

Introducing Seaside Town Muslims

Eastbourne Mosque History and Politics

Sevket Hylton Akyildiz

SOAS, London, United Kingdom

sevket.akyildiz1@gmail.com

Abstract

The majority of British Muslims live in cities such as London, Leicester, Birmingham and Bradford—and academic research thus far has reflected a city and post-manufacturing town emphasis. This paper investigates the as yet undocumented history and mosque politics of Muslims living in the small town of Eastbourne, East Sussex, using participant observation and unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Firstly, I conceptualise my case study group by highlighting some differences found in a small town in terms of the origins of its Muslims, their ethnic heterogeneity, and residential spatial distribution. Secondly, I explore mosque politics in terms of mosque planning, public reactions to mosque rebuilding, and mosque management issues.

Keywords

British Muslims – East Sussex – ethnic heterogeneity – mosque building – seaside town – small town – Southern England

A review of the academic literature shows that the dominant academic discourse concerning Muslims in the United Kingdom and Europe is focused upon geographically concentrated ethnic groups in city environments—and, since 11 September 2001, is often presented in the context of the “war on terrorism” and social integration issues. But what is the story of Muslims living in the peripheral towns of England—places of low crime and some economic affluence? I will reframe the debate away from (post-)industrial city and global city concepts and towards small town coastal Southern England. In

fact, Muslims living in small town Southern England are rarely reported on in the national media, except through the medium of sensationalist stories about “terrorism,” or “mosque arson.”¹ To introduce an alternate perspective, I will put the analytical spotlight upon a numerically small Muslim community living in a thus far undocumented geographical location. In this context I explore a single site where practicing Muslims establish their mosque, and interact with each other and the Eastbourne Borough Council (EBC) and town.

Islamicisation of public spaces at the seaside coast of Southern England is a contemporary phenomenon and the result of socio-cultural change in the West. Challenging modernisation theory it is a development that forces us to re-examine, to some extent, the trajectory of secularisation and national identification. From the perspective of a small town my paper compliments Jocelyne Cesari’s 2005 study: “Reflecting a dialectical approach in which Muslims both affect, and are impacted by, European culture.”² The reader should be made aware that in this early stage of the research project, my historical and political content are exploratory, and therefore a work in progress. In this case I am providing the findings of my research thus far.

My interdisciplinary research study will examine the establishment and politics of practicing Muslims at the Eastbourne Mosque/Islamic Cultural Centre. This is a mosque which is situated in a non-manufacturing town of southern England. The coastal town of Eastbourne (population 99,308 in 2011),³ East Sussex,⁴ is portrayed in popular British seaside culture as an icon of the English seaside; the town has long been viewed as a place of white-British spaces of relaxation, holidaying, leisure, and retirement. In reality the town is historically and culturally constructed with an evolving social and cultural identity.⁵ Indeed this paper will show how a small Sussex town influenced by globalisation mirrors change across British and European society. The evidence I will

1 See Emanuel, R, “Mosque Cleaner Named as Terror Suspect”, *Eastbourne Herald*, Friday 5 December 2003, pp. 1-3. A fictional and humorous story about supposed Al-Qaeda operatives active in Eastbourne is part of the plot in the book by Mac, J, *The Eastbourne Connection* (Guildford: Grosvenor House Publishing, 2009).

2 Cesari, Jocelyne, “Mosque Conflicts in European Cities: Introduction”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31/6 (2005), p. 1015.

3 East Sussex Community Information Service, ESCIS, “Population: Eastbourne District”. Available at www.escis.org.uk/Entry/View/Population:_Eastbourne_District/3433, accessed 25 April 2013.

4 East Sussex County consists of the councils of Brighton and Hove, Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Rother, and Wealden.

5 See the general cultural history on the subject by Elborough, T, *Wish You Were Here-England on Sea* (London: Sceptre, 2011).

present in this article shows that one outcome of socio-cultural change during the last 20 years or so is a growing, if still numerically small Muslim presence in Eastbourne, totalling 1,458 in 2011.⁶

My study draws upon history and politics. This mixed approach allows me to explore in a broad manner Eastbourne's Muslims and their mosque, and to make comparisons with related case studies. I review academic literature, online county government documents, Office of National Statistics census (ONS) data, the *Eastbourne Herald*, and online British newspapers. Furthermore I have undertaken 50 unstructured and semi-structured interviews (fifteen of which are included in this paper) with male and female Muslim worshippers and mosque committee members at the Eastbourne Mosque. The fieldwork component involved ten years participant observation from 2005 to 2014 at the Eastbourne Mosque, as well as socialising and working with the town's Muslims, both practicing and non-practicing.

The paper is structured in two parts. In part one, I will define and contextualise my case study group and mosque site by addressing the following questions: what does the history of the town's Muslim congregation and mosque committee circa 1990 to 2014 reveal about their arrival in the town, ethnic heterogeneity, and their residential spatial distribution? How do these three themes contrast with city-focused literature in terms of adaptation of Muslims to their new social contexts, and in their relationship with the town's people and council?

In part two I investigate mosque politics in Eastbourne (between 2004 and 2014) involving Muslim worshippers, the mosque committee, the town council, and the mosque's neighbours. Here I concentrate upon three topics which are comparable with city-focused research: mosque politics (planning, mosque attendance and fundraising), public reactions (to the redevelopment consultation process of autumn 2010), and management issues (formation of an alternate mosque committee). These themes explore the character and composition of the mosque elite, the role of the congregation, and interactions between Muslims, municipality, neighbours, and town. This paper does not address the mosque and marginalisation of young people and women, a theme common in the literature and deserving of further research in my case study group and site. I have not examined in this paper the number of interethnic marriages between Muslims, for instance an Algerian man and a Pakistani woman.

6 Office for National Statistics (2012) "KS209EW 2011 Religion, local authorities in England and Wales". Available at www.ons.gov.uk/ons/search/index.html?pageSize=50&sortBy=none&sortDirection=none&newquery=KS209EW, accessed 26 Dec 2012.

Case Study Group

My case study group are mostly United Kingdom citizens. Indeed British Muslims holding British citizenship are European citizens and therefore European Muslims. However, for practical purposes I will use “British Muslims” in a hybrid and hyphenated context. British Muslims, like British people and Europeans, have multiple social identities that are dependent upon audience and social situation. In my definition, I will include British born citizens who practice the faith of Islam, and Muslim immigrants who are seeking or else have achieved British citizenship. In actual fact, a large percentage of Muslims living in Britain are descended or partly descended from immigrants of Muslim heritage who arrived in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Writing in 1991, Muhammad Anwar says “... almost 60 per cent of Muslims are actually now British-born.”⁷ This makes the majority of male and female children, teenagers, young adults, and converts at the Eastbourne Mosque British citizens by birth or naturalisation, or else they are British Commonwealth subjects with the right of abode in the United Kingdom.⁸

Second generation Muslim children and adults generally spoke to me in terms of their British national identity and British/European citizenship. Their first generation Muslim immigrant fathers and the adult refugees almost always spoke of their British citizenship being based upon a civic identity. In recent years the Muslim immigrants in Eastbourne, as elsewhere in Britain and Europe, include foreign-born economic migrants, political refugees, war refugees, and professional Muslims (National Health Service, NHS, doctors) who are part of the Muslim brain drain from their homelands to the West. Many of these individuals will be seeking, or have already attained, full British citizenship status, or a British passport and its associated privileges.

