The Struggle to Belong:
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Multi-Faith Space:
Towards a Practice-based Assessment

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Abstract

This paper considers recent developments in the provision and management of multi-faith spaces (MFS) within the United Kingdom. It begins by delineating the MFS as a novel research object, where old and new configurations combine in interesting, often unforeseen ways; proceeding to stress that an assessment of the pragmatic, material and spatial practices that occur *within* these spaces, can provide a counter-balance to macro accounts that focus chiefly upon socio-political or theological issues.

It is suggested that MFS largely exist on the boundary between religious requirement and secular accommodation. However, whilst they are *symptoms* of particular socio-political settlements, they are also *agents* in the active (re)configuration of public space. A working definition of the MFS is provided – *an intentional space, designed to both house a plurality of religious practices, as well as address (more or less) clearly defined pragmatic purposes* – subsequent to an outline of the tripartite epistemological structure utilised herein, that focuses upon: practices, socio-technical networks and public space.

Next, what is termed 'the elephant in the prayer room' is discussed; the reality of Islamic prayer comprising the majority of use within UK based MFS. Finally, the role and scope of new forms of networked legitimacy is assessed, alongside a reconsideration of the modified role of architecture within faith provision. In conclusion, the need for ongoing assessments of how MFS are realised 'in practice' is highlighted, alongside how this could both offer a toolkit for individuals seeking to meet the challenge of multi-faith provision in the twenty-first century, as well as providing a foundation for future 'embedded' research within these spaces.

Multi-Faith Space:
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> *Compared to conventional places of worship, many of the human techniques of sacralisation are less possible where the space is shared 'by people of all faiths and none' and located in a public, secular institution, such as an airport, prison or leisure attraction. In such contexts, sacralisation may take place in other ways.* (Gilliat-Ray, 2005b: 357).

1. Introduction

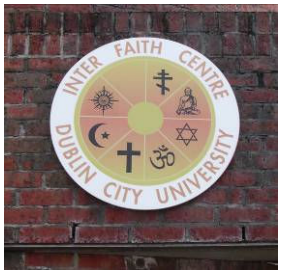
Whilst some authors, such as Kepel (1994), point to a respiritualisation of the West, in countries such as the United Kingdom a slow rejection of formal observance is in evidence, with religious life characterised by a veneer of what has been termed 'residual Christianity'(Weller, 2008). In the 2001 census 76.8% of the population self-identified as belonging to a religious group, however a feeling remains that *"most people are not articulating their beliefs through attendance and participation in corporate (Christian) worship in churches"* (Gilliat-Ray, 2004: 462), instead, as Ulrich Beck (2010) suggests, people are subscribing to more personal and bespoke forms of spirituality. Yet this only tells part of the story, with recent years seeing an increase in organisations and facilities that might be termed 'multi-faith', as modern cities seek to embrace religious diversity as an asset, socially, politically and economically. Whilst these amenities might be construed as novel attempts to house religious plurality within the late modern state, questions remain around their recognisability, stability and role.

In this paper we argue that whilst it is important to gauge the intentionailities – material and discursive – that lay behind the formation of the modern multi-faith space, it is also important to consider the recursive relationship between supply and demand, and how these spaces are ultimately realised through the nexus of activities that occur within them. We outline two ways of addressing this issue. Firstly by considering multi-faith spaces as, simultaneously, 'symptoms' and 'agents'. Secondly, by highlighting the ongoing role of social practice(s) – articulated through networks of people and 'things' – as both a stabilising, yet potentially disruptive element in the ongoing realisation of these spaces.

This approach has emerged out of a three year research project *Multi-Faith Spaces - Symptoms and Agents of Religious and Social Change* (funded by the UK's *Arts and Humanities Research Council*).[1] The project seeks to address the oft missing link between the study of religion, and geographical/spatial research (cf. Hopkins, 2007), and by extension the tendency to treat multi-faith space unproblematically; as simply 'another' form of 'sacred space', rather than a noteworthy object in itself (e.g. Parker, 2009). By addressing the spatiality of religion 'as practiced', and the novelty of multi-faith space, an ongoing assessment of the shaping role of activity is possible, and ultimately the extent to which these spaces might contribute towards new forms of socio-religious identity. Our hope is to develop a framework that highlights the complexity of multi-faith space, whilst delivering actionable recommendations around (appropriate) architectural form, interior design and facilities management. This paper mainly considers these issues from a UK perspective, with an emphasis, albeit not exclusively, on the public sector and public spaces.

a. Setting the Scene

The elements that make up the multi-faith space (*henceforth* MFS)[2] are not new, the form does not emerged *ex nihilo*, although in specific instances it could be said to represent a new form of socio-material configuration. In general, MFS demonstrate an overt or co-ordinated approach to 'secular religious provision' (i.e. by wholly or partially secular entities), notwithstanding specific examples that emerge out of single faith traditions. However, it is important to recognise that MFS are often self-defined, lacking common or established forms, designations, or even symbology, demonstrated by the disparate examples below.[3]



[1] Grant Number AH-J017321-1. See www.manchester.ac.uk/mfs.

[2] Throughout the text MFS refers to the 'material object' under investigation, as well as the plural.

