

# The role of mosque in educating society: past and present

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## **Abstract:**

*The mosque is a place where the Muslims offer their prayers and perform their religious activities. The emergence of mosque for the Muslim community religiously connected with the fundamental beliefs of offering prayers, which is one of the basic pillars of the Islāmic values. The current study is based on the documentary and content analysis. The key objective of the study was to explore the role of mosque in the past and present era. It was investigated how mosque played its role in promoting social awareness, religious fervor, political cognizance, and cultural values in the past and present days. The findings of the study reveal that, in the past, the mosque played a vital role not only in promoting religious and spiritual education but also in developing cultural, ethical, social, and political awareness amongst masses. It also worked as platform to develop social reforms. However, unfortunately, the role of the mosque is reduced these days. Now-a-days, the mosque is just confined to a place for worship only. Therefore, in view of the findings of the study, the government is recommended to design effective policies to restore the previous role of the mosque that it played in the Islāmic history to educate the society in a well-planned manner.*

**Key Words:** Mosque, Functions, Religion, Past, Present

## **1- INTRODUCTION**

Almighty Allah granted multiple blessing to all human beings in the world and hereafter. It is great blessing that He has made every inch of the world for Muslims to worship wherever they wish to pray. They can worship at market, street, institution, park or any open area. One of the companions of the Holy Prophet *Jābir ibn ‘Abdullah* reported that, The Holy Prophet said, “*I have been granted five things which were not granted to any other prophet before me: and for me the earth has been made a mosque and a means of purification, therefore,*

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*any one of my Ummah can offer prayer whenever the time for prayers is due*".<sup>1</sup> According to *Al-Tirmadhī, al-Ṣalāh*, the prayers can be offered at any place except for the graveyards and filthy places such as washrooms and toilets.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is Muslims' belief that mosque is a great blessing for the whole Muslim community.

The first and foremost role of the mosque is to spread the Islāmic values amongst a Muslim community. The mosque always remained a significant and powerful source for enhancing community development, brotherhood, moralities, ethics, and character building among Muslims.<sup>3</sup> The mosque is not merely a place for worship but it is a sacred place where Muslims sit together and listen to the sermons of religious scholars in order to gain piousness and purify their spiritual, religious, moral, and ethical thoughts and beliefs. It is a place where Muslim leaders, religious scholars, distinguished preachers such as *Imāms, Khaṭēbs*, and *'Ulamās* promote religious and social beliefs of Muslim Ummah.<sup>4</sup> Adhān (the call for prayer) five times a day heard from the minarets of mosques reminds the Muslims for offering prayers and creates the habits of punctuality amongst the Muslims.<sup>5</sup> As regards the objective of the current study, the past and present role of mosque is discussed in order to highlight various aspects of a mosque in educating society. Therefore, a documentary analysis is made in connection with the current issue.

## **2. REVIEW LITERATURE**

The Muslims have a rich Islāmic history, which indicates that the mosque played its vital and fundamental role in educating the Muslim community and promoting cultural, religious and social awareness in the regime of *Haḍrat Muḥammad (ﷺ)* and his companions (رضي الله عنهم).<sup>6</sup> The mosque played its function as *Madrassā*, library, social institution, government and administrative office etcetera. With respect to different roles of mosque, a brief description is given as follows.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Bukhaari, Volume 1, Book, Hadith, 419, p. 111; Muslim, 810.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Tirmidhi, al-Salaah, 291.

<sup>3</sup> Qureshi, Muhammad Siddique. *The role of mosque in Islām*. Publishers United, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Zaimeche, Salah. "Education in Islām: The role of the mosque." *United Kingdom: Ahmed Salem* (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Siddiqui, Qirfiraz. "Usage of cellular phones to announce/notify timings of muslim prayers." U.S. Patent Application 10/788,614, filed June 23, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Snider, Nancy. "Mosque Education in Afghanistan." *The Muslim World* 58, no. 1 (1968): 24-35.

## 2.1 Mosque; a source of purification

The basic purpose of the construction of mosque in Islām is to generate ‘piety’ (*Taqwā*; fear of God) among the believers so that the *Tazkiyyah* (purification) should prevail within the society and this will distinguish between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. It means, the mosque is the place where Muslims practice and do good deeds only so that they become more beneficial for the humanity. Any act of disbelief, particularism and help of the enemies of Allah and his Messenger is not allowed. The following verses from the Holy Qur’ān verily elaborate the purpose of the mosque.

وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مَسْجِدًا ضِرَارًا وَكُفْرًا وَتَفَرِّقًا بَيْنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَإِرْصَادًا لِّمَنْ حَارَبَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ.  
وَلِيُخَلِّفُوا إِنْ أَرَدْنَا إِلَّا الْحُسْنَىٰ. وَاللَّهُ بِشَهَادَاتِهِمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ

And as for those who chose a place of worship out of opposition and disbelief, and in order to cause dissent among the believers, and as an outpost for those who warred against Allah and His messenger (Muḥammad ﷺ) aforetime, they will surely swear: We purposed naught save good. Allah beareth witness that they verily are liars.