7 See Anwar, Muhammad, “British Muslims: Socio-Economic Position”, in *British Muslims—Loyalty and Belonging*, S. Seddon, D. Hussain and N. Malik (eds.) (Markfield, Great Britain: The Islamic Foundation, 2003), p. 59.

8 In 1991 the Muslim population of Britain was approximately 1.5 million. See Anwar, Muhammad, *Muslims in Britain: 1991 Census and other Statistical Sources*, CSIC Paper no. 9 (Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, September 1993), cited in Ansari, Humayun, *The Infidel Within—Muslims in Britain since 1800 to the present*, (London: Hurst, 2004), p. 171. According to the 2011 census the total population of England and Wales is nearly 56 million people, with a total Muslim population of approximately 2.7 million. See Office for National Statistics (2013), “The Percentage of the Population with no Religion has increased in England and Wales”. Available at www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/sty-religion.html, accessed 29 April 2013.

In the case of Muslim children, one or both of their parents are often naturalised British citizens originating from a Muslim-majority country. Some of the wives and ex-wives of the Muslim men at the Eastbourne Mosque are ethnic white British or East Europeans, either of Christian heritage or else agnostic or atheist. Some wives are white female Muslim converts—some wear the hijab, others not.⁹ For all that, when I use the term British or European Muslim it does not mean they all regularly attend a mosque. Equally, because a British citizen has a parent who is/was a practicing Muslim, or else originated from a Muslim background, it does not mean that he or she is a practicing Muslim. (I have chosen not to insert the responses of Eastbourne's nominal Muslims and local people of Muslim heritage who do not visit the Eastbourne Mosque, as I feel this would be a topic for a separate paper unrelated to mosque politics.) So, I am using the term Muslim in a particular context, meaning Muslims aged 16 to 80, regardless of race, gender, disability and class who have consciously chosen to worship at the Eastbourne Mosque. And I have included male and female worshippers who only attend the mosque for the Friday midday prayer and Ramadan prayers (the annual 29-30 day fast). I will refer to this body as consisting of practicing Muslims who adhere to and participate in the general Islamic rituals, values and practices. In terms of class, Eastbourne's Muslim worshippers are a mixed bag, some are unemployed, some work in minimum wage jobs, others are middle class professionals, and a few are wealthy.

A glance at the worshippers at the Eastbourne Mosque shows noticeable ethnic heterogeneity. However, we can divide the worshippers into two basic categories: the management and the general congregation. First, the management (also referred to as the EICC Committee) between 1995 and 2014 was predominately Mauritian and Bangladeshi. In 2013, only two of its twelve members are Arabs: Respondent 20 is an ethnic Arab (a Palestinian and NHS doctor); Respondent 21 (builder) was born in Morocco and has lived in Britain for the last 30 years. This ethnic exclusivity of the EICC Committee is a legacy of the first trustees and their involvement in the opening of the mosque. Indeed, the first settled Muslims in Eastbourne were mainly South Asians.

On the other hand, the congregation of the regular worshippers have increased in number over recent decades, and today, in equal number to the Bangladeshi and Pakistani regular worshippers there are Algerians, Palestinians, Iraqis, Iraqi-Kurds, Moroccans, Egyptians, Libyans (students), Saudi Arabians (students), Indonesians (students) Senegalese, Ghanaians, Western Saharans, Afghans, Turks, Bosnians, along with English, Welsh, and Greek converts, and

9 Observations made by the author living in Eastbourne for extended periods between 1990 and 2013. Author's personal archive.

first and second generation British-born Muslims of mixed and non-mixed ethnic heritage.

A counterargument to my statement that ethnic heterogeneity is evident, might say that in the face of diversity Muslims are being pragmatic; if they had the choice would they prefer to worship at a mosque representative of their own ethnicity? It is an idea worthy of contemplation and deserves further research. During my fieldwork I did not hear worshippers commenting negatively about the ethnicity of fellow worshippers (below I mention an anti-Shi'i comment by one worshipper.) In 2006 and 2007 my work colleague in the town was an Iraqi-Kurd "nationalist" who informed me several times he drank beer, watched football, did not like Turks and said "No, I would not go to that mosque" (Eastbourne).¹⁰ (Will we meet again at "that mosque" when he is an elderly man?) Casual conversations are difficult to interpret—especially as the young man concerned was trying to establish himself in the town, and had recently married his Latvian girlfriend and was expecting their first baby. Iraqi-Kurd worshippers at the mosque do not speak of non-Kurds as problematic. Does their presence at the mosque indicate their willingness to embrace plurality?

In terms of "religion" numerically, the 2001 census data shows that there are 880 Muslims living in Eastbourne, amounting to about 1.0 per cent of the town's total population. The same 2001 census reports that 635 Muslims resided at Hastings, amounting to nearly 0.7 per cent of that town's population.¹¹ By 2011 the Muslim population of Eastbourne and Hastings (population 90,173 in 2011) was approximately 1,458 people in the former and 1,159 in the latter.¹² The 2011 ONS census shows that Muslims now constitute about 1.5 per cent of the total Eastbourne population and 1.3 per cent of the total Hastings population, and nearly 0.8 per cent of all those in East Sussex who responded and declared their

10 Unstructured interview with Respondent 100, August 2013. Author's personal archive.

11 Source: Eastbourne Borough Council, 2013, "Religious, Faiths and Beliefs", 2013, Available at www.eastbourne.gov.uk/community/religions-faiths-beliefs/?locale=en, accessed 25 April 2013; the total population figures for Hastings, and East Sussex and South-East England from the 2001 and 2011 censuses are available at East Sussex County Council, East Sussex in figures, "Population". Available at www.eastsussexinfofigures.org.uk, accessed 25 April 2013; see also available at East Sussex County Council, 2012, East Sussex in figures, "Religion in 2011". Available at [http%3A%2F%2Fesfigures01s.escc.gov.uk%3A80%2Fobj%2FfStudy%2F821&mode=cube&v=2&cube=http%3A%2F%2Fesfigures01s.escc.gov.uk%3A80%2Fobj%2FfCube%2F821_C1&top=yes](http://www.eastsussexinfofigures.org.uk/webview/index.jsp?study=http%3A%2F%2Fesfigures01s.escc.gov.uk%3A80%2Fobj%2FfStudy%2F821&mode=cube&v=2&cube=http%3A%2F%2Fesfigures01s.escc.gov.uk%3A80%2Fobj%2FfCube%2F821_C1&top=yes), accessed 25 April 2013.

12 Office for National Statistics (2012) "KS209EW 2011 Religion, local authorities in England and Wales".

“religion” as “Muslim.” According to the census data, by 2011 the total number of Muslims was approximately 10,296 living in East Sussex (population 526,671 in 2011) including the unitary authority of Brighton and Hove.¹³ These might prove to be conservative figures, and neither figure accounts for individuals who opted to not declare their “religion” in the census. Equally, children of dual heritage marriages might not be registered as “Muslim.”

