



Visual Dhikr

A Visual Analysis of Mosques in Cardiff

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Abstract

The relationship between British Muslims and British mosques is a close one. Mosques have always been used as markers of the development, direction and desires of the British Muslim communities. As such, mosques have been, and continue to be, important places of academic research amongst social scientists from a variety of backgrounds, indicated by a number of studies about them in recent years (McLoughlin 1998; Ansari 2002, Brown 2008 et al). Gaining a better understanding of the sites of religious worship in the United Kingdom will result in a clearer and more nuanced understanding of the Muslims of the United Kingdom. This study hopes to add to that understanding. The question that this dissertation hopes to address is ‘what, if anything, do the architecture and design of mosques in Cardiff reveal about the Welsh Muslim community?’ Architecture and design should be understood in the widest possible sense to include decoration, layout and internal arrangement of items. It seeks to answer this question within the social science paradigm, primarily using visual methods. My work argues that mosques employ a range of techniques, summarised as ‘visual dhikr’, to express layered notions of ownership and identity.

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Introduction

The relationship between British Muslims and British mosques is a close one. Mosques have always been used as markers of the development, direction and desires of the British Muslim communities. As such, mosques have been, and continue to be, important places of academic research amongst social scientists from a variety of backgrounds, indicated by a number of studies about them in recent years (McLoughlin 1998; Ansari 2002, Brown 2008 et al). Gaining a better understanding of the sites of religious worship in the United Kingdom will result in a clearer and more nuanced understanding of the Muslims of the United Kingdom. This study hopes to add to that understanding.

The question that this dissertation hopes to address is ‘what, if anything, do the architecture and design of mosques in Cardiff reveal about the Welsh Muslim community?’ Architecture and design should be understood in the widest possible sense to include decoration, layout and internal arrangement of items. It seeks to answer this question within the social science paradigm, primarily using visual methods. My work argues that mosques employ a range of techniques, summarised as ‘visual dhikr’, to express layered notions of ownership and identity.

The dissertation is divided into four sections. The first section is a literature review that examines both previous publications on mosques as well as publications that look at Muslims in Wales and identifies the contribution the dissertation hopes to make to the field. The section concludes with background and history of the mosques included in the study and justification for choosing them.

The second section is a methodological overview. As the dissertation employs visual social science research methods (specifically that of photography), a discussion of the merits and suitability of image-based research is included as well as

justification for its use. The same section outlines my particular methodological approach in capturing the images and analysing them. Consideration of ethical concerns is also included.

The third section outlines the findings. I argue that some Muslims employ visual dhikr to articulate a sense of ownership. The concept of ownership is looked at through three lenses. The first looks at transformation, and how visual dhikr transforms space into Muslim space. The second looks at notions of belonging and argues that visual dhikr establishes both a sense of inclusion and exclusion to various Muslim communities. The final aspect of analysis looks at the notion of expression and how the exterior of mosques in particular utilise visual dhikr to communicate ideas about community, identity and presence.

The fourth section reflects upon the research process and how the study may be improved and developed further. The dissertation ends with a conclusion outlining my findings and how I believe my work may be developed in the future.

Section One - Background

i) Literature Review

There is a wealth of research and published studies on mosques; these range over a number of fields and indeed countries. My particular focus is mosques within the Welsh and British context. My dissertation seeks to examine the architecture and design of mosques visually and use it to draw conclusions about religious identity and the migration experience of Muslims. The dissertation will draw upon existing literature, some of which has looked at these issues already. The key difference however is that my approach will use visual methods as the primary research tool. I hope that this will complement existing research. Furthermore, I hope that my dissertation will build upon studies in the field of architecture that have looked at mosques visually for analysis, but have not yet taken this further to draw conclusions about the British Muslim community. I also hope to contribute to the field of the study of Islam in Wales to shed light upon mosques in Cardiff and the congregation that worships there. Very little sociological research has been conducted on Muslims in Wales, and none that looks at mosques visually to derive information.

Some mosques have received particular attention for their important role in the history and development of the British Muslim community. Ansari (2002) and Brown (2004) both examine Woking Mosque reputed to be one of the first purpose-built mosques in Britain and as such has been used as a case study by which to look at British Muslims. Another mosque which is increasingly the focus of modern studies is Abdullah Quilliam's Muslim Institute in Liverpool, which is looked at in some depth by Geaves (2010). Also worth mentioning here is Gilliat-Ray's work on a Cardiff mosque mistakenly called 'The First Registered Mosque in the UK' (2010b). All these studies look not only at a mosque, but the importance of places of worship in

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communicating notions of identity, history and belonging. The Woking Mosque, Quilliam's Mosque and Cardiff's mistaken mosque all have value and meaning beyond simply local places of worship and in some cases are used by British Muslims today in innovative and meaningful ways of expressing their own vision of Islam, religiosity and indeed citizenship.

An early and valuable contribution is Barton's monograph 'The Bengali Muslims of Bradford; A Study of their Observance of Islam with Special Reference to the Function of the Mosque and the Work of the Imam' (1986). Barton's extensive study covers many aspects of the mosque's day-to-day running, its congregation, the Imam and its religious vision. As such, it is a useful piece of source material and it offers both detailed thick description alongside rigorous theoretical conclusions.

A number of journal articles by social scientists have successfully examined the role of the mosque in identity formation, not just of Muslims but of non-Muslims as well. Gale is one such leading researcher. He has published a number of papers looking at the practicalities of mosque building (planning permission, local councils, parking disputes) but also how these issues relate to larger trends within the Muslim community and British society as a whole. His publications are particularly useful in examining how architectural decisions made by mosque planning committees rarely occur in a vacuum and were often the result of various tensions between the local council, the Muslim congregation and the local non-Muslim community (Gale and Naylor 2003; Gale 2004; Gale 2005; Gale 2007). A precursor to Gale's research is an unpublished thesis by Grudzinska (1982) entitled 'Planning for the Muslim faith: a study of the provision of mosques in the City of Birmingham'. It is an early record of the process of establishing a number of mosques in Birmingham. The thesis is valuable especially in conjunction with Gale's work. McLoughlin also looked at the

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mosque as part of long-term study in Bradford. Several journal articles published by McLoughlin look at the way in which Muslim sacred space is being used, often challenging pre-conceived notions of public/private spheres (McLoughlin 1998; McLoughlin 2005). Particularly prominent in his writing is the idea of the 'community mosque', wherein the mosque takes on roles and responsibilities beyond simply being a place of worship. This idea helped sharpen my own theories regarding the use of design and decoration in mosques included in this study.

A handful of publications have been produced by non-academic organisations. Some have been produced by Muslim groups such as 'The Mosque within a Muslim community' (Alavi 2004) produced by the UK Islamic Mission; the Muslim Council of Britain's 'Voices from the Minaret' (2006) and the Muslim Parliament's 'The role of the Mosque in Britain' (Maqsood 2005). These publications vary in their academic reliability however they are useful additions in understanding mosques. They often reveal a great deal about the aspirations and ideals of the Muslim organisations that produced them and how they locate the mosque within this vision.

Other organisations that have contributed towards the understanding of mosques include the Charity Commission which published a survey of mosques that provides recent and reliable quantitative information (although limited somewhat in scope referring only to mosques registered as charities) (Coleman 2009). Think-tanks that lobby to influence public and political opinion have also produced publications on mosques, such as the Quilliam Foundations's 'Mosques Made in Britain' (Dyke 2009). Research by think-tanks however is often produced without academic and methodological rigour and requires a critical eye in its examination.

Several single-author books published trace the history of Muslim community over large periods of time. Authors of such books include Ansari (2004), Gilliat-Ray

(2010a), Matar (1998) and Halliday (2010). The books are of considerable value in locating the development of the Muslim community and they often comment upon the location, usage, quantity and prominence of mosques across history. Their value lies in being able to locate the story of a particular mosque amongst the wider developments of the Muslim community in Britain.

A number of academic studies look at the mosque in relation to 'space', particularly the idea of sacred and 'Muslim space'. Thus Allievi's 'Mosque Controversies in Europe' tackles this, and many other ideas, in the edited book (2009). Dafydd Jones looks at 'discourses of absence' and how the mosque can be a statement of Muslim presence and its absence can alternatively compound a sense of isolation felt amongst some Muslims in rural areas (2010). Metcalf particularly focuses on 'Making Muslim Space' (1996), as does Ryan and Naylor's journal article (2002). All authors variably look at the spiritual dimensions of space as well as the political dimensions and very consciously discuss the impact of location in the worship of Muslims. Metcalf's work was particularly useful for me in formulating my own ideas about mosque design and architecture, particularly in reference to the notion of *dhikr*.