[3] (from left to right). University Hospital Coventry; Dublin City University (Eire); Birmingham International Conference Centre.

There is no 'external validation' body for MFS, although faith actors operating within these spaces (often titled 'Chaplains'), are usually mainstream representatives of established single faith traditions. Yet, as Gilliat-Ray notes, ownership is often, if not contested, then confused, because as *"the ownership of shared sacred space is ambiguous, there is often a parallel ambiguity about the religious functionaries associated with them… in many cases… it is not always obvious that there is a specific persona associated with or responsible for the space"* (2005b: 365). Nonetheless, far from a 'free for all' occurring, guidelines are often proffered within each specific sector. Within tertiary education, the UK's *Learning and Skills Council* (LSC) define the 'multi-faith prayer room' as:

> *An area that is open at all times for people of all faiths to use, either together, in faith community groups or for the benefit of individuals. Some colleges have a booking system… enabling people to pray at specific times of the day in dignity and in private… A guiding principle… is that the claims of one faith are not advanced over and above the claims of another. The layout and equipping of the room therefore needs to be sensitive to the needs of a variety of religious traditions, so that it can be a genuine resource.* (LSC, 2007: 19-20)

Other similar definitions are available, and are largely variations on the themes presented here, alongside formal specifications that say more about the needs of the sector and institution in question, than about the optimum configuration of multi-faith space *per se*.

Each week one can find news stories about new MFS being developed; for instance the following: *"A Leicester shopping centre plans to open a multi-faith prayer room to allow shoppers space for quiet reflection."*[4] However, academic literature dealing exclusively with the MFS is less common; the key exception being the work of Sophie Gilliat-Ray, whose research was framed around the instrumental use of 'faith' by the previous New Labour government. Beginning with a consideration of the 'Faith Zone' within the 'Millennium dome' – the celebratory exhibition space, launched to no little controversy, and now re-modelled into the O_2 arena – she notes that whilst it "*was an isolated project, what it was possible or not possible to do was constrained by existing relationships, structures, and expectations"* (2004: 462). The newness of the faith space within the Dome was thus problematised, with Gilliat-Ray going on to also assess the more formal prayer/worship facilities within the facility, noting that within the historical development of the MFS, the traditional chapel (e.g. within a prison or hospital) linked to a disciplinary mode, has become

[4] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-13672677 (9/6/2011).

increasingly voluntary, as religious space becomes gradually 'neutralised'. She explains:

> *The space is in some sense being re-produced as it becomes subject to new interests and competing politics. However, over the past decade or so, religious spaces have also been newly produced in institutions that have no history of accommodating religious activity.* (2005a: 291)

The old and new clash in interesting, often unforeseen ways. In the case of the Millennium Dome, the generation of space *ex nihilo* encountered controversy from the outset, with Muslims refusing to use shared space within the dome due to the buildings' basis in lottery funding. Ultimately a space was found outside of the dome itself, although the author wonders why this external space was not then shared, depicting a privatised space *"'housed' within another institution that has its own politics"* (ibid.: 297), and noting elsewhere that this model leads to a situation where *"the experience of using such spaces is usually temporary and transitional"* (2005b: 363-4).

Many years later, with something of a critical mass now having being reached, we can now begin to suggest there are enough MFS present in the UK that these observation can be considered in greater depth. Moreover, an assessment of the pragmatic, material and spatial practices that occur *within* these spaces, might provide an important counter-balance to macro accounts that focus mainly upon socio-political or theological issues; considering also how micro and macro accounts meet and enmesh. In the words of Lily Kong:

> *Theories of urban space and society must take on board integrally the ways in which socially constructed religious places overlap, complement or conflict with secular places and other socially constructed religious places in the allocation of use and meaning… At the material, symbolic and ideological levels, the separation between sacred and secular is more fluid than rigid*. (2001: 212)

In a practical sense, we are interested in how individuals from different backgrounds 'live together', albeit within the confines of material spaces that are often transitional, partially realised, or designed for 'seeking' rather than 'dwelling' (Wuthnow, 1998). The previous UK (Labour) government formulated this issue in terms of living either 'face to face' or 'side by side' (DCLG, 2007a, 2008).[5] However, whilst promoting the theme of 'shared spaces for

[5] The title of the final report being: Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society.

interaction and social action', there was a failure to adequately materialise these ideas. We suggest that this issue becomes increasingly pertinent, as the notions of both 'public space', and indeed the 'public sector' itself, undergo ongoing flux and revision.

b. Multi-Faith Spaces as Symptoms and Agents

A range of historical and contemporary examples exist of what might be termed 'material accommodations' that have lead to the fragile provision, or healthy acceptance, of shared religious space. From the seventh century, Muslims were permitted to worship in the south transept of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.[6] Examples also abound within the Indian Subcontinent, where the eclecticism of Hinduism in particular has lead to some interesting accommodations, for instance at the Kataragama and Munnesvaram temples in Sri Lanka (Bastin, 2002). Closer to home, shared spaces are in evidence in the Balkans, redolent of the 'silent co-existence' of Islam with Orthodox Christianity (Papademetriou, 2004), and manifested through shared churches, and shrines for St. George, honoured and revered by Christians and Muslims alike (cf. Bowman, 2010). Other examples can be found in multi-denominational *Simultankirchen* in Germany, the Alsace and Switzerland. In some cases, both denominations shared a bell tower, but retained exclusive use of two separate naves built on either side of the tower (Kaplan, 2007).