Unlike Sean McLoughlin’s 2005 study of mosque construction by Bradford Muslims and “densely populated ‘Muslim’ inner city” in a town where Islam has been institutionalised,¹⁴ and Richard Gale’s research in Birmingham in reference to “highly localised communities” of Muslims “living in surrounding streets,”¹⁵ my findings show that the Muslim residential spatial distribution in Eastbourne is generally diffuse.¹⁶ The only evidence of some “ethnic-clustering” is in the town centre, where many bedsits and cheaper flats are found—but is this by choice or the result of economic realities? Often these Muslims are students, refugees or those purchasing affordable homes found there. Though I accept that my single case study has limitations, and I intend to investigate other resort towns on the East Sussex coast before I can make a conclusive statement. Still my provisional findings somewhat disprove Humayun Ansari’s statement that “Britain’s Muslim population . . . have distributed themselves into ethnically distinct communities upholding a broad range of sectarian allegiances.”¹⁷ For example, my research reveals that across Eastbourne spatial residential patterns of Muslims are demarcated by class—and not by ethnicity or religion. I note that the town’s Muslims reside across the full range of housing, private and council, spacious and small. Eastbourne Muslims defy notions of spatial self-segregation; their homes are distributed amongst the non-Muslim population throughout the town. Ansari’s analysis is correct in the context of Sunni/Shi’i split, for instance, there are ten mosques in East Sussex, and just one in Brighton for Shi’i Muslims.

Furthermore, Eastbourne’s Muslim school children attend majority ethnic white schools and colleges; this is in contrast with places like Bradford.

13 Office for National Statistics (2012) “KS209EW 2011 Religion, local authorities in England and Wales”.

14 McLoughlin, Sean, “Mosques and the Public Space: Conflict and Cooperation in Bradford”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31/6 (2005), pp. 1045–66: 1045.

15 Gale, Richard, “Representing the City: Mosques and the Planning Process in Birmingham”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31/6 (2005), pp. 1161–79: 1163.

16 The socio-economic complexities surrounding the concentration and segregation of Muslims/whites in British cities are explored by Ansari, *The Infidel Within*, pp. 172–6.

17 Ansari, *The Infidel Within*, p. 166.

Muslim/white separation at schools was noted by Hermon Ouseley in his report of the July 2001 Bradford “riots.”¹⁸ Furthermore, the designated burial space for the Muslims of Eastbourne is at the Langney Cemetery, and here all citizens bury their deceased family members and friends—regardless of their religious background.

In respect of the above, it is worth noting that while cities have many social problems, which affect marginalised groups, including young working class Muslims, they also offer employment and cultural opportunities. The towns of East Sussex might be in one sense economically wealthier than some other regions of the country and some boroughs of London; and in Eastbourne crime might be lower, but job opportunities are very limited outside of hospitality, retail, and care work (young university educated locals migrate out of the town), homes are expensive to rent or buy, illegal drugs are available if one knows the “right” people—Brighton and Hastings both have numerous residents with drugs problems. On Friday and Saturday night there is a noticeable police presence in Eastbourne town centre to prevent the drunken fistfights that occasionally erupt. Seaside towns are enjoyable places to be in the summer, but culturally somewhat dull in the winter—this can lead to boredom and depression for some residents.

The Mosque

In the case of Eastbourne, the first space for collective prayer was private. The longest living Muslim resident my research could find is a Bangladesh-born resident and businessman, Respondent 23, and a one-time owner of an Indian restaurant on Seaside Road, Eastbourne. Respondent 23 says: “In 1970, each Friday we gathered in a room above my premises to pray.”¹⁹

To understand the opening of the Eastbourne Mosque in 1995 we need to reflect upon national and European developments. The establishment of the Eastbourne Mosque was one of approximately 1,000 mosques opened in the United Kingdom during the 1990s.²⁰ A number of key factors explain mosques opening across the country: the numerical growth of the Muslim population in Britain between 1970 and 2011; the improving economic and social capital

18 McLoughlin, “Mosques and the Public Space”, p. 1055.

19 Unstructured interview with Respondent 23, August 2013. Author’s personal archive.

20 These mosques converted buildings and purpose-built were opened in Britain. See Biondo III, V. F., “The Architecture of Mosques in the US and Britain”, *Journal of Muslim Affairs*, 26/3 (December 2006), p. 404.

of some Muslims; the greater assertiveness of some British Muslims around the time of the Salman Rushdie affair in the mid-1980s.²¹ Fetzter and Soper highlight another factor: the British government's accommodation of Muslim cultural practices through its multicultural policy of the 1980s.²² Furthermore, the number and mix of ethnic groups living in British seaside towns increased as a result of the Labour Party's policy during the late 1990s of dispersing refugees and asylum seekers across the country and easing financial costs on city councils.²³

Mirroring Gale's observations that almost half the mosques in Birmingham are converted residential homes,²⁴ and a French Government survey of 1991–2003 that found converted spaces prevail in France²⁵—all of the three mosques in the neighbouring towns of Eastbourne, Hastings and St. Leonards (a former school, established 1985) and Bexhill (a former residential home, established 2014) are converted spaces. The building we know today as the Eastbourne Mosque, at 40A Ashford Square, was originally constructed for a non-religious function. Builders were granted planning permission in 1949 to create a structure “for use as a store and office.” In 1953 Eastbourne Council granted permission for its owners to turn the store and office into a “non-residential club,”²⁶

21 See Rath, J, Penninx, R, Groenendijk, K, and Meyer, A, *Western Europe and its Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 233–248, 283; see also Modood, Tariq, *Multicultural Politics-Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 185–209.

22 See Fetzter, Joel, S, and Soper, J.C., *Muslims and the State in Britain, France and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 7, 48–59.

23 House of Commons and House of Lords, “Written evidence submitted by Hastings Borough Council”, *Communities and Local Government Committee*, 16 July 2013. Available at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmcomloc/50/50iii96.htm, accessed 30 August 2013; see also Staff reporter, “Seaside Towns: The End of the Pier Show”, *The Economist*, 26 August 1999. Available at www.economist.com/node/234954, accessed 5 November 2013; For a broader study in a national context that explains the negotiation between Muslims and the state see Meer, N, “Negotiating Faith and Politics—The Emergence of Muslim Consciousness in Britain”, in *Muslims in Britain—Making Social and Political Space*, Waqar Ahmad and Ziauddin Sardar (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 156–67.

24 Gale, “Representing the City”, p. 1163.

25 Maussen, Marcel, *Constructing Mosques: the Governance of Islam in France and the Netherlands*, PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2009, p. 156.

26 Eastbourne Borough Council Planning Committee, *Report of the Head of Planning-List of Planning Applications for Consideration*, Report 1-Item 2 (Eastbourne: Eastbourne Borough Council, 30 November 2010), p. 14.

and the building became a sports and social club, the Seeboard Club, also known as the South Eastern Electricity Board Club (SEEB).²⁷

The club was purchased in 1995 and in the same year the local authorities granted consent for it to be a place of Islamic “prayer meetings, group readings and religious instruction/meetings.”²⁸ The building did not undergo any significant change to its external appearance. However, internally, it was cleared to make way for a one large prayer space, and two smaller prayer spaces—one of which is for women only. The building itself is a compact and unobtrusive single-storey bungalow-style construction. It has no obvious Islamic building style or ethnic architectural design, such as a minaret, to demarcate it as a mosque. The northern end of the mosque is adjacent to the drab red brick Upper Avenue Bridge.²⁹ The mosque is almost 70 metres in length by 10 metres in width, with a capacity for almost 200 worshippers (150 men and 50 women). There is no wheelchair access, except at the rear of the building through a fire exit. At present the mosque has a small kitchen, as well as a small washroom for ablutions (*wudu*) and toilet facilities, but these are for use by men only.