Although my dissertation is in the field of social sciences, literature in the field of architecture proved useful in gaining a deeper understanding of mosques. These include publications aimed at the general public such as Davies' work on mosque architecture (1982) and Gailani's impressive visual directory of mosques in London (2000). Beyond these, there are a number of academic studies on Islamic religious architecture such as Erkocu's (2009) work that looks at the construction of the mosque and its political and social implications. Serageldin and Steel look at the design of contemporary mosques (1996) and offer useful analysis of key features,

although very little emphasis is put upon its social implications. Shahrman goes one step further and examines architecture and regional variations of mosques (1998) although a social scientist would be frustrated by the lack of analysis upon the reasons for regional variations and what this tells us about the mosques' worshippers and congregation. Aazam's unpublished thesis offers the reader an interesting analysis of the 'spatial syntax' of a mosque (2008) and successfully links to varying orthopraxies of Islam. Frishman (1994) and Turner (1981) offer reflections upon mosque architecture and the way it has changed across a time.

My dissertation also locates itself amidst research that looks at Islam and Muslim in Wales, and hopes to reveal information not just about mosques but also the Welsh Muslim community. The earliest work that looked at Muslims in Wales did so through the lens of race and ethnicity rather than religion. These studies looked at a variety of ethnicities, some of whom were not traditionally known to be Muslim (Collins 1951; Collins 1957). Many were specifically interested in 'docks' area of Cardiff with its ethnic clustering and heterogeneous population (Little 1942a; Little 1942b). The 'docks' in Cardiff, often referred to as Tiger Bay, has been re-examined in a number of recent books. These include Aithie's 'The Burning Ashes of Times: from Steamer Point to Tiger Bay' (2005) and Kliet's work on Somali migration to Cardiff (2004). The South Wales Islamic Centre is located in the Cardiff 'docks' area, and indeed has a long lineage in the history of Muslims in Cardiff.

There is also a significant amount of research on the racial tensions in South Wales, particularly Cardiff, in the early part of the twentieth century (Sherwood 1988; Evans 1980; Evans 1985). It is perhaps revealing that these studies took place during the eighties, a time noted for its racial tensions.

More recently, extensive studies have been produced on notable religious leaders from pre-WW2, such as Abdullah al-Hakimi, whose influence is arguably still manifesting itself in Cardiff today (Lawless 1994). This is perhaps one of the earliest studies to use religion as the primary lens of analysis. One social scientist who studied Muslims in Wales is Dr Sophie Gilliat-Ray. Her publications include various journals looking at the migration experiences of Somali and Yemeni elders in Cardiff (2010c) and the already mentioned 'first UK mosque' in Cardiff (2010b). Paul Chambers conducted an extensive and important study on religion in Wales, based upon 40 qualitative interviews with a variety of religious leaders in Wales. He has produced a number of articles that talk of religion in Wales, secularism, and naturally, the Muslim presence (Chambers 2006; Chambers 2005). His methodological understanding and consideration of Islam in Wales is insightful. However, his research is lacking in some respects due to there being no consideration of historical sources to consolidate oral histories of migration experiences in Wales.

Dafydd Jones published a study that looked at Islam in rural west Wales (Dafydd Jones 2010) that is not only valuable in understanding mosques but also Welsh Muslims. He has opened the field for further study and provided unique and shrewd insights for academics to build upon, particularly for those interested in Muslims in Wales. Grahame Davies has also recently published a book that examines the literary relationship between Islam and Wales (Davies 2011). His extensive and very comprehensive examination of Welsh literature (most of which is in the Welsh language) is a helpful addition to understanding conceptions of Islam and Muslims by Welsh authors, poets and writers for almost a millennium. Although his book is not sociological, it is ideal for use in triangulating understandings of Muslims in Wales in relation to migration and Muslim presence.

There are also a number of public policy research publications (Hasen and Hempel-Jorgensen 2001) that mention Islam in Wales, although in a limited way. Finally, there is an unpublished Master's thesis on Muslims in Aberystwyth of which I am yet to obtain a copy (Latifa 1999).

ii) Background to Mosques

There are twelve mosques within Cardiff, and they are as diverse and varied as the Muslim community that worships there. I have chosen to restrict my study to only three mosques. They are similar in size but are also different from each other in many ways and so offer fertile ground for analysis and comparative study.

Due to the lack of previous research on mosques in Wales, I have compiled information on those included in the study from a variety of sources. These range from publications by the mosque (websites, leaflets and so on), informal discussions with the mosque committee members (not officially part of the fieldwork) and also general information gleaned from other indirect sources such as local record office planning documents.

Dar ul-Isra Muslim Educational and Welfare Centre

Dar ul-Isra was established 1989 (Dar ul-Isra website) by postgraduate Muslim students. The building is a former parish hall, established in 1910 for St Andrew's and St Teilo's Church. The building also has a Scout's Hall attached to the back, established several years after the Parish hall. Both are now in the possession of the Muslim community. The Scout's Hall is still architecturally unchanged, and indeed used as a Scout's Hall for the 1st Cathays al-Huda Muslim Scout Group. The main Parish hall however, after several years of use with only superficial changes,

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was renovated in between 2008 and 2010. It is worth noting that the Parish hall was not distinctly Christian in appearance, or built in any aesthetically Christian fashion. Rather it was primarily a functional building with a large hall and kitchen. The renovation work saw the creation of two new floors, major extensions around the building, and distinct architectural changes made. The mosque currently consists of two large halls and a third floor with a number of small rooms. It is one of a few mosques in Cardiff that provides space for female worshippers.

Dar ul-Isra is perhaps distinct from other mosques in Cardiff as it was established by a committee of individuals with diverse ethnic backgrounds – predominantly Arab and South Asian Muslims. Furthermore, the founding committee consisted of educated students, sufficiently fluent in the English language to pursue postgraduate studies in the UK. This is in contrast to the other mosques included in the study. Perhaps as a consequence of the committee's make-up, English is used as the primary language of the Friday sermon and of general communication. This has attracted an equally diverse congregation, consisting of a large number of second or third generation British-born Muslims and a distinctly middle-class professional congregation. The mosque is located very close to Cardiff University and thus also attracts a number of students. Dar ul-Isra will be hosting a newly established Muslim Chaplaincy for Cardiff University and is beginning to formalise its relationship with the university in official terms.

Dar ul-Isra has hosted a number of 'outreach' events in the past, such as a reopening ceremony after its renovations attended by the Lord Mayor of Cardiff and a mosque open day that attracted a number of faith leaders from other traditions. Dar ul-Isra's attitude to engagement is perhaps also reflected in it successfully attracting a substantial amount of investment from the Welsh Assembly for its renovation work.

Shah Jalal Mosque

Shah Jalal Mosque is located in a busy and central commercial district of Cardiff. It is a converted chapel. The chapel, originally named the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, was built in 1899. The exact date of purchase of the chapel by the Muslim community is unknown however it was opened as a mosque in 1988. A number of substantial changes were made to the building both internally and externally although the dominant Victorian chapel character of the building still remains. The mosque has three floors. The large basement is used for religious education for children (as it was during its life as a chapel, as the original plans call the basement 'school room'), the ground floor is the location of the primary prayers and the top floor is used as an overflow room.

The building was purchased and is run by the Bangladeshi Muslim community. Bengali (Sylheti dialect) is the primary language of communication of the mosque and indeed the Imams are trained and educated in Bangladesh. The congregation likewise generally consists of Bangladeshi Muslims from the local area. However, as it is located in a central district of Cardiff and close to both the city centre and a busy commercial street, the mosque also attracts a number of Muslims from other ethnicities and backgrounds who find the mosque convenient for their worship. The committee highlight they have space for women, and open parts of the mosque for women worshippers during special events.

Evidence of the Bangladeshi origins of the mosque is clear in the name. Shah Jalal is the travelling Sufi mystic credited with bringing Islam to the Bengal region of India in the 13th century.

South Wales Islamic Centre (SWIC)

The South Wales Islamic Centre has a long-established lineage in Cardiff, and has undergone several incarnations. Its history can be traced to Abdullah al-Hakimi, a noted leader amongst the seafaring Muslim community in Cardiff, Liverpool and South Shields (Gilliat-Ray 2010c). It began life as a number of terraced houses on Peel Street, and after suffering a bomb attack during World War 2, it was rebuilt and reopened in 1947 under the guidance of Abdullah al-Hakimi's deputy Hasan Ismail. This mosque remained much as it was for the better part of the twentieth century; however it transferred ownership in the eighties from Hasan Ismail's deputy, the late Shaykh Saeed Ismail, to new owners. In 1984, a new mosque was established in Alice Street. Although the mosque is not on the same geographic location as Peel Street, it still runs in the same tradition as previous mosques, being led by a Yemeni *Shafi'i* Imam and with a strong Sufi tradition.