MFS exist largely on the boundary between religious requirement and secular accommodation, *symptoms* of both specific socio-political settlements within nation states, as well as wider trends concerning the shape and scope of Western liberal modernity. However, they are also positioned at a 'fault line', and can be conceptualised as *agents*; active participants in the reconfiguration of public space(s). In line with Kong's suggestion above, MFS lay bare the mutability of the sacred/secular division, suggesting that whilst arguments reign over the increased or decreased significance of religion, MFS might point to novel forms of signification hitherto under-researched.

Whilst appearing elusive, MFS are usually recognisable when encountered. They exist in airports, hospitals, universities, prisons, shopping malls, private companies and even football stadiums. In some cases they are literally titled 'Multi-Faith Space', at other times one encounters various permutations of Chapel, Prayer, Faith, Quiet, Meditation, Contemplation, Silence, Space, Room, Hub, etc. Naming appears pragmatic, although further investigation

[6] See: http://www.sacred-destinations.com/israel/bethlehem-church-of-the-nativity.

often reveals this not to be the case, with designations such as 'Prayer' and 'Faith' unsurprisingly taken to be more religiously loaded than 'Quiet' or 'Silence'. For instance, Steve Nolan documented the media reaction to a case where Christian symbols were removed from a hospital chapel, arguing that nonetheless *"using the world 'chapel' to designate the public sacred/spiritual spaces of healthcare institutions is one way of sustaining the signifier 'Christian country' in the master position"* (2008: 322). To many respondents, not only the word 'Chapel', but even the Christian cross were viewed in benign terms, the author concluding that what was particularly striking was *"the unquestioned assumption of Christian privilege as natural – a given – and the extent to which this assumption unselfconsciously marginalizes minority religions"* (ibid.: 324). From name designation onwards, controversies are often rendered visible, and through these controversies the agentic role of the MFS emerges. Indeed, the term 'Silent Room'[7] – used frequently in German and Swiss hospitals (*Raum der Stille*) – could be viewed as itself a reaction to perceived religious bias.

In some sense, we follow in the tradition of authors such as Robert Putnam (1995, 2007), as we are curious as to whether MFS foster bridging, bonding or linking forms of social capital. The first suggesting that individuals from different groups might experience 'bridging' encounters that might *lead onto* something genuinely new and valuable. The second, suggesting at first only the reinforcement of existing bonds, yet also suggesting a space whereby different groups might feel their intra-group affinities are protected. The third, often ignored, suggesting an ability to facilitate links to (and between) dissimilar individuals, in order that they might take advantage of a greater array of resources than those of their immediate group (see, Woolcock, 2001). However, as we make clear presently, whilst we are interested in networked forms of sociality, we do not seek to favour the individual user of the space as the primary unit of analysis.

[7] Notwithstanding the 'worship' activities precluded by the term 'silent', or the issue of even being in a 'room' (e.g. for neo-pagan or Shinto adherents).

2. Towards a Definition

To provide a scaffold for our research, we put forward a working definition of the MFS as: ***an intentional space, designed to both house a plurality of religious practices, as well as address (more or less) clearly defined pragmatic purposes*.** Let us take each of these points in turn.

a. An Intentional Space

The issue of function – correlated, albeit imperfectly to differences in room designation – is a key issue, particularly the divisions between mono-function (e.g. devoted exclusively to prayer) and multi-function, alongside the intentions behind such spaces – for instance, are they 'single faith' spaces that are simply 'letting others in', or have they been designed as *intentionally* multi-faith. These issues have knock-on effects with regard to access, and the location of the MFS within public, semi-public, privatised, or wholly private space; alongside the proposed models for the management of use, and user groups.[8] Altogether, these disparate issues set a frame for subsequent activities within the MFS.

Whilst we find little fundamental agreement about what MFS actually *are*, areas of commonality around the kinds of things that these spaces *might* bring forth, contain, or achieve are often enunciated discursively and practically (via new processes of 'sacralisation' or otherwise). The UK context seems to point to a need to uncover non-contentious ways of conceiving of and enacting MFS, whilst still focusing on intentionality – how intentions are manifested within the architectural, spatial and artistic arrangement of the space. How does one develop a clear ethos, yet minimise controversy?

[8] For instance leaders/managers of a single faith (or none), single multi-faith practitioners, self-styled multi-faith ministers, or perhaps some kind of hybrid committee structure.

b. Housing Plurality

One view sees MFS as specific attempts to house religious plurality, within the late modern state. This rests upon the view that western-style democratic governments have, in many cases, come to an acceptance of faith(s) as a central part of civil (and civic) life for many of their citizenry, and faith must be actively accommodated (literally as well as figuratively). Accordingly, UK governments have sought to enrol faith within a range of socio-economic programmes, as "*from a local to national level – culture and identity are now seen as factors contributing to economic growth, urban regeneration, social cohesion, and public order"* (Knott, 2009: 89). This recognises that the term 'religion' is itself contested, and imbued with socio-cultural meaning; Woodhead recently suggesting that in the UK case there is *"no hard and fast boundary between 'religion' and 'belief'. Both refer to orientating commitments, including political ones"* (2009: iii).