The outside walls of the Eastbourne Mosque are painted off-white and a thick green bush screens the main southern end and entrance of the building from passers-by. At the rear of the mosque are Network Rail railway lines which transports train passengers in and out of the town. A car parking space owned by the mosque is situated beside the structure and parallel to the railway tracks, and can accommodate 15 vehicles. At busy times perhaps 30 cars of worshippers are parked here and nearby.

Though the Eastbourne Mosque is Sunni, in some cases Shi'i Muslims, mostly of Iranian decent, will pray here too, especially during the nightly Ramadan prayers when they will often eat the evening meal after fasting, the *iftar*. So, Shi'is from the town and visitors to the town can attend prayers here. Respondents 7 and 8 agreed “There is only one body of Muslims, we do not consider sects,” conversely, Respondents 49 and 50 stated that Shi'ism was problematic in their view. Were they serious or joking? Their comments

27 Mosquedirectory.co.uk (2012), “Eastbourne Mosque (Old Seeboard Club)”. Available at www.mosquedirectory.co.uk/search_mosque/mosquesearch.php?mosque=Eastbourne, accessed 14 November 2012.

28 Eastbourne Borough Council Planning Committee, *Report of the Head of Planning-List of Planning Applications for Consideration*, 2010, pp. 13-42, 34.

29 “New Mosque Plans”, *Eastbourne Mosque*, 23 January 2011. Available at www.eastbourne-mosque.com/category/new-mosque-planning/, accessed 14 December 2013.

nullified the spirit of a transnational, interethnic, classless community of believers (*ummah*).³⁰

The building cost almost £45,000. The purchasers were five of current Eastbourne Mosque Committee: a local Iranian woman (possibly Shi'i?), a Palestinian man, and other local Mauritian and Bangladeshi Muslims. The Iranian woman and Palestinian man made the largest financial donations. The female Iranian Muslim donated approximately £12,000 herself, and the Palestinian man a similar sum. The Iranian woman neither visits the mosque nor is involved in the running of it.

McLoughlin reports that some religious leaders are seen by the British government, and Hermon Ouseley (2001), as, directly or indirectly advocates of "self-segregation."³¹ At Eastbourne this is not a problem. A well-educated and multilingual Moroccan-born imam is popular with the congregation at the mosque. In 2003 he replaced an Algerian imam that the EICC committee felt lacked the communication skills necessary for the job. The new imam runs a grocery shop in the Seaside district of the town close to the mosque, and occasionally translates Arabic into French/English. He is approachable and open to discuss many topics, and is a regular speaker at the annual Faith Forum in the town, and at workshops about Islam elsewhere in the United Kingdom. His teenage years spent in France mean that he understands European society and, importantly, the lived reality of European Muslims.

On Thursday nights men gather to listen to the imam discuss *tafseer* and question him about Islamic themes;³² Saturday morning Arabic, Qur'anic, and Islamic tuition by the imam are available for Muslim children. Advice and counselling is also offered at the mosque—³³ after prayers individuals can be seen waiting their turn to speak privately with the imam and members of the EICC in the small office. Cesari says at such moments mosques become a "community centre . . . where pre-existing networks of solidarity come together and where various rituals that mark Islamic family life—marriages, circumcision, death—take place."³⁴

30 Semi-structured interview with Respondents 7 and 8, 49 and 50, August 2013. Author's personal archive.

31 McLoughlin, "Mosques and the Public Space", p. 1045.

32 *Hadith* is the collection of traditions containing the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad's daily practice (*Sunna*). *Tafseer* means the transliteration or exegesis of the *Qur'an*.

33 Darr, N, *Muslim Directory* (London: MDUK Media Ltd, 2012), p. 345.

34 Cesari, "Mosque Conflicts in European Cities: Introduction", pp. 1017-8.

Mosque Politics

Across Europe reports Cesari “the Islamicisation of urban space,” in varying degrees, is problematic; refusal by a local municipality might be “implicit or explicit”—often, the outcome will lead to dialogue.³⁵ Indeed Eastbourne’s mosque project mirrors the challenges experienced by Muslims living in contemporary United Kingdom and Europe—in terms of inconvenience to neighbours and design/cultural incompatibility. At the local and national level, issues related to the “war on terrorism” and Islamophobia feed negative perceptions about Muslims and their mosques.³⁶ So, what does this mean for my case study? Well, six years passed between the first application in 2004 to redevelop the mosque and the final acceptance of the redevelopment of the mosque site in 2010—and eight years passed before confirmation that the all planning criteria were met (December 2012). To examine the slow process I have chosen three topics which highlight conflict and solidarity between Muslims, and support and resistance from the local council and town: mosque plans, public reactions to the council’s autumn 2010 consultation, and management issues.

Mosque Plans

In 2004, nearly ten years after the purchase of the Ashford Road site in 1995, and because of the steady growth in the number of local worshippers, the EICC Committee made an application to the Eastbourne Council for planning permission to replace the single storey site with a new two-storey mosque—the first purpose-built mosque on the Sussex coast. There were eighteen letters of objection from residents, a letter of support, and two petitions of support with 348 and nineteen signatures respectively. An Eastbourne Council planning committee document (8 March 2005) says it acknowledges: “The expanding needs of Eastbourne’s Muslim community have outgrown the existing Cultural Centre . . . used on occasions by 150 people,”³⁷ yet, the council refused the application, because its “more intensive use” would have an “adverse impact on the immediate locality to the detriment of the amenity of local residents.” “Noise” and “disturbance” were cited as reasons to decline the application in line with

35 Cesari, “Mosque Conflicts in European Cities: Introduction”, p. 1018.

36 Ibid., p. 1019.

37 Eastbourne Borough Council Planning Committee, *Report of the Head of Planning-Planning Manager* (Eastbourne: Eastbourne Borough Council, 8 March 2005), pp. 8-10.

Policy Ho20 of the Eastbourne Borough Plan 2001-2011. The language of rejection used by Eastbourne Council matches Gale's 2005 study of Birmingham Council, rejection "constitutes the public interest."³⁸

In 2006 the EICC applied once again to redevelop the site. But this time the EICC Committee voluntarily withdraw their application on 21 April 2006.³⁹ Once again the Eastbourne Council Planning Committee document (25 April 2006) accepted the idea that a redeveloped two-storey mosque, used "... on occasions by 135 people, would allow a qualitative improvement in the facilities"—nonetheless the application was refused on the grounds of "disturbance" and "inconvenience" that would be "... detrimental to the amenities of local residents."⁴⁰ In addition, in response to public notification of the application the council received thirteen letters of objection, and a petition containing 25 signatures objecting to the redevelopment.⁴¹

However, due to an increasing number of Muslim residents in the town, and in light of increased number of mosques opening in Britain and Europe, it inevitably meant a further building application was forthcoming. In addition, the increasing number of worshippers meant that more funds were available.