The current mosque is one of two purpose-built mosques in Cardiff (the other being a rebuilt mosque in the same location as the original Peel Street mosque, less than two hundred metres away). Its architecture, design and layout are strongly reminiscent of mosque architecture in Middle-Eastern countries and include a dome and minaret that are not functional, but merely aesthetic. It has an adjoining community centre built nearby that is used as an overflow room as well as for youth and community activities. The location of the mosque is in the Cardiff 'docks', which has a very high proportion of Muslims and a historic Yemeni and Somali community that established themselves in Wales during Cardiff's height as a port city. The area suffers from high levels of unemployment and poverty. The SWIC has space for women, and the new Imam of the mosque is consciously trying to increase women's participation within the Islamic centre. In the past, the Friday sermon was generally

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(though not always) given in Arabic, however the new Imam delivers his sermon in English regularly. This, coupled with his Sufi background, has begun attracting Muslims from other parts of Cardiff to the mosque.

Choice of Mosques

I chose the three mosques as I believe they offered suitably fertile ground for analysis. As one mosque is a community hall with renovations, the second is a converted chapel and the third is a purpose built mosque, I felt they offered examples of the dominant architectural types of mosques in Britain today. A prominent type of mosque I have not included is the 'house-mosque', smaller mosques which are based in converted homes. Although it may have been useful to also include an example of a 'house-mosque' in the project, it would have been impossible to offer a suitably detailed analysis of four mosques.

The mosques also offer three distinct theological and ethnic backgrounds. Shah Jalal practices a popular form of Islam from Bangladesh heavily influenced by Sufism. Dar ul-Isra offers a diverse ethnic mix and thus attracts a variety of theological backgrounds but its roots are reformist, from both Arab and South Asian reform movements (such as *Ikhwaan al-Muslimoon* and *Jamaat al-Islamiyya*). The South Wales Islamic Centre is colloquially referred to as 'the Yemeni Mosque' which indicates its Yemeni roots and congregation. The Imams of the mosque have all been educated in Yemen, are from a broadly Sufi background and follow the Shafi' madhaab. This theological and ethnic diversity between the three mosques helped highlight issues of religious identity and the migration process and aided the analysis section of the dissertation.

Section Two - Methodology

Qualitative social scientists have a large array of methods with which to research and explore social phenomena. In considering the methodologies and approaches available to examine the architecture of mosques in Cardiff, it is evident that traditional tools may not be appropriate. Although it is possible to use focus groups, interviews and participant observation as methods to examine mosque architecture and what it can tell us about religious identity and migration, they may not be the most beneficial method. I have opted instead to use visual methods. In this section I will outline the strengths of visual methods as well as potential weaknesses, particularly in regard to research about Muslims. I will also clarify my overarching approach to the research and analysis.

i) Visual Methods

In 1979, Becker wrote that ‘visual social sciences isn’t something brand new... but it might as well be’ (Becker 1979, 7). Becker’s statement reflects the tone of contemporary works on visual social sciences, which are conscious that image-based research is yet to gain acceptance amongst many. Ball and Smith argue that when images are used in works of sociology and anthropology they are ‘underanalyzed, generally serving as little more than illustrative devices’ (1992, 12). Likewise Prosser believes that image-based research is ‘undervalued and under applied by the orthodox research community’ (1998, 97). With regard to the use of images in research with Muslims, particularly mosques, there are very few sociological precedents. There are a number of published works aimed at the general population that use photography heavily in discussing and presenting the Muslim community. Gailani (2000) for example, published a directory titled the ‘Mosques of

London' and uses images copiously alongside descriptions and histories of London's mosques. However, the images are illustrations, and not analysed or looked at to gain a deeper understanding of the mosque or the Muslim community of London. Thus my research is in many ways synthesising a variety of approaches to gain new understandings.

There are a number of arguments as to why visual research methods are the most appropriate tool for analysing mosques. They can be grouped under three general themes. The first relates to the primacy of visual media in contemporary society and the exciting opportunities for gaining deep insight and understanding by looking at the visual world. The second relates to the ability of visual methods to make the familiar unfamiliar. I term this the visual distance of images. The visual distance allows the researcher to look at images and gain information that would have been either impossible or difficult without capturing the information using photography. The final strand of my argument for choosing visual methods relates to their ability to create a unique form of space for research participants to articulate their voices. I use voices for lack of a better word and to relate the concept to pre-existing literature on participant voices. I argue that the design and decoration of mosques are valuable and important statements made by Muslims and thus it is as important to give them the same prominence and value as statements that might be made in an interview or focus group.

The Primacy of the Visual

The visual dominates human interaction in two ways. In one sense, 'visual media and their messages have come to dominate mass communications in contemporary society' (Grady 2004, 18). In another, more basic sense, humans are

strongly visual creatures and we rely upon our eyesight perhaps more than any other sense. Visual methods are sometimes contrasted with textual, but even here the visual takes primacy as font, italics and underlining along with a variety of other methods are used to convey meaning and information beyond the textual content. Given this stress upon the visual in human experience, it is surprising that image-based social science is still struggling to gain legitimacy. I believe that other social science methods (the qualitative interview, focus groups and so on) only indirectly tap into the very deep and meaning-laden visual world. This view is reflected by Grady who believes the visual is a 'vein of data that richly compliments the types of information social scientists usually mine' and a 'unique form of data that stores complexly layered meanings in a format that is immediately retrievable' (Grady 2004, 18). By using visual methods to research mosques in Cardiff I will be opening up the visual religious experience of Muslim worshippers. The architectural design of the mosque, the positioning of sacred objects, even the colours chosen for decoration, all indicate information about the congregation of the mosque. Using photography to 'capture' this information for analysis allows me to directly interact with the visual religious world of the mosque's Muslim worshippers, rather than relying upon them articulating their experience of it (which itself is valuable and valid data but of a very different nature). This desire to scope the visual experience of worshippers is similar to Richter's who believes 'photography can enable research to take greater account of the visual dimensions of local churches' (2011, 207). The value of visual information and the visual experience of individuals is one of the principles upon which image-based research rests.

Visual Distance

Social scientists often talk about entering and leaving the 'field'. Although one must be careful not to oversimplify it, the field provides a useful term to describe the period in which we are in contact and engaged directly with the object of research. Analysis begins before one enters the field and continues after one leaves. Many social science research techniques aim at 'capturing' the field in some way, either through notes, interview transcripts or in this case the photograph, to preserve it for later analysis. Almost all social scientists stress that listening to an interview recording more than once is vital to fully appreciating the content and to derive the most valuable analysis. In the same way, visual methods allow one to capture information for later analysis and deriving deeper meanings after leaving the field. Without the use of a camera, a researcher would usually need to rely upon their memory or field notes for information on spatial arrangements and dimensions, colours and the plethora of other layers of information encoded in the visual. This naturally limits the depth of analysis possible. Preserving information (admittedly in partial form and somewhat divorced of the full context) via a photograph allows the researcher to delve into and access information otherwise unavailable. Gibson discusses the 'ecological properties' of an image, usually hidden to conscious human perception (1979). For a social scientist this is a valuable way of dissecting and analysing the image. Another phrase used by Gibson is the 'ambient array' which refers to the basic visual information of shapes, colours, intensity of light, shadows and so on that are used to inform the production of meaningful images. This is only one aspect of the information that can be derived from photographs. There is also the ability to probe deeper into the creation of assumptions. In a similar fashion, photographs of mosques allowed me to reflect upon the assumptions I made and followed while in the 'field' with the benefit of distance. Essentially, the visual

distance that the photograph and visual methods allow gives me the opportunity to make the familiar unfamiliar thereby opening new perspectives for analysis. Prosser offers a useful summary of the strength of visual methods in this regard: -

‘...through our use of photographs we can discover and demonstrate relationships that may be subtle or easily overlooked. We can communicate the feelings or suggestion the emotion imparted by activities, environments, and interactions. And we can provide a degree of tangible detail, a sense of being there and way of knowing that may not readily translate into other symbolic modes of communication’ (1998, 116)

Creating Space

Concerns about power distribution and the relationship between researcher and the researched have been a prime concern of social scientists, particularly in light of the colonial overtones of early anthropological work (Ball and Smith 1992, 7). Social scientists thus stress the importance of creating space for the voices of the researched rather than speaking for the researched. The latter can often disempower the research participants by undermining their own voices. Rather, the approach of creating space for the researched to articulate their ideas has been adopted as being more successful. Visual research replicates the same process, creating space for the visual information of the researched. I believe that photography can convey the research participants’ views and ideas in a very clear and succinct way, with perhaps less interference or distortion from the researcher than in textual methods. Providing adequate context to the photograph is as vital as the contextualisation of an interview or focus group statement. However the data gleaned from a photograph even without analysis is

much greater than what is communicated in an extract from a transcript. Again, this speaks of the depth and wealth of visual information. I believe that the mosques I will be photographing as part of the fieldwork are constructed and inhabited spaces and thus are full of statements about the Muslim congregation that worship there. Those statements may be through design, such as the carpet upon which the congregation pray. The statements may also be unintentional, such as where the congregation place their shoes before worship. In each case however, statements are being made about the sacred, about religious authority and about identity.