Nonetheless, the extent to which a material accommodation of faith within MFS might contribute towards these instrumental goals is *substantively* controversial – there are naysayers from all sides of the political divide – as well as *practically* controversial – how is it to be effectively achieved? A danger appears to be that MFS could become either too attenuated (distant) or sterile (devoid of meaning) for adherents; although the potential for an innovative use of space, whilst containing differences in a 'creative tension', is also present. In terms of spatial methodology, issues around 'housing' and 'boundary setting' are particularly interesting. The extent to which research captures what enters, exits and circulates within the MFS, and the extent to which this might challenge existing gatekeepers, animates much of what follows.

c. Addressing Pragmatic Purposes

MFS are caught between scales, generated to meets the needs of a local(ised) geographical community, *in addition to* meeting wider social requirements. They are as much responses to plurality, as interventions *per se*. Firstly, there is a perceived need to balance prescription and organic growth. Secondly, this must be allied with an understanding of religious requirements, at a procedural level. Thirdly, key facets of the mission and outlook of the sponsoring organisation must be taken into account. Finally, the management of 'faith space' will inevitably be shaped by existing local faith groupings. Twin questions emerge:

- ***How are MFS positioned as capable of addressing particular needs within the wider society whilst retaining credibility within the locale?***

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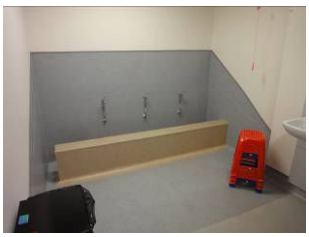
Often this is framed in terms of a balance between *cost* (monetary and otherwise) and *need* (perceived, researched, or otherwise), although this would be an oversimplification. We will explore these issues with the example of a recently opened MFS situated within *Manchester Royal Infirmary* (UK).

Within the last ten years, many new models of MFS have emerged in UK hospitals, largely as a result of *Private Finance Initiative* (PFI) building programmes.[9] This space is a 'third generation' offering, superseding a (now derelict) hospital chapel, and a (now closed) non purpose-built single multi-faith room.

[9] The deliver of public sector infrastructure projects via the use private sector debt and equity, often utilising subsequent private sector management of the service(s).

This ‘Multi-Faith Centre’ resembles a modern Chapel space, yet a shift of focus to the right shows a partitioned area, leading to an space set-aside for Muslim prayer. The partitions can be removed, to (re)make the room ‘whole’ for services, prayers, events, etc. Absent from this view is any evidence of obvious religious symbolism, for this we have to look in other places within the ‘Centre’.



A storage room (left) frees the main space from unnecessary clutter; a selection of individually labelled boxes are provided to store various ‘faith implements’ (middle). Further down the corridor we also find ritual washing facilities (right), as well as chaplaincy offices and a small Muslim prayer space. Taken as a collection of rooms, transitional spaces, and storage areas, this MFS emerges out of issues arising from previous provision (a chapel, and a single multi-faith room), whilst maintaining some continuity with pre-existing chaplaincy arrangements – in this case an Anglican lead chaplain, with Roman Catholic, Free Church, Muslim and Jewish colleagues (and a range of other faith representatives ‘on call’). This pattern is repeated at many hospitals, albeit with subtle differences – sometimes an existing chapel is also maintained, occasionally Islamic prayer spaces are located in a separate zone, etc (cf. Heskins & Ghumra, 2005).

Moreover, some ‘new’ spaces demonstrate material forms of continuity. Firstly, an older chapel spaces retrofitted into a multi-faith room – such as the *West Suffolk Hospital* ‘Chapel and Multi-faith Room’ (left) – will often have separate multi-faith (or non-Christian) spaces within them (in this case the door on left) but be nominally open to usage by all faiths. Secondly, a newer space which retains traces of the past – such as *Russells Hall Hospital* ‘Prayer Centre’ near Birmingham (right) – where stained glass is present from an old chapel, broken and reused.

Hospitals demonstrate a range of styles and models; from the purpose built MFS, to the retrofitted space, to converted chapels, to chapels operating in conjunction with other spaces. This permits research to consider the relationship between the intentional ascription of spaces, and how material arrangements both enable and constrain usage.

3. Theory

We term the theoretical framework of our approach 'socio-pragmatic', in that we utilise theory in order to clarify observation. Below, we highlight the three axes around which this approach is structured: practices, socio-technical networks, and public space.

a. Practices

We suggest perceived divisions between material intention, and everyday practice (religious or otherwise), can be addressed through an assessment of how MFS are realised *in* and *through* practice, how different 'inputs in space' interact and enmesh. We do not look at the space as a holistic entity, rather we consider the practices of actants within that space, and how these practices are (pre)structured, conditioned, mediated, enabled and prevented through materiality. This cuts-across the theme of MFS as 'symptoms' and 'agents', whilst offering a novel spin on the management of faith, focusing not upon faith-based practices *per se*, but rather any practice within space that has been wholly or partially delineated as 'religious'.

