation regarding the training of Imams was inadequate in most countries. Improved training structures for Imams would help integrate Muslim communities into the European Union.⁹⁴

A clear distinction needs to be made between what is a cultural practice and what is an actual Islamic teaching. Jorgen Nielsen, in his forward to Tariq Ramadan’s book *To Be a European Muslim*, highlights the change in the presence of Muslims in Europe. The first generation of European Muslims, those who have grown up in western Europe, are asking fundamental questions about Islam. They have discovered, first, that the cultural traditions of their parents have difficulty functioning in a modern, urban, and bureaucratic society and, second, that much of that cultural tradition is not essentially Islamic in any case. In certain instances, some would even regard particular aspects of these cultural practices as unacceptable in Islamic terms.⁹⁵ New generations of European Muslims have taken it upon themselves to take the lead and become actively involved in

institution would require a unique administrator (imam). During the period of the Ottoman Empire amongst the minimum requirements for being the imam of the Grand Blue Mosque in Istanbul was to have full knowledge of Islamic teachings, full memorization of the Qur’an, memorization of the major collections of Hadith, knowledge of *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence) in accordance with the five major schools of thought, an area of expertise in pure science, the ability to speak five different languages, and the ability to mount a horse, among other stipulations.

⁹⁴ “The Status of Imams in Europe,” European Policy Centre, July 8, 2005. <http://www.epc.eu/en/er.asp?AI=519&LV=293&PG=ER/EN/detail&TYP=ER&see=y&t=2> (accessed April 5, 2010). The report shows that currently no training is available in Belgium despite requests from the Belgian Muslim community for imams to be educated in the context of European Islam. Imams in Belgium were also less financially stable. Islam had been recognized in Belgium since 1974, but imams still had not been given state grants. This contrasted with state funding for other clergymen, which in itself was an exceptional situation compared with other EU countries.

In comparing the situation of mosques and imams to other religious groups across the EU, attitudes varied immensely in different European countries. In terms of funding for clerics, Belgium provided state grants for recognized religious groups, although imams still did not qualify for funds. Secular France, on the other hand, did not provide any money for any religious leaders. This situation was similar in the UK, where no direct subsidies were provided for vicars in the official Church of England. Germany had limited funding, for example, for chaplains in hospitals, and this was provided through a national church tax. Estimates of the number of Muslims living in Europe also varied enormously. The largest numbers were in France, where around 8% of the population is believed to be Muslim. This was followed by the Netherlands with 5.7%, Belgium with 4%, Germany with 3.7%, and the UK with 2.7%. France had established institutes for some official religions such as the Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions, but Islam was not recognized or funded. However, there were some initiatives to help with language and citizenship training. In the UK, religious training was affiliated with universities, but Islam still had limited recognition. However, there was a will in the UK to fund more Islamic research with the creation of a Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK at Cardiff University. In Germany the training of imams was recognized in cooperation with institutes and universities, similar to the situation in Sweden. In the Netherlands, each religious denomination had precise rules on the training of its own clerics and the training of imams was recognized. This was in conjunction with a compulsory citizenship course similar to the one which existed in the Flemish regions of Belgium.

⁹⁵ Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*. xii.

their societies. The European perception of this new presence, often considered to be a problem, has been assimilated into Muslim minds. Through the prism of current social difficulties in the West, modern sociological analysis, and the media, these Muslims have been colonized by the idea, the obvious fact, and the indisputable evidence, that Islam is a problem in the West and that Muslims have problems with progress, democracy, and modernity.⁹⁶

Despite acknowledging that what the British government has given to its Muslim citizens is far below the minimum required, some attempts have been made to rectify this imbalance. What really deserves praise is the significant role that Muslim citizens have played in the community by taking the lead and being proactive members of society. Another aspect to be considered is having British-born Muslims trained and educated to act as Imams and spiritual leaders to address the issues of British Muslims today.⁹⁷ In its attempt to deal with Muslim communities’ issues and concerns, a European institution (European Council for Fatwa and Research), embodying the concept of Islamic laws related to Muslim minorities, was established more than a decade ago by the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE).⁹⁸

Another vital issue is women’s roles within mosques. Their roles vary significantly according to their cultural and social surroundings. In some communities, women are very active contributors within mosques, giving lectures, organizing events, educating their fellow women, catering for youth and children, and partaking in mosque committees and decision-making bodies. There are even mosques that are designed specifically for women. These are managed and administered entirely by women, from leading prayers, to giving talks and organizing events, among other activities.⁹⁹ In other communities, women have been marginalized; events hardly cater to their needs, there is no adequate place for them to network, and they are sometimes not even allowed within the mosque’s premises.

In general, women can and should be active partners within the mosque. They need to be given more access to mosques, their presence needs to be noticed, and they should be able to contribute. Furthermore, children’s affairs need to be empowered through education and training.

In the UK, the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPACUK), Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), and the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB)—most of which do have women on their committees—have been leading a campaign to actively involve women in Britain’s mosques. The majority of British mosques are not large enough, nor purpose-built, to accommodate women’s presence. Now, with the emergence of a second and third generation of Muslims taking a leading role in running mosques, the situation is changing toward further assertiveness in utilizing women’s presence in a more productive and effective manner.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 113.

⁹⁷ Abdel-Hady, “British Muslims...A Challenge.”

⁹⁸ van Bruinessen, “Making and Unmaking Muslim Religious Authority in Western Europe.”

⁹⁹ One mosque was in the state of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

Conclusion

This is an introductory work into a vast and significant topic that needs to be fully researched and which can only be achieved through collective international teamwork. It is an extremely difficult task to give an overview of the current status of mosques, as it seems impossible to establish general statements. This is due to the fact that what can apply to one country could very well differ in another. Even within one country there are still noticeable variations. Nevertheless, there are a number of outstanding mosques that can act as a model to be followed.

In general, mosques need to be equipped with enough resources and manpower in order to function more actively within society. More crucially, there is a vital need to empower the Imams with full knowledge and awareness of their surroundings, and to provide them with the training and education needed to undertake their influential roles within society.

During the Prophet's life, women were partners in society, and particularly within the institution of the mosque. They participated in prayers, social events, and administrative and educational activities. Women even requested that they have a specific day allocated for them to meet with the Prophet. There is a need today to develop a more welcoming and adequate space for women, and to train and educate them to contribute more effectively to the mosque as partners.

Youth, as an important demographic in any society, need to have an attachment to the mosque. Likewise, mosques must accommodate and care for their needs and provide activities for them within mosque premises. Mosques can play an exceptional role in confronting extremism and terrorism by educating youth, filling their spare time with useful activities, dealing with their concerns, attending to their needs, and having their queries answered by qualified Imams.

Mosques need to attract, or at least welcome, youth and children, to make them feel at ease to participate, learn, and enjoy the environment of the mosque, and to teach them proper conduct with one another, and respect for their elders. There is no better example than the Prophet and how he would allow children to partake in activities in the mosque. His grandsons played beside him while he led prayers, and he would try not to disturb their play. On the contrary, he would prolong his prayer so that they could enjoy their play.

Finally, if mosques are to attain the same unique role they had in the past, the mosque must be treated as a unique institution.

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