Although I feel that visual methods are the most appropriate tool to answer my research question, some consideration of the criticisms of visual methods is needed; as well as an awareness of the limitations and drawbacks of using image-based research. The literature on visual methods outlines three general strands of critique; I believe that they fall into three broad categories. The first is the issue of perspective; does photography distort 'reality' to such an extent that it is no longer reliable? Is there an unacceptable discontinuation between the context of the photograph and the content? The second issue relates to perceptions of photography; the camera has strong colonial overtones and has connotations of surveillance and power – is this then an appropriate method? The final issue relates to pragmatics such as consideration of the cost of material, dissemination, maintaining the anonymity of participants and so on.

Perspectives

Prosser highlights the argument that 'the act of image making (in photographic and filmic terms of aiming, framing, manipulating light and camera angle etc.) unacceptably alters the object in the frame and the objective content and subjective meaning of the image' (1998, 98) thus eliminating photography as a valid research

tool. Pink also believes 'many social scientists resisted the use of the visual in ethnography claiming that as a data collection method it was too subjective, unrepresentative and unsystematic' (Pink 2001, 7). The thrust of these claims is that photography is a distorted perspective of reality. Underlying these criticisms is the belief that there is an objective reality that can be captured and recorded in such a way as to recreate the original. The criticism I believe is faulty on two levels. At one level, the presumption of an objective reality is not universally supported amongst social scientists. Positivist approaches have been challenged in recent decades by postmodern approaches (Riley 1974, Ely 1991, Miller and Dingwall 1997). Postmodernists would argue that photography captures a valid, although unique, perspective. It is one of many realities. The second fault lies in singling out photographic methods as being subject to the process of altering 'reality'. What can be said of photography and its subjectivity can be said of almost all other qualitative research methods. As such, I believe that as long as the researcher explicitly states their methodology and follows the protocols of other research methods, photography can act as a valid, reliable and useful investigative approach.

Perception

A second critique of photographic methods is that of perception. I believe this criticism is a much more genuine concern. It is also made more pertinent considering my research is within the Muslim community. The camera is not a meaningless tool; many presumptions are made about the photographer and the purpose of photography. Additionally, the simple act of taking a photograph is an exercise of power of the photographer over the subjects (Prosser 1998, 119). Photography, from its inception, has been associated with surveillance (Knowles and Sweetman 2004, 12). In

contemporary society, Muslims have often been the subject of surveillance tactics by authorities (Gallagher 2011; BBC News 2010). Thus a researcher conspicuously taking photographs of mosques and Muslims may indeed be challenged and unwelcome by some of those present – even if prior permission was sought by mosque management. Additionally the camera, and particularly the photograph, has cultural connotations strongly reminiscent of colonial anthropology. The earliest use of photography in the social sciences in fact stems from anthropologists who used photographs to document the physical characteristics of ‘races’ encountered in the former British colonies (Ball and Smith 1992, 7). These overtones of colonialism and surveillance, both exertions of power, may have a number of problematic repercussions in the field. They cannot be predicted, but being conscious of them will help minimise any possible issues.

Pragmatics

Pragmatic concerns about visual methods have also been raised in the literature. Good photography equipment, though increasingly affordable, is still more expensive than the general tools of social science. Dissemination of work laden with images is difficult, especially if colour is of importance (most journals are still printed in black and white, and producing full colour books involves a high cost, although the internet has reduced these burdens to some extent). The possibility of technology going wrong in the field is always present, and the more reliant one is upon the technology, the more potentially catastrophic a technical error can be. These are all noteworthy issues, and certainly stress the importance of planning, and being competent in other social science methods. That said however, they are not

considerable enough to dissuade use of the technique considering its potential benefit to the field of social science.

ii) Research Plan

In presenting my plan, I hope ‘others may gain insight into how the study was conducted and more importantly, judge its worth’ (Prosser 1998, 117). Jackson advises that ‘it is impossible to do serious social documentation with a camera without some informing theory: there are too many chances for selection, options for inclusion or exclusion, too many choices to be made’ (Jackson in Becker 1981). The sheer wealth of information that can be captured by a camera means that even subconsciously I was making decisions about what to include and what to exclude. Thus explicitly stating what informed my decisions will allow others to gain insight into my methodology and rationale in using some photos and leaving others. I believe the most suitable approach for this project is to examine issues from a semiological perspective. This means treating everything within the mosque as being value-laden and a statement, a sign, regarding a variety of issues including religious identity and migration. By adopting this approach, I chose to capture aspects of mosques that I believed would reveal the most information about religious identity and the migration. Thus this includes the exterior and interior of mosques. I chose to focus on signage, the intersections between different parts of the mosque, choice of decoration and adornment and the prayer niche for the Imam. The final choice of photographs used in the dissertation was ultimately based upon their conceptual and analytical value.

Most image-based researchers encourage ‘mapping the physical surround’ (Prosser 1998, 121) or a ‘vicinity walk’ (Richter 2011, 209) prior to photography to familiarise the researcher with the area, to provide opportunities for the researcher to

meet any community members and to allow the researcher to start framing areas of interest for a later photography session. Although I see the benefit of such a 'vicinity walk' I chose not to carry out the process. The first reason is that I am already familiar with the geography and internal layout of the fieldwork sites. The second is that I feared a vicinity walk without a camera may mean I lost golden opportunities for capturing aspects of the mosque that struck me as important there and then.

I visited each mosque twice. The first visit gave me the majority of my fieldwork pictures and the second allowed me to recapture photographs that may have gone awry on the first opportunity and to take more photographs of areas of interest. I visited the same time on each day, after the midday prayers. At each visit I joined the congregation for the prayer, waited for a small period of time for the mosque to empty and then took the photographs. I began with the interior followed by the exterior. The choice of timing is primarily a consideration for the mosque management committees who indicated that it was most suitable time. In the summer months, mosques are closed after dawn prayers and reopened for the midday prayers and are kept open until the final evening prayer. Thus after the midday prayer the mosque would be already open and I would not be a burden upon the management committee. The second reason for taking photographs after midday prayers was due to the mosques' relative emptiness. The congregation present in a mosque is likely to increase after the end of the working day, and all three mosques hold Quran classes for young children in the evenings. Although a presence in the mosque would be valuable in showing how the mosque is used; there are a number of ethical and practical reasons that would unnecessarily cause problems. Richter discusses the same question in regard to churches, and concludes that it is 'least disruptive to arrange to photograph church interiors when they are unoccupied' (Richter 2011, 213), believing that what is missed

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in the absence of a human presence can be ascertained through other methods, such as participant observation and interviews. Taking photography after midday prayers also provided consistent lighting for the photographs.

The photographic equipment I used was minimal. The first was an advanced professional digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) camera which I borrowed from family. I also purchased a tripod for use which was valuable in positioning the camera. I felt that my presence in the mosque with a professional camera and tripod would also present a clear image to the congregation about my purposes and intentions. The camera and tripod were not seen as incidental, as a smaller digital camera may be, and it was, I hope, clear that my intention was to photograph the mosque.

There are several layers of 'access' through which I needed to negotiate. The first level of access was the formal gatekeepers of the mosque; the mosque committee. This usually meant a formal approach and request, either by phone or in person. The second level of access was during the fieldwork itself. My presence in the mosque and photographic activity at times attracted curiosity and questions. I was thus required to explain myself and the research. In my experience of the fieldwork, I found that the worshippers within the mosque were generally warm and receptive to the photography and not at all suspicious at my activities. I was conscious however that when photographing the mosque exterior, usually from a distance (across the road, or in one case, from inside my car), there was much more concern and agitation about my activities by those entering the mosque.

iii) Ethical Considerations

The most prominent ethical and legal concern with regard to using visual-methods is the issue of consent. The British legal system allows photography of adults

and children when in the public sphere with no prior consent needed (Richer 2011, 209). However, whether this is ethical research is open to debate. More importantly for this research project, consent is required to take a photograph of an individual in a private building such as a mosque. The issue of consent should also be balanced with awareness that provision of anonymity is at times impossible when taking a photograph. I have designed consent forms and kept them on my person during fieldwork to ensure I was prepared for this situation. I found however that verbal consent was freely given by those present, but there was greater reluctance to sign the consent forms. There is perhaps greater fear in giving away ones name and signature than being included in a photograph. The literature I examined did not mention this issue, so as yet I am unsure whether it is peculiar to the Muslim community I researched or something found more generally across the board.