Considering how MFS are created through ongoing use, as well as designation, permits an assessment of how usage may, in turn, generate and shape new forms of social practice. MFS are a performative phenomenon, and ethical issues notwithstanding, it is important to spend time within these spaces, and allow narratives to emerge. The pictures below – of the multi-faith room at a UK airport – illustrate this method.

Objects: The green screen had been mysteriously transferred from the medical facility next door. During my time at the airport, it moved several times, and before the priest arrived to take the Mass it was fully extended across the bottom middle part of the room.[10] It was clearly being used as a room divider for Islamic prayer.[11] The priest folded it up, and placed it at the back of the room. It finally disappeared a day later.

Events: A Roman Catholic Mass was held every Tuesday at noon. The space was still nominally open for others to use, and the presiding priest noted that (quiet) Islamic prayer was still allowable at the back of the room, and this had indeed occurred in previous weeks. Later, I found a sign in the Chaplaincy office (unused on this day) which stated 'Mass in Progress, please respect…'. Was the implication here that the room had temporarily become a church? Had some part of the room become Christian? Whose space was it during this time?

These vignettes suggest that through the confluence of actants and activities, over time, an MFS can be characterised. Future research might take a more in-depth temporal and focused view, examining how the recognition and stability of individual sites emerges through ongoing practice, and indeed make judgements – typologies guided by use – as to what kinds of practice must occur in order to make these spaces 'multi-faith' at all.

b. Socio-technical networks

We take our theoretical starting point from *Science and Technology Studies* (STS), a tradition noted for its sub-approaches such as the *Social Construction of Technology* (SCOT) (Pinch & Bijker, 1984) and *Actor Network Theory* (ANT) (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1999b). We borrow eclectically from these approaches, utilising their interpretative flexibility, whilst subscribing to the key tenets upon which most STS work is founded: the mutual shaping, or co-constitution, of the 'social' and the 'material'. Thus we view MFS as 'symptoms' *and* 'agents' of religious and social change.

Allied to this, we also view socio-technical networks as the basic unit of analysis, and suggest that these networks are constantly, and consistently, re-performed and stabilised through practice. With religious practice(s) as merely one strand amongst many. We also follow Bruno

[10] Roughly where the cameraman is standing in the left picture.

[11] Qibla (the direction of Mecca) would be at about the 7pm position, behind the position of the screen was a rarely used door that connected the room to the chaplain's office.

Latour (1996, 1999a) in taking 'actants' to be both human and non-human, and defined through relationships with other actants. In the above example, the priest and the green screen would both be actants. The managing chaplain would be another actant, albeit one with a potentially more central role in keeping the MFS 'in balance', what in ANT parlance would be viewed as 'boundary work' (see, Bowker & Starr, 2000).

In a very practical way, this approach also allows controversy to be defused, in a research field prone to passionate debate. The placement of a bowl of flowers is as much of a 'controversy' as the siting of a Cross or Qibla. In line with our division between symptoms and agents, it also permits an analysis of how the social is 'materialised' – the symptom as the relationality of actants leaving lasting traces; alongside how the material is 'socialised' – new forms of agency emerging from novel configurations of actants and networks.

c. Public Space

As noted, the political promotion of shared 'faith space' within the UK has tended to conflate physical space with 'space for dialogue'. This speaks of imprecise terminology, with a particular confusion around the terms 'multi-faith' and 'inter-faith'; the latter more often referring to communication, in the ethical sense of attempting to provide equal conditions for effective dialogue (cf. Habermas, 1989). For instance, Michael Barnes' notion of a 'theology of dialogue', characterised as a:

> *...multi-layered practice which negotiates the shared space of the 'middle'… based not on the strategy of placing the other 'somewhere else', by unilaterally drawing the boundaries, but on the tactical retrieval of an ethically demarcated sense of the other.* (2002: 180)

However, in a conceptual sense, this view works well with our epistemology, and as Jane Smith points out this 'shared space of the middle' might allay the fears of some, within the Islamic tradition, who are concerned that 'interfaith relations' "*suggest the possibility of syncretism, preferring instead what they see as the more neutral terms 'multifaith' or 'multireligious' which they believe better preserve the integrity of each tradition"* (2007: 96); with Adam Dinham conceptualising the latter within joint practice, the *"multifaith encounter, focusing more on common action than on common ground"* (2009: 203-4). So the MFS can be viewed as an 'in-between space', or 'space in-between', a construct that speaks of a desire to provide a space to meet on equal terms, yet recognising the unequal requirements of each

user. There is also a recognition that equality is not (technically) possible, yet specific common elements might be *provisionally* rather than *substantially* brought together. This is a key issue within the UK's recent *Single Equality Act* (2010) where all faiths (and none) are now equal before the law.