A third application was made in September 2010. The autumn 2010 consultation process is closely examined below (Public Reactions)—in following I will describe here the application of September 2010 incorporating a three-storey mosque. Unlike the 2004 and 2006 applications this one was successful. But why? The executive summary of the Report of the Head of Planning, EBC (30 November 2010) explains:

There are no policy objections to the proposed development and it is considered that the replacement three storey mosque by reason of its siting, height, scale, massing and appearance will have no harmful effects on the occupiers of surrounding residential properties and will have no detrimental impact on the visual amenities of the locality. In addition, it is considered that the proposal provides adequate on-site parking to serve the development and will have no detrimental impact on the

38 Gale, "Representing the City", pp. 1169, 1173.

39 Eastbourne Borough Council Planning Committee, *Report of the Head of Planning—List of Planning Applications for Consideration*, 2010, p. 15.

40 Eastbourne Borough Council Planning Committee, *Report of the Planning Manager* (Eastbourne: Eastbourne Borough Council: 25 April 2006), pp. 22, 28.

41 Ibid., p. 25.

highway network. It is therefore considered that the proposed development is acceptable.⁴²

Henceforth I will refer to the autumn 2010 application as Plan A. And if Plan A goes ahead the existing mosque would be demolished and rebuilt, adding six metres in length and increasing the floor space available. The maximum height allowed for the new roof of the three-storey mosque would be 9.5 metres or "... (10.4 metres to the top of the proposed minaret) which is comparable to a two storey building with a pitched roof."⁴³ Under Plan A, the proposed ground layout will contain the entrance, foyer, main prayer hall, rest room, toilets, ablution room, and storage and refuse space. The first floor will house a balcony overlooking the main prayer hall, the imam's office, rest room, a second office, and the women's prayer hall. The second floor will house a library and classroom. The exterior of the new mosque would be built of yellow facing brick and "... would comprise a number of flat roofs."⁴⁴

The Design Review Panel at the mosque says it chose a "contemporary architectural design that seeks to express the cultural nature of the building sometimes with discreet reference to lesser known features that are associated with Islamic design."⁴⁵ A middle way between traditional-Islamic and local building style was chosen. In contrast to mosque building in the Netherlands, which saw mosque design influenced by whichever ethnic community was constructing it,⁴⁶ the Eastbourne plan has no particular ethnic style. Furthermore, the choice of design has symbolic significance, Eric Roose reviewing Dutch and international studies, says, traditional mosque design might be perceived as "a tendency towards self-segregation," while contemporary design is viewed as "modern, liberal."⁴⁷

In actual fact there will be no minaret as such in the new Eastbourne mosque; rather, the plan includes a parapet that will represent a symbolic minaret.⁴⁸ An EICC Committee told me: "In our design submitted to the council there is no minaret, we decided this was the best option in consideration

42 Eastbourne Borough Council Planning Committee, *Report of the Head of Planning—List of Planning Applications for Consideration*, 2010, pp. 13-4.

43 Ibid., p. 15.

44 Ibid., p. 16.

45 Ibid., p. 35.

46 Roose, Eric, *The Architectural Representation of Islam: Muslim-Commissioned Mosque Design in the Netherlands*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), p. 10.

47 Roose, *The Architectural Representation of Islam*, p. 16.

48 See "New Mosque Plans", *Eastbourne Mosque*, 23 January 2011. Available at www.eastbourmosque.com/page/2/, accessed 14 December 2013.

of planning regulations and minaret issues, nationally. But some members [of the committee] wished for one, pity really.”⁴⁹ Gale says this compromise reflects a “controlled landscape aesthetic.”⁵⁰ Equally it reflects, in the words of one Birmingham Muslim, the necessity for compromise: “... as a matter of religious obligation.”⁵¹

Eastbourne Council, seeking to placate the neighbours of the mosque, offered to help to find a suitable replacement mosque site elsewhere in the town, but Respondent 1 said “the two options suggested were away from the town centre, and offered little extra prayer space internally”—a point noted by Gale concerning the reluctance of Birmingham Council to grant permission for mosques in residential environments.⁵²

To smooth the path of development a degree of trust had to be fostered between the EICC Committee, Eastbourne Council, and immediate residents. In response of the government’s community cohesion policy, Respondent 1, a chairperson of the EICC Committee said, “To help foster common understanding some of us have joined the Eastbourne Faith Forum⁵³ and the Police Forum... “we are trying to create confidence between us and the town.”⁵⁴ Liberal Party councillor (Langney district) Harun Miah is an example of a local Muslim trying to bridge the interests of the town and those of the town’s practicing Muslims.

The Report of the Head of Planning of November 2010 says attendance at the Eastbourne Mosque: “even during peak times, for instance, Friday prayers and ramadan, less than 100 attendees visited the mosque at one time.”⁵⁵ It goes on to say that the proposed redevelopment will cater for a peak attendance of “100 people at prayers.” Planning for car-parking is for 90 to 97 visitors. In order to curb the noise and traffic disturbance at the mosque caused by large numbers of people travelling to-and-fro, the EICC Committee and Eastbourne Council recommend that an “... upper limit of 100 people for any one event is

49 Semi-structured interview with EICC Committee member, January 2013. Author’s personal archive.

50 Gale, “Representing the City”, p. 1165.

51 Ibid., p. 1166.

52 Ibid., p. 1174.

53 Eastbourne Borough Council, “Faith Forum”. Available at www.eastbourne.gov.uk/community/religions-faiths-beliefs/faiths-forum/, accessed 14 June 2013.

54 Unstructured interview with Respondent 1, 11 Tuesday June 2013. Author’s personal archive.

55 Eastbourne Borough Council Planning Committee, *Report of the Head of Planning—List of Planning Applications for Consideration*, 2010, p. 19.

included as a condition and in a legal agreement.”⁵⁶ The EICC Committee say that in the eighteen months up to the final decision by the council planning committee, that attendance at the Eastbourne Mosque was 75 to 90 worshippers at *Jum’a* prayer and at the two ‘id holiday celebration prayers.⁵⁷ In fact, the report says that a “few years ago” the number had been approximately 135 worshippers. The reason given for this decrease is the opening of two new local Muslim prayer spaces, one at a converted residential home at Bexhill-on-Sea, and the other a temporary collective prayer space at Seaford public community centre.⁵⁸

From my intermittent observations taken over several years at the prayer sessions it is true that small numbers are evident at most of the five Muslim prayers from Sunday to Thursday, generally consisting of perhaps 10 or more people. And this is common to mosques in Europe.⁵⁹ However, I would suggest that both the EICC and Eastbourne Council are using conservative figures for the attendance at the *Jum’a* prayers. In fact two successive *Jum’a* prayers with separate imams at each session are required to cater to demand.