A second issue of equal importance is consideration of 'ownership' of the photographs taken. While negotiating access with the mosque committee I specified that I would retain ownership of the photographs and may use them in a variety of ways. My intention was to primarily use them for the research project but with the possibility of extending beyond it. I felt it important to clarify this in advance.

Some works of social science discuss 'covert photography' as a method of gaining information undisturbed by the camera (Prosser 1998, 120). In some cases, this means not informing the subjects of the photos, in others, it means gaining permission for use after the photo was taken. I have no intention of engaging in covert photography. Having already discussed the connotations of surveillance associated with a camera, I am keen to avoid anything that may lose the trust of research participants and gatekeepers and covert photography is certainly something that may increase levels of distrust and hinder further research.

The researcher 'benefiting' from the research process with no tangible benefits for the research participants is seen as a highly unfavorable situation; especially as photography has much greater associations with exploitation (Pink 2001, 43). The most obvious way to 'give something back' was to provide the mosques a copy of my photography (with the exception of those including the presence of other individuals within the photograph). I provided the images on a CD and thus it was an inexpensive yet genuinely valuable gift to the mosque management committee. This partly influenced my choice of using a professional DSLR camera. Pictures taken on a standard digital camera would be easily obtainable, whereas pictures taken on a DSLR camera are harder to obtain and have value in the production of publicity material for the mosque. Additionally, my project involved some study of the history of the mosques. I also provided this information to the mosque management committee (much of which I obtained from the local records office). I hope that by doing this the research project is genuinely useful not only to me but also to those who participated in the project.

I believe it is important to consider also the ethical positions of the research participants during the fieldwork process. Islam has a strong theme of aniconism and some Muslims consider the process of photography as forbidden under Islamic teachings as akin to the creation of idols. Some Muslims may simply object to having their photograph taken, whereas others may find the process of taking photographs within a mosque as offensive to their religious sensibilities. Although no Muslims objected to my photography during the research process, I felt it was important to be conscious of it prior to entering the field.

iv) Analysis

The process of analysing the data derived from fieldwork is constant, it begins to some degree before the data (reference to 'pre-research') collection begins and certainly occurs during it. For the purposes of a research plan it is usually indicated as a separate and distinct part of the research process. The comparative lack of visual method studies compared to traditional methods meant that there were few precedents for me to follow and methodological choices were limited. The same can be said for analytical approaches. There is a degree of innovation and inventiveness required.

The primary theoretical approach I have taken for analysis is that of semiology. From a range of theoretical approaches in use by visual social scientists, it is perhaps the most qualitative approach. Rose describes that the basis of semiology is the sign, or to phrase it differently, the 'unit of meaning' (Rose 2001, 74). A sign can be anything, as long as it conveys some meaning. By adopting this approach, I will be looking at mosques and their architecture and understanding them as being statements or signs which are linked to wider systems of meanings; in this case culture and specifically religious and ethnic identity. Bal and Bryson believe that 'human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs' (1991, 174). As my research question is focused upon human culture by asking about religious identity and migration, semiology is an ideal approach to analysing the visual material. One significant drawback of it however is both its complicated and varying terminology along with a lack of consistency in its methodological use (Seale 1998). This however can also be viewed as an advantage; semiology is flexible and lends itself to innovative use. Despite its earliest and most significant uses being within the field of analysing advertising communication (Rose 2001, 70-71); I feel it can be adapted with great potential in the study of religion.

I began analysis once I had collected the photographs needed. I first divided them by content (rather than by mosque). Categories which primarily described the main focus of the photograph were used. Example code included 'calligraphy', 'signage', and 'decoration'. Having devised descriptive labels of analysis, I labeled them according to what I understood to be prominent 'signs' or 'units of meaning' within them. Thus images of the Kaaba were symbolic of 'Makkah', 'unity', the importance of the 'leader' and even the 'Prophet Muhammad' himself. I would add these as code to the image. Once this second stage of analysis was completed, I built upon the general labels with greater depth. In a single photograph I identified a specific sign and analysed it according to semiological principles. At each of these three stages, I reduced the number of images being looked at. This gave me a final selection of photographs that could be successfully analysed within the dissertation under a single thematic heading.

I chose not to combine visual methods with other methods, despite there being great value and benefit in doing so. I am conscious that presenting the photographs to a focus group for example could yield very layered and meaningful data on religious identity and experience. I have chosen not to do this primarily due to the size and scope of the project which would make a visual analysis combined with a textual analysis very difficult. However using visual methods alongside traditional qualitative methods is certainly a promising approach

Section Three - Analysis

i) Visual Dhikr and Outline of Arguments

Visual dhikr is a term used by Ruh al-Alam, a British Muslim artist, to describe a collection of his works. I felt that it was a malleable term that could be employed in the context of my dissertation. Dhikr itself is a word used in the Quran, literally meaning ‘remembrance’ and usually associated with divine meditation and reflection. It is however, even in its linguistic roots, used to refer to the Quran itself, knowledge, memory and a variety of religious practices (Wehr 1980). Visual dhikr seems appropriate to me in describing the focus of my research, particularly as it resonates with Werbner’s work ‘‘Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah: Zikr and the Sacralizing of Space among British Muslims’ in which she describes how British Muslims used ‘zikr’ (more commonly spelt dhikr) to create Muslim space, express notions of ownership and to articulate a clear and confident presence (Werbner 1996).

Welsh Muslims in designing and decorating their mosques employed a variety of visual symbols that I argue are used to express notions of ownership. Much like Werbner’s Sufi Muslims who used dhikr to sacralise space, Muslims have used visual dhikr to recreate space according to their needs. I conclude that visual dhikr is essentially about ownership and creating a sense of belonging for the Muslim worshippers within them. The creation of this space however is subject to a variety of internal and external influences; these range from the heterogeneous and fluid identity of Welsh Muslims (both in terms of their theological and ethnic constitution) to the politics of not only multiculturalism, but language and nationhood (especially prominent within the devolved Welsh context). I explore these issues by looking at three broad concepts. I first look at how Muslims use visual dhikr to transform space.

This process may also be described as ‘Islamification’, however I feel that this is a loaded word and thus avoiding it would be better. The second section examines how visual dhikr is employed to give Muslims a sense of belonging. This section highlights the effect that the migration experience of Muslims has upon mosques. A final section looks at expression and identity. This section focuses on the outward face of the mosques, and how visual dhikr is used a mode of communication by Muslims to wider society, and how Muslim identity is expressed within these contexts. All three sections however, I believe, develop the argument that visual dhikr is primarily about ownership and belonging.

ii) Transformation (Sacralisation)

Perhaps the most obvious form of visual dhikr is calligraphy. Calligraphy has traditionally been used to decorate mosques, partly due to Islam’s general prohibition towards depictions of living creatures. As such, various Quranic verses, sayings of the Prophet and key Islamic words are used to decorate mosques in their original Arabic script in often very impressive and complex designs. Mosques in Cardiff were no exception. Calligraphy ranged from framed artworks to mosaics on the walls. An examination of the role and function of this calligraphy has led to me believe that they are part of a process of transformation of space. The space is made into Muslim space and made to possess meaning and symbolic purpose.

We can observe calligraphy used prominently in two of the three mosques under study. Shah Jalal and the South Wales Islamic Centre both use it in various contexts and there are few walls within the two mosques that do not have some form of calligraphy upon them. Dar ul-Isra is an exception, and the reasons for its striking difference with the other two mosques will be examined further on. The prayer niche

used by the Imam in the South Wales Islamic Centre (Image 1) was copiously decorated with calligraphy, most prominently with a Quranic verse written on the wall but also with several smaller tiles and calligraphic works. The verse is from the Chapter of the Cow, verse 144 and details the command given by God to pray in the direction of the Kaaba. Images 4, 5 and 6 show various Quranic verses in traditional calligraphy on the walls, this time in the overflow room adjoining the main mosque. Image 3 shows a picture of the door to the Kaaba, but above it several smaller frames containing the 99 names of God. Shah Jalal also has a richly decorated prayer niche for the Imam (Image 7), it displays prominently the words Allah and Muhammad along with the declaration of faith “there is none worthy of worship except God”. Image 8 shows a wall in the main prayer room; in a similar vein to the South Wales Islamic Centre, it includes a list of the 99 names of God.