In offering a new kind of space the question of how the user might be pre-configured is important. Whilst one might assume that they are a religious, or spiritual person, an example from Britain's Cathedrals is instructive, where ongoing attempts are made to balance sustainability, via revenue making, and the ongoing facilitation of formal and informal religious practices (worship). Following Michael Foucault (1986), Myra Shackley sees Cathedrals as 'heterotopic' noting that these spaces are:

> *…seldom an isolated node of activity, being usually surrounded by supplementary buildings such as minor churches and shrines, as well as by various types of visitor facility… Many cathedral visitors are seeking an experience to change them, but not all are seeking that experience for the same reasons.* (2002: 347, 351)

Visitors seek what might be described as 'a positive visitor experience', yet the distinction between 'visitors' (including observers) and 'users' (including worshipers) is never absolute. Similar to the MFS, discussions over balance must keep in mind seemingly mundane features of facilities management, as well as more substantial issues around religious provision.

4. Discussion

Below, we discuss a key area emerging from our research; that of MFS development being shaped by the requirements of Islam, and yet largely ordered and managed through Anglicanism. The 'push' for the development of MFS has emerged from a clearly defined need, based largely around ongoing immigration. The 'pull' – what might be termed the 'social organisation of supply' – is organised around several aspects: equality legislation, changes in the scope and meaning of chaplaincy, a renewed emphasis on customer focus within the public sector, and the fostering of constructive workplace relations. Our attempts to mitigate controversy, hopefully allows us to tap into the 'practice-centric' elements of Islam, where there is *"no separation between belief/faith and practice"*, and devotion is structured around *"both a sense of belief and an orthopraxy"* where God is posited as the link between human action and Islam itself (Hussain, 2009: 239). This research allows us to assess Islam as a set of behaviours and practices, prior to any consideration of its ideological component(s). For the Muslim the whole world is sacred, prayer affirms this, the act of prayer requires material assistance and facilitation, so how might an MFS affirm or hinder this?

a. The Elephant in the Prayer Room

Islam might be considered the 'elephant in the prayer room', as Muslim citizens are the major users of MFS within the UK. Yet, the challenge of accommodating Islamic practice is not a new one, as Fetzer and Soper point out, *"as early as 1732, King Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia set up an Islamic prayer room in Potsdam for twenty Turkish mercenaries in his employ"* (2005: 99). The authors go on to provide contemporary figures, noting that *"given an estimated 1.6 million Muslims… there is one mosque or prayer room for every 1,071 Muslims in England, Wales, and Scotland"* (Ibid.: 47). However, expanding provision has proved controversial. For instance, the 'Multi Faith Room' at Ewood Park, home of Blackburn Rovers Football Club, triggered fervent debate amongst the club's supporters. A Facebook Group (2008) was generated, with inevitably vitriolic results; contributors intimating that the space represented 'the thin end of the wedge'.

Two of the more repeatable claims were that it had become a *de-facto* mosque,[12] and that it's earlier instantiation (it has now moved) resulted in the removal of a toilet block, not reinstated even after the space moved to its present location (above). For the casual observer, it would be hard to argue that the space would appeal to anyone, other than a pious Muslim who required set-aside space to pray. Notwithstanding the specifics of this case – an attempt to get Blackburn's Muslim population to come and support their local team – a key issue is how an MFS might take into account the requirements of Muslim prayer, without *becoming* Muslim prayer spaces. We can ask two questions.

What do Muslims require? As D'Alisera has suggests, for the adherent of Islam the 'sacred' is not bounded and separate from the 'quotidian realities' of everyday life; being Muslim is *"located at the nexus of everyday personal practices and social projects that help develop the cohesiveness of people and help build community identity through collective action"* (2010: 95). An inherently practical faith, yet one that requires the pious adherent to pray five times a day, at varying times, requiring careful scheduling. Furthermore, Islam is a faith that varies from place to place, with the whole representing *"a range of Muslim cultural identities dependent on each specific context, and which represent themselves through a dialogue with its historical past"* (Nasser, 2005: 64). Islamic identity, based on solidarity rather than comprehensive similarity, also detaches 'the cultural' from 'the necessary'. As such, prayer space within the Mosque only needs to be clean and oriented to Mecca: *"Muslim ritual requires no 'sacred space' and can be practiced anywhere"* (ibid.: 73). At a base level, all that is required is a demarcated space, that is enclosed, clean, and free for use at specific times.

What do Muslims receive? Availability and cleanliness are often the two most problematic elements. Ritual ablution facilities are often complicated to arrange, with a lack of finance, knowledge, or will meaning they can be absent or inadequate. Difficulties can also arise

[12] A similar allegation concerned a prayer room used by Taxi drivers at Manchester Airport which was subject to a suspected arson attack on September 11 2010 (Qureshi, 2010).

during Friday prayers, where there is often a need to monopolise a formally shared space. This has lead to organisations providing separate and exclusive prayer facilities for Muslims. As Gilliat Ray notes whilst *"often the 'economics of people' are at issue… there is also a sense in which Muslims are sometimes being constructively 'relegated' to their own separate spheres, setting up a dichotomy between Muslims, and all other faith groups.* (2005a: 301). This has ongoing material ramifications, with some groups welcoming the separation for both ideological, as well as practical reasons (i.e. if it's 'your space', you don't have to keep re-organising the chairs after the Christians prayer meeting, etc).