The EICC Committee has no wealthy “Middle-Eastern” patron to help pay for the Eastbourne building project. Unlike some municipal authorities in France which assist with building costs,⁶⁰ in the United Kingdom there is no support from the state. Consequently fundraising is active and financing originates from numerous local sources. For example, donation buckets are circulated around the congregation during the *Jum’a* prayer. Private donations of varying amounts are gifted by worshippers. The EICC Committee publicises the donations it receives and has banked. If Plan A goes ahead, the projected total cost in 2013 was nearly £600,000 or more, and by the summer of 2013 almost £300,000 had been raised by the collective efforts of Eastbourne Muslims.⁶¹ The sum raised thus far is handwritten on the whiteboard situated on one of the inner walls of the mosque (by November 2012 the satellite television broadcasts had raised nearly £18,831).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Cesari, “Mosque Conflicts in European Cities: Introduction”, p. 1018.

⁶⁰ Maussen, *Constructing Mosques*, p. 157.

⁶¹ Observations made by the author, 1 July to 31 August 2012. Author’s personal archive.

Public Reactions

In analysing the response to the autumn 2010 application I highlight three sets of voices: supportive, oppositional, and extreme right-wing. The first two represent neighbourhood and local voices, while the third is ideological and anti-Islamisation.

To a large extent the supportive voices for the mosque redevelopment at the Eastbourne Mosque emanate from the Muslim community, "Other faith leaders are also supporting the plans,"⁶² and an unknown proportion of the general public. In a similar fashion to a mosque building project at Marseilles between 2000 and 2001 which "did not provoke a great polemic" in the city,⁶³ the Eastbourne project was not a major talking point locally in 2010. As we will see, those who objected to the mosque plan were some immediate neighbours and external actors. The redevelopment application of the September 2010 was made public through the *Eastbourne Herald* newspaper, public notices close to the mosque, and through letters sent to homes near to the mosque. In response

... 61 letters/emails and two petitions containing 401 signatures in support of the application and 40 letters/emails of objection have been received. Two of the people who have written in support of the application live in the immediate vicinity of the site (Ashford Square and Ashford Road) and several live in the town centre (Cavendish Place, South Street, Willowfield Square etc.). The remainder are from residents all over the town as well as from outside Eastbourne. Nearly all of the objections are from residents in the immediate vicinity of the site and other roads nearby.⁶⁴

The fostering of dialogue between the mosque and the neighbouring non-Muslim locals in the vicinity of the mosque requires competent communicators. The Eastbourne Mosque Committee says that they "support the formation of a Resident's Association for the area and will make space available in the replacement mosque to hold regular meetings."⁶⁵

62 Staff reporter, "Eastbourne Mosque plans submitted to council", *Eastbourne Herald*, (Friday 1 October 2010). Available at www.eastbourneherald.co.uk/news/local-news/Eastbourne-mosque-plans-submitted-to-council-1-1593796, accessed 1 January 2013.

63 Maussen, *Constructing Mosques*, p. 158.

64 Eastbourne Borough Council, Report of the Head of Planning—List of Planning Applications for Consideration Report, 2010, p. 23.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Oppositional voices raised a range of frank questions with regards to the redevelopment plan; these were aired by local residents at a public meeting in the Eastbourne Town Hall (13 September 2010).⁶⁶ Approximately 100 people attended the event and numerous questions were addressed about planning policy associated with the site, the effect of the redevelopment on the local environment, and traffic impact.

Due to the extensive range of comments in opposition we can only highlight a selection of the criticisms and suggestions raised. Opposition to the proposed mosque development notes that:

- A three storey building should not be allowed, it would dwarf the houses and block out the light
- If a large building is needed why not move to an industrial site on the edge of town?
- The development is too overwhelming for the area
- Parking at present causes access problems to and through Ashford Square, Bourne Street and Ashford Road
- There are also concerns about noise, drainage, security, and loss of privacy to residents in the immediate area.⁶⁷

The oppositional voices and their concerns have further points to note. Indeed, such public concerns are to be expected from any project which would significantly redevelop a religious space beside residential homes. From the author's observations of Eastbourne in the last 30 years or more, it would be fair to say that in most cases churches have been reduced in number in the town, with several either demolished or converted into flats. This is part of the general secularisation and de-Christianisation of the United Kingdom. The redevelopment of the Eastbourne Mosque must for this reason come as a surprise to some local citizens as it does not follow the trend, with the exception of some evangelical Christian churches.⁶⁸

The above discourse by all parties, both the supporters and oppositional voices, has been undertaken in a civil and democratic manner true to British-European values. One feels that the communication between the mosque community and the wider non-Muslim community will continue and perhaps

66 Ibid., p. 26.

67 Ibid., pp. 25-6.

68 Observations made by the author living in Eastbourne town for extended periods between 1972 and 1995. Author's personal archive.

neither party will be truly content with the outcome, but I suspect a reasonable and working accommodation will be and should be reached.

Indeed, the *Eastbourne Herald* article titled “Mosque plans are given the green light” (published 3 December 2010) led with: “Islamic leaders are jubilant after controversial plans to build a new mosque . . . were given the go ahead. . .,” furthermore, during a meeting of protesters at the Town Hall a woman was removed by security staff after repeatedly shouting the neighbourhood would “resemble Islamabad.” In contrast, Martin Relf, chair of Churches Together in Eastbourne disagreed, and said the plan is acceptable.⁶⁹

However, a third group, the political extreme right-wing, including neo-fascists and neo-Nazis, have shown some interest in the redevelopment of the site. They use the language of “culture,” “rights,” “identity,” “patriotism” and a particular notion of Britishness, by which they often mean “white Britishness.” The British and European political extreme-right disagrees with multiculturalism, Muslim immigration, and progressive and capitalist-globalist socio-cultural change.

In what follows we have to distinguish between everyday casual racial prejudice, institutional racial prejudice, and intercultural misunderstanding.⁷⁰ Intercultural misunderstanding is a genuine experience for all people uneducated in or unfamiliar with other ethnic cultures living in the same country or town as themselves. What follows is not intercultural misunderstanding, but crude nationalist rhetorical propaganda. Though not addressing the extreme right, Gale describes how Muslims and their mosques are viewed by some as “intrusive,” “a negative symbol of the Muslim presence” and “foreign.”⁷¹ For example, in Eastbourne, the British National Party (BNP) launched a new campaign (4 May 2010) under local organiser Peter Falon to “halt the building of a mosque, complete with minaret, in that town . . . which will confront all train visitors to the Victorian seaside resort.” Furthermore, the BNP make the claim that they support the Ashford Square Resident’s Association, and in

69 Staff reporter, “Mosque plans are given the green light”, *Eastbourne Herald* (Friday 3 December 2010). Available at www.eastbourneherald.co.uk/news/local-news/mosque-plans-are-given-the-green-light-1-1759846, accessed 01 January 2013.

70 See The *Eastbourne Herald* published the story “Dad Tells Muslims: You Will Be Killed” (28 March 2003) detailing the nuisance phone-calls made by a male 37 year old Eastbourne resident to the Eastbourne Mosque; he swore down the phone to members of the mosque and racially abused them, saying: “You will be blown up and killed.” Source: Staff Reporter, “Dad Tells Muslims: You Will Be Killed”, *Eastbourne Herald*. Available at www.eastbourneherald.co.uk/news/local-news/dad-tells-muslims-you-will-be-killed-1-1413006, accessed 28 November 2012.