Calligraphy is used transform space in a number of ways. Its prominence emphasises the centrality of Islam, the Quran and God within that space. The calligraphy essentially acts as a way of recreating the space as a new arena. We can use Dafydd Jones’ theory that mosques in West Wales are ‘subaltern counter-publics’ and build upon it to some extent. Although none of three mosques included in the research can be described as subaltern in the same way as the mosques in West Wales (all three mosques present a clearly Islamic public image, something which will be examined further later on in the study), they can be seen as counter-publics, arenas in which the hegemonic British discourse is broken, and a new space is created in which Islam is central and prominent (Dafydd Jones 2010, 764).

I believe calligraphy successfully transforms space to aid in the creation of counter-publics in a number of ways. The first is the use of the Quran. The Quran is a

central part of worship for Muslims, regardless of ethnicity or language. Thus we see that Quranic Arabic is used both in South Wales Islamic Centre, a mosque that has Yemeni roots and caters for a primarily Arabic speaking congregation and Shah Jalal, a mosque with Bangladeshi roots that caters for a primarily Bengali speaking congregation. The reason behind the adoption of Quranic Arabic calligraphy, rather than artwork based upon more ethnic identities and cultural meanings, is due to the Quran's flexibility in carrying meaning across cultures and national boundaries. Nasser notes how the Quran is particularly portable, 'making Islam independent of local circumstance for its reproduction and enabling its historical movement across geographically diverse, multiethnic and multicultural terrains' (Nasser, pg 65). Nasser believes that the Quran can transform cultures and communities and has done so in the past due to its ability to be used in a variety of local circumstances. Naturally then, it is reasonable to see how the Quran can be used as a means of indicating a new discursive space. From a semiological perspective then, every single piece of calligraphy acts a sign to express that within the four walls of the mosque a new discursive arena exists.

The second way in which calligraphy can transform space is made clearer when understood within a broader Islamic theology. Metcalf argues Islam does not have a legalistic form of sacred space, but rather, Muslim space is created via 'ritual and sanctioned practice' (Metcalf 1996, 3). Central to this ritual practice are the daily prayers which are essentially recitations of the Quran accompanied by symbolic actions. Outside the performance of these prayers, the mosque can indeed be empty space, with no religious meaning attached to it. For example, Muslim communities without mosques often resort to using community centres, schools, even churches, for the needs of their ritual worship. During their prayer within that space, that space is

transformed into a symbolically Muslim space, but upon completion of the prayer and cessation of whatever booking period is arranged, that space returns to being a community hall, a school or a church. The recitation of the Quran during prayer, or even outside of it, transforms that space into sacred space for the duration of its recitation. For Shah Jalal and the South Wales Islamic Centre, visual dhikr is used to preserve sacred space in the absence of the recitation of the Quran. Thus even when no Muslim is worshipping within that space, it is still very much Muslim space and the visual dhikr is what preserves this. This process is perhaps the best example of the relationship between audial and visual dhikr.

Calligraphy also serves another related purpose. On one hand, it transforms space to become symbolically potent, but it also expresses ownership. The Quranic verse ‘to Him belongs all that is within the heavens and all that is upon the earth’ (Quran 4:131) is perhaps noteworthy here. Ownership is an important concept within Islam. In theological terms, it would perhaps more commonly be referred to as the sovereignty of God. No doubt in creating Islamic space, there is a need to show that this space is ‘owned by God’, and that his sovereignty is present within these walls. This is most prominent within Shah Jalal, I believe partly due to the building’s Christian origins. We see that the Muslim owners of the mosque go to particular efforts to ensure that the new Muslim identity of the building is absolutely clear. This is partly done via the exterior, which will be examined further later, but also internally through calligraphy. The presence of Quranic verses on the walls of the mosque act as a ‘branding stamp’, indicating its Muslim ownership.

One example of how calligraphy works to express ownership can be seen in the clocks used in Shah Jalal. Images 9 and 10 show analogue clocks with Islamic calligraphy. Image 11 is also particularly interesting. It is a digital clock with the

words Allah and Muhammad in Arabic presented on either side. The presence of calligraphy even on pragmatic items is a reminder that Islam permeates throughout this building. A second example is a wooden carving with 'Allah' written upon it placed upon the wooden panels of the mosque (Image 12). The mosque is a registered building, meaning that many aspects of its architecture must remain unchanged and thus many features are strongly reminiscent of Welsh chapel architecture. The wooden carving of Allah that is essentially mimicking the wooden style of the panels is an attempt to make it seem part of the original work. I argue that this is a conscious attempt to transform the architecture of the chapel into a Muslim architecture. The small piece of artwork is extremely representative of the purpose of calligraphy within mosques.

A final example can be seen in the exterior of Shah Jalal mosque. The proclamation of faith is written in English across the entrance arch, including the words 'MUHAMMAD (PBUH)' and 'ALLAH', with a final 'ALLAH HU AKBAR' written above the doors (Image 13). The mosque committee has emphasized the Muslim ownership of the mosque. One can identify in the picture newly installed parts of the gate (currently in silver). Previously the gates were topped with spikes. To the author, it would require a very imaginative mind to presume they were crucifixes or in any way religiously symbolic. Nonetheless, the mosque committee were sufficiently disturbed by them to replace them with new, curved railings. In an informal discussion with members associated with the mosque, I was informed that they were replaced as the previous crosses were reminiscent of crucifixes. I believe this stems from a very strong desire to convey the Islamic identity and ownership of the mosque. Anything that could contest the visual dhikr of the mosque was removed. The archway with the proclamation of faith written upon it also indicates this. By

walking under it, the individual is in no doubt he or she is now entering Muslim space. I believe it is important to weigh the importance of these aspects of design with the Muslim community in terms of economic constraints. An undecorated clock is less expensive than a decorated clock. Thus the choice to opt for one with a Quranic design is no doubt important enough to the Muslim community to warrant the extra cost. This is especially true of the redesign of the gates in front of Shah Jalal. Although I wasn't given an estimate for the cost of the work, it is easily within the region of several hundred pounds, if not more. The cost of this work was no doubt deemed necessary. I believe this sheds light the importance of design and architecture to the Muslim worshippers of the mosque.

Dar ul-Isra is an exception to the above discussion. In stark contrast to Shah Jalal and the South Wales Islamic Centre, it has no calligraphy on its walls whatsoever. It adheres to a minimalistic design architecturally. This absence of Islamic calligraphy is one of many things that set it apart from the other two mosques in consideration. I believe one reason for Dar ul-Isra's difference in this regard is its intention and purpose. Literature produced about Dar ul-Isra such as its website (Dar ul-Isra 2010) refers to it as an 'Educational and Welfare Centre' and not primarily a mosque (although it certainly fulfils the function of a mosque in regard to the daily prayers). One of its rooms is designated a Community Hall (Image 14) rather than a prayer hall. Additionally, the mosque received a grant from the Welsh Assembly as a community centre. In this regard, one can see how the absence of calligraphy is an indication that the space, though used for ritual worship by Muslims, is intended to be a more neutral community space that can be adapted and used for a variety of purposes. The mosque manager indicated that the mosque has been used for celebrations, community health sessions and weddings. Thus calligraphy is not

needed to transform the space, or indicate ownership, as the function of the space changes according to needs. This is not totally without precedent. Steele argues that the earliest Muslim mosques were extremely simple, a reflection of the 'minimalist nature of [Islam's] liturgical requirements' (Serageldin and Steele 1996, 30) and space was transformed according to needs, whether for spiritual, communal or organizational wants. Thus Dar ul-Isra may reflect a more pragmatic architectural example.

iii) Belonging

A second theme of analysis, again under the branch of ownership, is belonging. One of the purposes of visual dhikr is to establish a sense of belonging. This belonging is multifaceted and has three categories. The first is a universal belonging, the belonging of the Ummah, within the mosque. The second is however a more nuanced, restricted belonging. This is the belonging to a specific ethnic group. The third type of belonging is exhibited most prominently by Dar ul-Isra, and this is belonging to a national identity, in this case, a Welsh multicultural identity.