How MFS take into account the ritual embodiment or demonstrative nature of Islamic prayer practices has also been noted within work on UK hospital provision, observation suggesting that:

> *…when Muslims do use a shared space for prayer it is not the Muslims who feels uncomfortable. This is especially the case where the space available has a default setting which is patently Christian… The absence of space dedicated for Muslim prayer was acknowledged by all Chaplains. Chaplaincy teams are clearly trying to do the best they can, often in far from perfect conditions.* (Collins*, et al.*, 2007: 72)

Finally, issues around extremism have fed back into these debate, with funding for Muslim infrastructure and grassroots organisations tied into the previous Labour government's anti-extremism 'Prevent' agenda (DCLG, 2007b), which the current government is currently re-working.[13] Adam Dinham encapsulates this issue, noting that:

> *Rhetoric attempts to avoid the separation out of Muslims, for example in the statement that the 'Muslim community in the UK is a responsible and respected part of our multi-cultural and multi-faith society…'. And yet, in doing so, it singles Islam out as a special case.* (2009: 94)

The upshot was that many groups chose not to pursue the funding (see, DCLG, 2008) which as Paton *et al* suggests, *"may have reflected fears that the schemes would be a means of interference, control and surveillance"* (2009: 363). On a more positive note, disconnection had also been addressed via the training of Muslim 'faith leaders', with the suggestion that *"faith leadership in Muslim communities is exercised not only by mosque-based imams but also by chaplains, teachers, instructors, scholars and youth workers, among others"* (DCLG,

[13] See: http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/jun/05/david-cameron-islamists-counter-terrorism

2010: 65). This touches on issues of legitimacy, which extend beyond the Muslim community.

b. The Question of Legitimacy

Chapman and Lowndes argue that faith representation often blurs *"the line between direct and indirect democracy"* (2009: 372). Utilising the work of Michael Saward they defend, to a fashion, certain 'non-elected' claims noting their specificity, spatial and temporal flexibility, and explicit nature. In Saward's words:

> *None of us is ever **fully** represented – representation of our interests or identities in politics in always incomplete and partial. This implies representation is about a claim (redeemed, if at all, only partially), and not a fact or a possession*. (2009: 3)

Non-elected representation exploits the structural weaknesses inherent in elective representation, and also *in extremis* makes the stark claim that the state is *in itself* structurally incapable of serving citizens' interests. Accordingly, new forms of authenticity are found within networks, where consent takes on a more apparent and consistent form. However, as we see with the MFS, these networks are often unstable, and so demands are subsequently made that faith representatives should be more fully 'locked into' these networks *"as new 'governance strategies' call forth new types of representatives they are, in effect, creating new constituencies…"* , consent is secured within a formation where power differentials are still very much in evidence, whilst nevertheless *"opening up spaces for creative political agency, especially within disadvantaged urban communities"* (Chapman & Lowndes, 2009: 373). This is the crux, that the continued expansion of such networks ultimately brings politically important issues – or at the very least the governmental position on multi-faith affairs – closer to those who are 'hard to reach'.

Again, this does not concern 'inter-faith theology', where there is a danger that elite discourse is more at more odds with 'ordinary citizens', of various creeds, than these citizens are with each other. As Melanie Prideaux has suggested, engagement should begin at the level of the 'ordinary life encounter', generating informal dialogue which *could* serve as a precursor to more formal discussion. As she notes:

> *Muslim-Christian dialogue has the potential… to become and act of faith in itself… This approach to dialogue… is deeply problematic within the Muslim-Christian encounter because of the apparent potential for syncretism… Unlike mystical*

> *dialogue, 'practical dialogue' tend to be the dialogue of necessity.* (Prideaux, 2009: 464)

This 'dialogue of necessity', or 'living dialogue', speaks clearly to a need to understand what 'people do', and the issues that animate their daily activities, with the aim of generating a shared ethical platform which might bridge the gap between 'grassroots' and 'dominant' forms of dialogue – rather than expecting the latter to filter down to grassroots level. Prideaux concludes by noting such transient dialogue is hard to measure, although as we suggest, a focus on practice that prioritises the 'ordinary life encounter' might tell us something about the forms of networked sociality that occur within MFS.

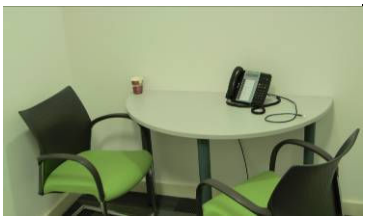
c. Architecture

> *It was as transcendental order that ancient cities acquired their monumental aspect. Massive walls and portals demarcated sacred space. Fortifications defended a people against not only human enemies but also demons and the souls of the dead. In medieval Europe priests consecrated city walls so that they could ward off the devil, sickness, and death—in other words, the threats of chaos.* (Tuan, 1977: 173)

Out research has documented close to one hundred MFS within the UK and overseas, and our programme continues through an in depth analysis of specific examples, alongside overseas fieldwork. Our architectural interest emerges from the theoretical backdrop outlined, rather than a position that seeks architectural solutions to the problem of order – the 'warding off of chaos'. The management and maintenance regime of a space is thus as important as the design process, with some of the more successfully realised examples of MFS we have encountered being those which have best managed the unstable equilibrium generated, as socio-technical networks merge and clash within particular spaces. This contrasts with a view that would seek to generate equilibrium *through* architecture, or seek to impose fairness and equity through design.