The Holy Qur’ān further says:

لَا تَقُمْ فِيهِ أَبَدًا. لِمَسْجِدٍ أُسِّسَ عَلَى التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْ أَوَّلِ يَوْمٍ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَقُومَ فِيهِ. فِيهِ رَجُلٌ يُوَفِّيهِمْ أَنْ يَتَّطَهَّرُوا.  
وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَهِّرِينَ

Never stand (to pray) there. A place of worship which was found upon duty (to Allah) from the first day is more worthy that thou should stand (to pray) therein, wherein are men who love to purify themselves. Allah loveth the purifiers.<sup>7</sup>

The Holy Qur’ān says that the mosques are those places that are the sacred sources to purify the Muslims. Since it is necessary for the Muslims to purify themselves and clean their private parts with dust [i.e. to be considered as soap) and water from urine and stools, after answering the call of nature, before entering the Mosques, and Allah likes the clean people.

The concept of Imām (Leader of the Mosque) in Islām is very unique. The person who leads the prayers in a central mosque of a Muslim state basically he should be the leader of a nation and this method prevails at all stages of the country. As regards the traditional role of the Imām, he is supposed to lead prayers, conduct and supervise religious ceremonies and activities, provide the spiritual and religious guidance to the masses and deliver religious sermons to

<sup>7</sup> Holy Qur’ān, Sura At-Taubah 107-108; Translated by Pickthall, 1930.

preach the people.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the Muslims, in some cases, consult the Imām for the solution of their social, family or marital problems.<sup>9</sup> They revealed that the Imāms help in counseling the people who suffer from mental health.

## **2.2 Mosque for educational purpose**

Islāmic history presents that in early years of Islām, mosques were used as educational institutions for teaching and learning the Islāmic knowledge. Moreover, Holy Prophet (ﷺ) used to teach his companions in mosque for several years. Thousands of *Ṣaḥāba* (Companions) of Holy Prophet (ﷺ) got the religious education through informal but well-organized educational system. They used to repeat the Qur'ānic verses until they learn the verses by heart absolutely.<sup>10, 11</sup> Furthermore, 'Abdul-Hādī, *Zakariyya*<sup>12</sup> elaborated that mosques were not only used to impart the Qur'ānic knowledge, health, *Sharī'ah*, *Fiqh*, literature and language, but also used to impart the knowledge of other subjects like, medicine, physics, chemistry and engineering systematically. Additionally, *Al-Hassānī*<sup>13</sup> and *Tibāwī*, 'Abdul Laṭīf<sup>14</sup> state that in mosques education was given free of cost during early years of Islām. Learners used to stay in mosques to get the knowledge because timetable of teaching and learning activities was scheduled during prayer hours.

In addition, Makdisi, George<sup>15</sup> and Musallam, Basim<sup>16</sup> revealed that ancient institutions like Al-Qarawaiyyīn (oldest mosque-cum-educational institution in Fez Morocco), Al-Qayarwān (built during 670 to 680 by 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi' in Tunisia) and *Al-Azhar* were known as pioneer universities of Islāmic history. Moreover, Mudrassas were also considered for the Muslims as a great source of

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<sup>8</sup> Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck, and Adair T. Lummis. *Islāmic values in the United States: A comparative study*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1987.

<sup>9</sup> Ali, Osman M., Glen Milstein, and Peter M. Marzuk. "The Imām's role in meeting the counseling needs of Muslim communities in the United States." *Psychiatric services* 56, no. 2 (2005): 202-205.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Bukhari. *Ba'ab*, 8, 30, 35, 42.

<sup>11</sup> Cesari, Jocelyne, and Martin Nguyen. *Encyclopedia of Islām in the United States*. 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Abdel-Hady, Zakariyya. "The masjid, yesterday and today." (2010).

<sup>13</sup> Al-Hassani, Salim TS. *1001 inventions: Muslim heritage in our world*. Abdelrahman Aly Abounegm, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Tibawī, Abdul Latif. *Islāmic education: Its traditions and modernization into the Arab national systems*. London: Luzac, 1972.

<sup>15</sup> Makdisi, George. "The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islām and the Christian West with special reference to Scholasticism." (1990).

<sup>16</sup> Musallam, Basim. "The ordering of Muslim societies." *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islāmic World* (1996): 164-207.

Islāmic education and knowledge. So, Muslim scholars built the *Madrassās* rapidly in 614 Hijra/1217AD. Dodge, Bayard<sup>17</sup> presented that in early Islāmic age *Madrassās* were attached with mosques which indicates that Islāmic education was delivered by great scholars to educate the people. For the prevalence of Islām Jumma prayer sermon is known as a great source to deliver the religious knowledge to Muslim.