Pictures of the Kaaba adorn the walls of Shah Jalal and the South Wales Islamic Centre in abundance, although once again Dar ul-Isra is an exception. They are 'synechdochal' semiotic images (Rose 2001, 79). In the same way that the Eiffel Tower is used as a partial image representative of the whole, the Kaaba and Masjid al-Haram are used as a partial images, representative of Makkah. Although the image of the Kaaba is perhaps not something one would immediately associate with dhikr, it is still serving the same purpose. The Kaaba is an image that holds very potent religious meaning for Muslims and is almost a universally recognised and celebrated image. It is the direction of prayer for Muslims across the globe without exception and so

communicates an idealistic notion of the unity of Muslims. It is also symbolic for the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Makkah incumbent upon all Muslims who can afford the journey, and one of the five pillars of Islam. In many ways then, the Kaaba is a unifying image. It unites Muslims across boundaries and is a recognisable image for all Muslims, regardless of language, ethnicity or indeed literacy. The South Wales Islamic Centre not only utilises the image of the Kaaba, but displays a framed piece of the *kiswa*, the cloth that covers the Kaaba (it is replaced annually) (Image 15). Other images of the Kaaba are placed in prominent locations. The South Wales Islamic Centre adorns the main entrance corridor with a picture of the Kaaba (Image 16), has one in the main prayer room (Image 17), and several in the adjoining overflow room including the piece of the Kiswa. In Shah Jalal, several images of Makkah and the Kaaba are placed in the main prayer hall in clear view of all the worshippers (Image 18), it includes a tapestry of the Kaaba, an old black and white picture and a second tapestry of the doors of the Kaaba.

I believe the use of the Kaaba within mosques is indicative of attempts to create a sense of belonging for all Muslims within the mosque. 'Islam is virtually without symbols other than the Ka'ba at Mecca assuming that one leaves aside mystical or allegorical motifs such as the crescent moon and star' (Frishman 1994, 32). As such, the Kaaba acts as a way of indicating unequivocally the precedent of the building it adorns and indeed linking it to romantic idealism of Islam's most sacred mosque. The Kaaba is thus a symbol of the ummah, a transnational community of believers.

Belonging however can be a contradictory concept. While establishing a sense of belonging for Muslims, it goes without saying that there is a sense of exclusion created for those who do not identify themselves as Muslims. Likewise, mosques also

use visual images to create a sense of belonging for some Muslims that will establish feelings of alienation for other Muslims; 'so while mosques are theoretically open to all Muslims, they can, in practice, operate all sorts of closures' (McLoughlin 2005, 1048). This process can be examined best through the use of language of signage within mosques. The South Wales Islamic Centre uses Arabic alongside English for its signage (Image 19, 20, 21). Although Arabic is supposedly a *lingua franca* for Muslims, in reality its understanding is far from universal. Using it outside of the sacred settings for the mundane indicates the ethnic characteristic of the mosque. Likewise, in contrast to the universality of the images of the Kaaba, Shah Jalal uses Bengali script for signage. These range from transliterated Arabic invocations (Images 22 and 23) to general notices (Images 24 and 25). In both mosques, the ethnic language is placed above English. This establishes a stronger sense of belonging for the communities in question (Arab speaking migrants and Bengali speaking migrants); it recreates a sense of home and establishes the primacy of an ethnic identity alongside a religious identity within the building. It is, however, also a very strong and powerful symbol of exclusion for those not capable of speaking the aforementioned languages.

The language used by Dar ul-Isra offers interesting comparative analysis. Its signage is bilingual, but instead of using languages traditionally associated with migrant Muslim communities, it uses English and Welsh. The signs are used for all sections of the mosque (Images 26 through to 31). Despite Dar ul-Isra's mixed congregation, all but a small minority will speak Welsh and thus are of limited value for the congregation. We can therefore question the use of Welsh within the mosque, as it can be ascertained it is not for practical value. I believe that just like the language of signs in the South Wales Islamic Centre and Shah Jalal, Welsh is used to establish a

sense of belonging, but of a different type. Dar ul-Isra is expressing its belonging to a wider Welsh identity. Both Dafydd Jones and Gilliat-Ray have noted how Muslims have used and adopted a cosmopolitan multicultural Welsh identity, one that is being promoted by the Welsh Assembly and others, to establish their belonging and presence within Wales (Dafydd Jones 2010, 754; Gilliat-Ray 2010, 186).

Interestingly, Marranci notes that Muslims in Northern Ireland used a similar strategy to express a Northern Irish identity and to minimise the chances of racial discrimination (Marranci 2004, 20). This then again stands in contrast with Shah Jalal and the SWIC. Instead of expressing an ethnic identity looking towards the migration history of the congregation, Dar ul-Isra expresses a new ethnic identity that reflects the new geographical and cultural location in which Muslims have found themselves today. I do not believe this is simply a political or empty gesture. Although the outward face of the mosque also uses a bilingual (Welsh and English) welcome sign (Image 32), the majority of the Welsh signage is internal. This signifies, to a large degree, that this sense of belonging is one that can be comfortably exhibited amongst the Muslim worshippers within the mosque. Although the decisions made by mosque management are certainly not always a reflection of the mosque congregation, the acceptance of Welsh signs indicates a large degree of agreement with the notion of a multicultural Welsh identity. Dar ul-Isra's mixed ethnic congregation should also be considered here. The heterogeneous congregation would be better served by languages that do not exclude or favour any particular ethnic or linguistic group and thus by avoiding them altogether, all groups are catered for and represented in an equal way within the architecture of the mosque. Welsh and English do not carry the same powers of inclusion or exclusion that other languages can exhibit.

iv) Expression and Identity

This section will primarily examine the exterior design and architecture of the mosques studied. The exterior is a key section, and perhaps the part of the mosque in which greatest consideration is given to architecture, design and decoration. The exterior is the aspect which is most likely to engage with the wider geographic community, both Muslim and otherwise, and so it is an ideal space for the expression of ideas and identity. I believe each of the three mosques present ideas about community, presence, cultural hegemony and integration via their exteriors. Before looking at these issues however, it is necessary to establish the means, or signs, by which each mosque communicates.

The South Wales Islamic Centre, as the only purpose-built mosque that is a part of this study, is in a unique position to utilise its architecture for communication. Unlike other mosques which are restricted by pre-existing designs, planning permission and general feasibility, the South Wales Islamic Centre was able to fashion its exterior from its inception. The two most striking features about the mosque are obviously its dome and minaret (Image 33). These two features of the mosque are so strongly associated with mosque design that some architects refer to them as ‘clichés’ (Serageldin and Steel 1996, 145). Their association with mosques is primarily due to their traditional function. The dome of a mosque allowed for acoustic amplification of the Imam’s recitation before digital technologies and the minaret would be used by the caller to prayer to make the *adhaan*; naturally a taller minaret would allow for the voice of the caller to prayer to carry further and reach a greater distance. In contemporary times, the function of both the dome and minaret have ceased; in some cases this has allowed for more radical and revised mosque designs to be used. That said, the dome and minaret are still commonly used for symbolic purposes. In the case

of the South Wales Islamic Centre, neither the dome nor the minaret is present for functional purposes. Indeed the minaret's design makes it simply a monument and it is not possible to ascend (Image 34). The retention of the minaret is for its semiotic value. The dome and minaret are recognizable conventions of Islam for the wider world. They express a Muslim identity and purpose to the building unambiguously. Further discussion on the importance of this expression of a Muslim identity will be conducted later on.

Shah Jalal as mentioned earlier is a former chapel. As such, it cannot express its Muslim identity via recognizably Muslim architectural features as the South Wales Islamic Centre can. Instead it employs different strategies to ensure that its Muslim identity is recognized. As the Image 35 shows, there are prominent and clearly written words in English. The declaration of faith, or *shahadah*, adorns the archway into the mosque. On either side of the railings the name of "MUHAMMAD PBUH" and "ALLAH" are placed. The mosque also has the star and crescent located towards the heights of the building (Images 36, 37 and 38) and interestingly, a loudspeaker. The loudspeaker has never been used nor has permission for its use ever been granted or appealed for by the local council (Image 39).

Dar ul-Isra uses different techniques to express its Muslim identity. It has a single sign above its door, describing it as a 'Muslim Educational and Welfare Centre' (Image 40 and 32). Its logo is also used. The design is Arabic calligraphy while using the geometric patterns commonly associated with Islamic designs. The Muslim identity of the building is significantly less pronounced than the other two mosques in question, but it is certainly not a 'storefront' mosque, as described by Naylor and Ryan (2003), referring to mosques that conceal their purpose to the wider public.