71 Gale, “Representing the City”, p. 1168.

reference to the mosque redevelopment says: “The Ashford Square Resident’s Association is totally independent of the British National Party but we have been working together in order to try and prevent this from happening.” Nick Prince (Southeast BNP deputy general circa 2010) says:

The development which will replace the existing Islamic centre, will most certainly deface what one presumes is a genteel Victorian seaside resort. Eastbourne’s image consists of a fantastic, sought after and well-loved tourist resort and not that of a multicultural society, and it is the traditional values of Eastbourne that we wish to keep.⁷²

A second political group campaigning against the Eastbourne Mosque redevelopment is the right-wing anti-Islamic organisation English Defence League (EDL). Writing in April 2011, Sam Failes explains that the EDL, unknown in Eastbourne previously, are trying to mobilise in the town and in Hastings—their first appearance locally occurred circa November 2010. The anti-neo-fascist and anti-neo-Nazi group Unite Against Fascism (UAF) has been active in resisting the BNP at general elections in East Sussex since 2005 and resists the mobilisation of the EDL. An Eastbourne mosque representative Taleb Durgahee said:

The EDL is of no concern to us. We are committed to pray in peace and harmony. In fact the emergence of this kind of organisation is an opportunity for excellence in ensuring that we show what a good Muslim is.⁷³

Following the imam’s Friday sermon (*khutba*) on 1 December 2012 an EICC Committee member announced to the worshippers that Eastbourne Council had written to say they were satisfied that all of the planning criteria for the redevelopment of the mosque had been met. The building of the new mosque is due to start in summer 2015.

72 British National Party, “Eastbourne B.N.P. Campaigns against New Mosque Development”, (updated 12 May 2010). Available at www.bnp.org.uk/news/eastbourne-bnp-campaigns-against-new-mosque-development, accessed 28 November 2012; see also British National Party, “British National Party Campaigns against New Mosque Development”, (updated 4 May 2010). Available at www.bnp7.net/opera-mobile.html?page=37&theme=4, accessed 28 November 2012.

73 Sam Failes, “E.D.L. Sets up Fort in Sunshine Coast”, Overtime—University of Brighton Sports Journalists (updated 21 April 2011) www.overtimeonline.co.uk/?p=2931, accessed 28 November 2012.

Management Issues

Today a group of the original purchasers of the mosque, men from Mauritius and Bangladesh, form the Eastbourne Islamic Cultural Centre Trust (EICCT). The trust manages the financial business of the mosque. In reality the members of the EICCT are also the same members of the EICC Committee; their authority was not challenged by Eastbourne's mosque congregation until late 2012. Plan B is the alternative vision advocated by local Muslims and non-EICC Committee members—it is a less costly redevelopment strategy for the Eastbourne Mosque. The story which follows is in some ways a smaller version of the Marseilles mosque building dispute circa 2001 and 2003. Maussen says of the French case, it "... points to the struggles over interests and power between two factions of Muslim organisations... seeking to gain control over the Regional Muslim Council and the mosque project."⁷⁴

Starting in late 2012 and early 2013 the Eastbourne Plan B team began lobbying for a less expensive, architecturally simpler option, one that would create more space for worshippers. Respondents 5 and 6 explained:

We have suggested an alternative plan because of the economic recession, and in light of the fact that some of the neighbours living close by to our mosque are recipients of Food Aid. We feel that Plan B is a moral project, costing less than £400,000.⁷⁵

A document requesting signatures of support for Plan B was circulated in March 2013 amongst worshippers. At a mosque meeting held on the 17 March 2013 the Plan B group lobbied for their vision.

However, relations between some of the EICC Committee members and Plan B supporters became acrimonious. In May 2013 the Plan B group called for regular elections for all EICC Committee positions and for a new mosque constitution (the existing one was written in 1995).⁷⁶ An action group was formed in August 2013 to implement this agenda and to organise an election in November 2013. So, in December 2013 two mosque committees operated, and both claimed to represent the worshippers. A similar dilemma has been investigated by Maussen at Marseilles: "... the competition between two factions

⁷⁴ Maussen, *Constructing Mosques*, p. 166.

⁷⁵ Semi-structured interview with Respondent 5, 12 Friday April 2013. Author's personal archive.

⁷⁶ Semi-structured interview with Respondents 5 and 6, 1 Saturday June 2013. Author's personal archive.

was linked to diverging understandings of the mosque as a symbol and on the function of the Islamic centre.”⁷⁷ In the Eastbourne case, Plan B supporters wanted elections, a space for Muslim women and teenagers to participate, and regular gatherings with the neighbours and town. For them, ornate architecture was less important than symbolic and actual functions of the mosque: an Islamic place and community outreach. Plan A supporters I interviewed agreed with these sentiments, however, Plan B supporters enthusiastically endorsed them.

The internal debate generated by Plan A and Plan B is a sign of a democratic debate amongst the Muslims at Eastbourne Mosque, despite it creating internal conflict. The Charity Commission was contacted by the organisers of Plan B and a complaint lodged, and legal advice paid for by both parties. Accusations of *fitna* (chaos) were traded between the two parties. Respondent 1, an EICC Committee member, says

In consideration of Plans A and B we need to show responsibility for the mosque and in our relations with the wider local community and have a balanced approach, and not be interested in personal consolidation or legacy.⁷⁸

Respondent 1 spoke of “uniting” the Muslim community at the new mosque—in much the same way Maussen reports some community elders did at Marseilles.⁷⁹

To resolve the conflict, one original purchaser (Respondent 17), a Palestinian, was contacted and invited to participate in a resolution between the two parties. Upon his arrival in late 2013, a series of well-attended meetings was organised at the mosque. All points of view were openly discussed, and twice a senior police officer sat in attendance as a neutral observer. The dialogue started in late 2013 and lasted until early 2014. Finally, Respondent 17 recommended that all legal actions against the Plan A group be dropped and an in-house consultative approach adopted. Plan B supporters, disappointed that Respondent 17 did not encourage them to pursue legal action, conceded and withdraw their complaint. Plan A is now the only project at the mosque. Respondent 1 (EICC member) says

⁷⁷ Maussen, *Constructing Mosques*, p. 167.

⁷⁸ Semi-structured interview with Respondent 1, 11 Tuesday June 2013. Author's personal archive.

⁷⁹ Maussen, *Constructing Mosques*, p. 169.

We have listened to the ideas of the alternative mosque redevelopment plan [Plan B] and have reduced the final cost of the redevelopment to £500,000 and the removed a number of costly artistic architectural features. We understand and accept many people wanted more prayer space rather than internal decoration.⁸⁰

It took several months, Ramadan of 2014, and two 'id holidays, before the atmosphere in the mosque returned to its pre-conflict ambiance. Indeed, months after the in-house resolution, Respondent 2 (EICCT member) complained "Money donations from worshippers have ceased, if we want to go ahead with the building we really need to get back to the level we had before [the conflict]." ⁸¹ My observations of worshippers note that in the winter of 2014 donations have picked up, and no-one talks about Plan B anymore.⁸²

In the words of Maussen, events in Marseilles show two groups separated by "ethnic, generational and denominational differences:"⁸³ a first generation North African working class community and a younger, educated, multicultural Muslim body. At Eastbourne there is no denominational problem, and no obvious ethnic divide between supporters of Plan A and Plan B. On one hand, the EICC Committee constitute first generation Bengalis and Mauritian businessmen—the *babas* (old men). The literature reports that control by the elders at mosques is common in the United Kingdom.⁸⁴ On the other hand, Plan B supporters were numerically larger, multicultural, young and old, and from all social groups and classes.