In the real, prosaic world, MFS must often be blended into un-aesthetic surroundings. For instance, Gilliat-Ray notes that "*the entrances and doorways of sacred spaces in many public institutions are often either left open or constructed from see-through glass… the simplicity of the doorways… stands in direct contrast to the doors and entrances of many religious buildings"* (2005b: 364). Far from spaces that 'nurture spirituality', these rooms often display a prudential quality, particularly when the MFS comprises of one small space for the use of

all. Quite often, when space is at a premium, these MFS will be found in locations of low commercial value, for instance at the end of a corridor, or next to a toilet block. Such spaces can be deficient in natural light, placed within the inner parts of a building, and are often characterised by suspended ceilings, an array service pipes, and low-grade anti-dirt carpets.



The pictures above are from a private (left) and government owned organisation (centre and right) in Greater Manchester. The space on the left was small office unit, differentiated only by the term 'Multi Faith Room' on the door, alongside a 'vacant' sign and a frosted glass panel. The slightly larger space (centre and right), might have operated as a useful quiet space, except when one notes the lack of chairs, and visibility through the door window. This pattern of neutrality and 'non-representational' decoration are often the norm within 'work' settings, an extreme version of the room where*" the furniture and decoration will not be suggestive of, or related to, any one particular religious tradition. It will be 'inoffensive', devoid of any markers of belonging or ownership by a faith community"* (Gilliat-Ray, 2005a: 303).

Limitations of space preclude a thorough summary, but suffice it say that when a small single space is utilised as an MFS, décor becomes constrained, the potential for new forms of practice to emerge becomes muted, and ironically the space invariably becomes less than its seeming balance would suggests; the orange room above being clearly only used for Islamic Prayer. As absolute neutrality cannot be achieved, the extent to which it is even aimed for should be negotiated. Every aesthetic choice 'materialises' an environment, so flexibility and manoeuvrability are vital. At a straightforward level, neutrality does not imply the removal of sacred artefacts, rather it requires consideration of what might be problematic for different groups. For instance, a Swastika would mean radically different things for a Hindu and a Jew.



Through practice one might establish whether potential users are able to separate aesthetic preference from the central tents of their faith tradition. The example of Zurich Airport (left) shows the 'wardrobe version' of the boxes approach to artefacts we saw previously. The example in the centre, from a Manchester based shopping complex, demonstrates an apparently problematic attempt to get everything into one space – Jesus can be covered with a curtain, which has lead to the unintended effect of people concealing themselves within it. The example on the right shows a common approach, what might be termed the vernacular IKEA mode. In some sense, it is as much what is *absent* from the MFS, than what is present, that requires consideration. What might be termed 'an architecture of concealment and revelation'

The practicalities inherent within MFS design are legion, and guidelines might emerge around a range of factors – all of which should be developed *in tandem*: lighting, olfactory elements,[14] shape and use of dividers, entrance and exit motifs, shared areas (learning and secular), food areas, sanitary areas, pictures, decorations, ornaments, sacred texts/symbols/artefacts (displayed and concealed), furniture, plants, etc. It should also be remembered that 'aesthetics' and 'design', whilst related, have their own trajectories, with 'design' also taking into account issues of a more spiritual nature, such as religious awe, the focus of the space, and the ability to use the space as a refuge from the outside.

[14] With the removal of evidence of other religious practices, taking on board the deliberate design of *"air circulation to remove fragrances such as incense and sweetgrass so that the next users of the space have an odourless room"* (Ota, 2007) at the University of Toronto's 'Multifaith Centre for Spiritual Study and Practices'.

5. Conclusion

What is clear is that the design and management of MFS is positioned at the vanguard of what might be termed 'secular religious provision'. However, this is not to argue that they are somehow representative of a clear decline in existing modalities of faith. As Callum Brown has argued, cultural historians in Britain have *"shifted considerably towards denouncing the inevitability of the secularisation theory. The rise of multifaith societies is equally no longer seen as the necessary accompaniment to secularisation"* (2009: 208-9). The MFS, as currently conceived, might be considered the material manifestation of this socio-religious complexity.

However, whilst examples of purpose built MFS are common, examples of what might be termed 'monumental' or 'cutting-edge' spaces, such as those found at the University of Toronto,[15] in the grounds of the University of Derby, [16] or even at FIFA headquarters in Zurich, where professional architects were engaged with a considerable budget, are relatively rare. What are more common are examples of the mundane accommodation of religiosity, and these come with a practical legacy derived from existing ways of managing semi-religious and/or mono-faith space (chaplaincy). It is not surprising that meeting the new challenge of providing 'spaces for all' in a consistent manner has not been achieved. Nonetheless, whilst there are clear examples of personalities driving particular spaces, some negatively others positively, that requires further research, ongoing assessments of how MFS are realised 'in practice' might aid the development of toolkits for individuals seeking to meet the challenge of multi-faith provision in the twenty-first century, as well as providing a foundation for future 'embedded' research within these spaces.

[15] Designed by Moriyama & Teshima Architects.

[16] Designed by Spear Architects. See also:
http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/mar/14/architecture.religion

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