What purpose does presenting a Muslim identity via the mosque exterior serve? One key important feature I believe is the establishment of community. Dafydd Jones argues that the lack of visibly Islamic architecture in West Wales compounds a sense of isolation and strengthens discourses of absence (Dafydd Jones, 2010). Thus by creating a visible and physical marker of Islam, Muslims in the community can grant their identity spatial presence but also to begin community organization and mobilization through the mosque. Even if Muslims do not regularly use the mosque, the presence of a mosque can be reassuring. Thus the symbols used by the mosque, whether a minaret, dome or the declaration of faith, act as ways of strengthening and creating a sense of community. Going back to the phrase visual dhikr, the dhikr is recognizable by Muslims and thus allows them to recognize the mosque. Indeed, one international mature student from the Middle East remarked to the author that after a period of homesickness he felt reassured and comforted when he first saw Shah Jalal's declaration of faith written across the entrance. Despite the ethnic and linguistic differences of the mosque, its Muslim identity reached and reassured the student. Without consulting any directories or maps, he located and recognized the presence of the mosque and thus used it as a method of accessing the Muslim community. In the end, Shah Jalal was not his regular mosque, but finding a visibly recognizable Muslim space allowed him to establish connections with other Muslims. This is an example of what I believe is a larger process served by mosques in communities. They act as places of congregation for the community and access to a Muslim network that is not geographically bound but interspersed across the city of Cardiff.

A second purpose of the visual dhikr of mosque exteriors relates to establishing a presence to the wider British public. The mosques are strong statements emphasizing the presence and existence of Muslims in that community. This relates

strongly back to the overarching thesis that visual dhikr is about ownership. By establishing recognizably Muslim buildings, the community claims ownership of this space. It is writing its presence into the very landscape of Britain. The establishment of a religious building expresses more than simply existence however. As Gilliat-Ray notes, there are several things associated with the establishment of a mosque. It indicates financial wealth and capital of the Muslim community, 'an emergent sense of belonging, an anticipation of long-term residency ... and desire for 'official' recognition' (Gilliat-Ray 2010b, 181). Beyond this it also shows agency and organizational capacity. The mosque itself stands to represent all these things to the wider public. In this sense, the mosque acts as a reflection and marker of the Muslim congregation who established it and worship there.

A third purpose of the design of mosque exteriors has already been briefly alluded to. That is contesting cultural hegemony and pre-existing colonial notions. The mosques break the architectural norm of chapels and churches that exist across most British urban landscapes, and so create a new urban landscape in which Islam is included. Nasser writes about how the notions of the 'Western' city and the 'Islamic' city that have been used as metaphors for the Occident and the Orient (Nasser 2005, 61). This dichotomy is broken by the mosques that establish themselves geographically in the Occident, indeed the heart of the colonial empire, and yet derive and use copiously the cultural metaphors of the 'Orient'. This is done most prominently through the use of the crescent. Both the SWIC and Shah Jalal use the crescent as symbols on their mosques (Images 33 and 36). The origin of the crescent is pre-Islamic, but was adopted and used prominently by the Ottoman Empire. Since then, it has been used interchangeably as representative of Islam and the 'Muslim world'. The crescent is not a symbol that is immediately derived from Islamic sources,

nor is there a clear link between the theology of Islam and the crescent, except for perhaps the importance of the lunar cycle to religious worship. Rather, the crescent is a symbol of empire and power. Any sense of a colonial hegemony is broken by the crescent and so a new cultural landscape is created that includes Islam.

This leads then to the final conclusion based upon the mosque exterior. Leading on from the resistance examined previously, we can see that there is also a process of recreation. The mosques included in this study each consciously portray a visible and strong Islamic identity, but as Hussain notes ‘a discussion of identity cannot be an entirely isolationist one, as by definition there has to be interaction’ (Hussain 2004, 85). Each mosque thus creates its identity with interaction with its geographic reality. Although they employ various religious symbolic signs, the mosques are still located within a British space, not just geographically but culturally. The South Wales Islamic Centre, though architecturally British, uses red brick that makes it almost immediately recognizable as a British mosque and allows it to settle into its local environment. Dar ul-Isra too adopts British architecture and materials. Shah Jalal, despite its concern with presenting an Islamic identity, is still a conversion of a Welsh chapel. It preserves the religious identity of the building. Each mosque has taken the religious symbols of Islam and established them within a new geographic and cultural setting, with differing results for each mosque but united in their innovativeness in asserting their ownership and presence using the religious heritage at their disposal.

Section Four – Reflections

It is beneficial, having completed the study, to consider the ways in which the research may have been conducted differently, and how my own identity as a young male British Muslim may have influenced the project and its findings.

The first and most obvious aspect to consider is the limitations of visual methods. As was discussed in the methodological section (Section One), visual methods have been criticized for being overly subjective. This is a valid criticism, but not one that is solely applicable to visual methods. It was however evident to me as I conducted the study that the depth of analysis would have been greatly improved if combined with other qualitative methods. I feel the focus group particularly would have contributed by allowing Muslims to articulate ideas based upon the images taken. As I adopted a semiotic approach to analysis, I understood and made decisions about the meanings of signs based upon my own thoughts. By using a focus group, I could transfer this process away from myself and to other Muslims, for them to articulate their understanding of the semiotic value (if any) of the mosque architecture and design.

A second aspect that concerned me was regarding my positionality and identity. I chose three mosques that I felt offered the most analytical value, but I was also conscious that these three mosques were also the ones I most often frequented for religious purposes. I was conscious that there was a possibility that I believed the three mosques within the study offered the most analytical depth only because I was already aware of their history, design and architecture and so could to a certain extent begin formulating ideas and analytical frameworks before the fieldwork took place. That said, within the scope of a dissertation of this size, I did not feel attracted to the idea of scoping a number of mosques prior to my decision.

An aspect of the analysis of positionality looks at how the knowledge generated in an interview for example, is dialectic. The biography of the researcher influences the way in which respondents answer questions and present their own views. In the context of image-based research, the dialectic is not present, but the same possibility of the researcher's biography affecting the knowledge generated is. My religious and cultural identity, coupled with my life experiences, interests and likes all affected the direction in which I pointed the camera. The aspects of the mosques captured were no doubt a product of my own identity and certainly another individual would have taken different pictures, focused on different aspects of the mosque and thus come to different conclusions based upon those photographs. For example, if I asked the mosque committee to provide me with photographs, I could have looked not only at the content but the way the mosque committee wanted me and others to view the mosque. This would be similar to Cressey's work on young Pakistani men's relationship to Birmingham (2008). Cressey looked at photographs that young British Muslims in Birmingham had taken. Incidentally they were taken by the same Muslims she had included in a study of young Muslims' relationship to their local city. By combining them, she was able to powerfully explore issues that arose in her fieldwork.

These issues do not devalue image-based research. I believe many of themes of analysis brought out through the use photography would be more difficult to access through other methods. Rather it seems that visual methods are a valuable complementary tool alongside other social science methodologies.

Conclusion

The primary findings of this study are centered on the mosque as a location and space of articulation of British Muslim identities. It focused on the use of calligraphy, symbolic decoration, and signage in expressing notions of ownership, belonging, community and identity. It shows that Welsh Muslims have utilised mosques to establish and reinforce communities, both local communities and the transnational ummah. It also argues that the Welsh Muslims included in the study are concerned with notions of Muslim space and are conscious of their location within a broader Welsh nation.

My work builds upon ideas articulated within Metcalf's 'Making Muslim Space' (1996), particularly Werbner's edited chapter 'Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah: Zikr and the Sacralizing of Space among British Muslims'. I adopt Werbner's theories about the role of dhikr and develop them by looking at visual dhikr but still comment on many of the same themes, primarily identity, ownership, religious experience and migration.

The study also employed visual methods. I believe they can be very successfully combined with other social science methodologies to illuminate aspects of the Muslim experience as yet unexplored in the study of Muslims in Britain. I was surprised to find a number of architectural studies that offered deep and insightful analyses of mosques but stopped short of looking at the relationship between mosques and the Muslims who worshipped there. It seems that there is scope for social scientists to incorporate this work and build upon it.

The limitations of the project have already been alluded to in the reflexive section. The incorporation of three mosques within the study was in itself a challenge, and I hope that an appropriate balance between depth and breadth has been achieved.

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It is however clear that inclusion of more mosques within the study would have been useful. I feel it may have helped explain the conceptual difference between Dar ul-Isra and the other two mosques in the study. Other limitations include the focus of examination within the dissertation. I looked primarily at what I coined 'visual dhikr'. There were however many other features of the mosque that I considered analysing before my final redaction. These included the Imam's prayer niche, the architectural layout, and the presence of various items (such incense burners, prayer beads, even a basket of hats) that all revealed great amounts about the theological character of the mosque and its worshippers.

It is hoped that this dissertation will contribute in whatever small way to the understanding of mosques and the Muslims who worship within their walls. Mosques are important not only for their historical value, or what they reveal about the contemporary state of Muslims, but also for defining the future direction of the Muslim community.

"There has to be a symbol in stone, of what Islam is seeking to do in the world...who we are in the modern world" Professor Timothy Winter (Winter 2011)

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