How can we explain the motivations of EICC members? In my view, Ihsan Limon provides a plausible interpretation of politics and mosque building, (including choice of mosque style) which reflects the mentality of the European diaspora. In particular, first generation immigrants seek to "secure their own identity" having experienced a "crisis of identity" on arrival in Europe and having faced "discrimination, marginalization and spatial segregation" from the host society. They turn to religion and, those with access to capital, mosque building.⁸⁵ But it does not stop here—control of the mosque building

80 Unstructured interview with Respondent 1, August 2014. Author's personal archive.

81 Unstructured interview with Respondent 2, August 2014. Author's personal archive.

82 Observations made by the author visiting the site between June 2014 and January 2015. Author's personal archive.

83 Maussen, *Constructing Mosques*, p. 166.

84 McLoughlin, "Mosques and the Public Space", pp. 1059, 1061.

85 Limon, I.D., *Islamische Kulstätten des 20. Jahrhunderts im europäischen Raum*, Kaiserlautern: Dissertation, 2000, pp. 63-8, 125 cited in Roose, *The Architectural Representation of Islam*, pp. 13, 16, 18, 19.

project/committee becomes “political” and personalised. Their active care of the mosque management, cleaning and organisation gives them a deep sense of attachment to the mosque vis-à-vis the irregular worshipper. In this milieu, and because of ineffective communication, mosque leadership is contested.

One consequence of the internal conflict, if indirect, is the appointment onto the EICC Committee of its first female member to head the women’s section.⁸⁶ Respondent 10 informed me that she had organised a number of events to assist with the integration of the town’s Muslim body and help local Muslim women. For example, by inviting local council dignitaries to ‘id parties, by booking a local swimming pool for women and young children only, by liaising with Eastbourne Council to help bring together the different ethnic groups living in Eastbourne, by inviting local civic services and dignitaries to speak at Muslim events held at Eastbourne Town Hall and local communities, and by promoting local civic services to local Muslim families. The women I interviewed said the local mosque management should be proactive in helping to address the social problems within their community. But they complained that this was not the case,⁸⁷ a problem common within British mosques.⁸⁸ A second development was the creation by Respondent 5 of an independent Muslim body in 2014, the Islamic Circle Discussion Forum of Eastbourne: “We represent an alternative voice to the mosque, explaining Islam to local Christians and non-Muslims, in these times when Islam and Muslims are negatively portrayed in the media.”⁸⁹ In a small way this poses an intellectual challenge to the local mosque committee as the representative of Muslims in the town—a function held by committees across the United Kingdom.⁹⁰

Conclusion

This introductory paper introduces the story of British Muslims and their mosque in a small seaside town in East Sussex—a place associated with elderly retirement and seaside holidays. What is unique about my study is that it provides an alternate perspective and adds another dimension to the study of European Muslims. My small town case-study shows ethnic heterogeneity amongst worshippers at one mosque, dispersed residential patterns of the

86 Email interview with Respondent 10, February–March 2014. Author’s personal archive.

87 Email interviews with Respondents 9, 10 and 11, March 2014. Author’s personal archive.

88 McLoughlin, “Mosques and the Public Space”, p. 1061.

89 Unstructured interview with Respondent 5, June 2014. Author’s personal archive.

90 McLoughlin, “Mosques and the Public Space”, p. 1048.

local Muslim community, intercultural mixing at local schools and colleges, intermarriage of Muslim men and women with white European converts, and that the neighbours of the mosque building are overwhelmingly non-Muslim. Commonalities found at Eastbourne and city mosques include: the community centre role of mosque sites through delivery of Islamic education and civic information, fluctuating mosque attendance numbers, self-funding of the rebuild, and the identification by first generation Muslims with the mosque as their cultural site within a foreign land.

In a comparative context I have found that some of the problems at the Eastbourne Mosque are similar to those found within many mosque communities of British and European large towns and cities, such as Bradford, Birmingham, and Marseilles. Similar problems relate to the control of mosque committees by first generation elders, the contestation between Muslim factions over the structure and nature of the mosque committee, the exclusion of second generation youths and young adults from community decision making, the marginalisation of Muslim women in terms of prayer space and participation in mosque management, the caution shown by council planners regarding mosque rebuilding, the need for the mosque committee to communicate better with neighbours and town, and the positive and negative reactions of neighbours, towns folk, churches, and political actors to mosque redevelopment.

Seaside towns and Muslims are an unexplored topic; future research might investigate the oral history of Muslims and non-Muslims to the opening, building and institutionalisation of mosques. Comparators might be Hastings, Bexhill, and Brighton. The notion of Muslims as a homogenous group needs to be questioned through investigation of social relations between Muslims who pray together, but come from different ethnic and class backgrounds. Analysis of potential ethnic clustering by Muslim men within town centre bedsits and cheaper flats requires further consideration in light of class and minimum wage issues. Furthermore a paper might question the idea of cities as the best option for multicultural living; in this case a paper might address religion, place, social change and "the good life." Such a paper might examine the strengths and weaknesses of life for minorities living in greener, low crime, slower paced small towns, and away from the job opportunities and crime of cities.

A significant proportion of the minority Muslim community will respond to social change through religion and traditional institutions (mosque buildings) as a means of helping them feel secure and true to their cultural heritage. But should we label this deliberate self-segregation? Does the process of building a mosque community inevitably lead to forms of self-segregation or communal self-absorption which hinders the collective good of the town? During

my fieldwork Muslims did not speak of deliberately excluding the town's non-Muslim population from the mosque. A future paper might ask members of the mosque community how internal and external actors, services and projects at the mosque assist in building civic society.

Is it possible that the Mosque politics discussed in this paper might diminish once first generation immigrants retire and are replaced by British and European born and educated mosque leaders? I think that the spontaneous, if unsuccessful attempt, by the supporters of Plan B shows a general desire amongst Muslims, regardless of age, class, or gender, to rethink mosque management dynamics in a fairer way. Indeed, Plan B supporters offer us a glimpse of how British Muslim consciousness might evolve; self-organised worshippers willing to interface with the civic bodies and people of the town in our time of global capitalism, Islamophobia and "war on terrorism." Factional mosque politics will only focus human capital into fruitless and often personalised internal conflict. Furthermore, my research found no evidence to prove that Muslims seek segregation. Rather, most of my interviewees seek to integrate as best as possible, despite institutional prejudice, a morally questionable foreign policy, and flawed social mobility mechanisms. However, upper-middle class Muslims are better positioned to access resources and integrate through social channels—and influence mosque building. Finally, though the mosque politics discussed in this paper addresses conflict, it might be that building a physical mosque structure proves less problematic than establishing meaningful and sustainable human relations between practising Muslims and the wider society.