### 2.3 Mosques as library

*Aḥmad, Mirzā Ṭāhir*<sup>18</sup> and BenAicha, Hedi<sup>19</sup> elaborated that Muslim community assisted the mosque libraries to promote the religious, spiritual and moral knowledge and mosques played a very vital role to develop the Islāmic culture, society, civilization and all about every aspect of the human life. Furthermore, Meho, Lokmān I., and Mona A. Nsouli<sup>20</sup> added that mosques played the crucial role for developing the religious, spiritual and ethical society for the Muslims. Readers can find Thousands of books those were placed in the mosques but specifically in Jamia mosques for the people to give religious and social knowledge to the people. Muslim scholars and writers tried their level best to collect the number of books for the Muslims because they were very conscious to preserve the heritage and religious knowledge as assistance of Muslims to read. Sibai, Mohamed Makkī<sup>21</sup> explored that mosque libraries generally called Qur'ānic libraries, Maktabah and Khazain al-Makhtaba. According to geographical location mosques libraries may be classified into two categories or groups because grand and magnificent libraries were built in 93/711 in Spain. Mosque of Cordova of Spain is known oldest, splendid and glorious monument of Islāmic architecture of early years of Islām that contributed to promote religious education amongst the community.

In addition, Laugu, Nurdin<sup>22</sup> presented that mosque of Cordova situated in Spain was equipped with knowledgeable, good and unique books of every field. Mosque Qarawaiyyīn which was built in 245/859 and situated in the North Africa is also considered as most beautiful and fabulous mosque in the world. It is based

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<sup>17</sup> Dodge, Bayard. *Muslim education in medieval times*. Middle East Inst, 1962.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmad, Mirza Tahir. *Revelation, rationality, knowledge and truth*. Tilford, Surrey: Islām International Publications, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> BenAicha, Hedi. "Mosques as libraries in Islāmic Civilization, 700-1400 AD." *Journal of library history* (1986): 253-260.

<sup>20</sup> Meho, Lokman I., and Mona A. Nsouli, eds. *Libraries and information in the Arab world: An annotated bibliography*. Vol. 12. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Sibai, Mohamed Makki. *Mosque libraries: An historical study*. Mansell, 1987.

<sup>22</sup> Laugu, Nurdin. "The roles of mosque libraries through history." *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islāmic Studies* 45, no. 1 (2007): 91-118.

on three well known libraries such as library of Abu Yousuf, library of Abu Inān (scientific library) and the third one is library of Mansuriyah. All libraries have collection of useful and informative books from almost every field of life like mathematics, sociology and medicine and those were extensively used to impart the knowledge for the Muslim communities in all over the world.<sup>23</sup> Qayrawān and Zaytūna were built around 50/670 or 60/680 in Tunisia known as prominent mosques those contributed in the development of knowledge. Another mosque; namely, *Jāmia Shyaikh Ibrāhīm* situated in Alexandria has a great collection educational books from almost every field of education and life. Furthermore, Bano, Masooda, and Hilary Kalmbach<sup>24</sup> revealed that several mosques those are situated in Libya, Syria and Algeria have contributed a lot in the field of education.

Al-Khuli, Ali Muhammad al-Shadili<sup>25</sup> elaborated regarding this aspect, Arabian Peninsula also known for the magnificent mosque libraries. Mosque of Makkah called *Haram* was built in early days of the Islām and played a vital role to educate the people during early days of Islām. It has the well-established and excellent library and favorable place for the students and teachers. Haḍrat Muḥammad (ﷺ) and his companion used to sit in this mosque and learn the lessons from *Qur'ān*, *Hadith*, *Sunnah*, literature and law.

#### **2.4 Mosque as social institution**

In a Muslim community, mosque also contributed and played the role for social development and awareness among people. It has been considered as center for cultural, social as well as ritual feature of the life. According to Gibb, Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen, and Johannes Hendrik Kramers<sup>26</sup> mosque is the place where Muslims used to perform their religious events, cultural gatherings and social activities and Islamic festivals such as *'Eīd-ul-Fiṭr* and *'Eīd-ul-Adḥā*, Islamic new year, day of *'Āshūrah* (to remember the sacrifices of Muslims in *Karbalā*), *Nikkāḥ* ceremony besides the *Adḥān* (call for prayers).

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<sup>23</sup> Laugu, Nurdin. "The roles of mosque libraries through history." *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islāmic Studies* 45, no. 1 (2007): 91-118.

<sup>24</sup> Bano, Masooda, and Hilary Kalmbach. "Women, leadership, and mosques." *Changes in Contemporary Islāmic Authority. Leiden/Boston* (2012).

<sup>25</sup> Al-Khuli, Ali Muhammad al-Shadili. "Dawr al-Masajid al-Tarikhi fi al-Tahqif al-Ilmi." *Cairo: Wazarat al-Awqaf* (1961).

<sup>26</sup> Gibb, Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen, and Johannes Hendrik Kramers, eds. *Shorter encyclopedia of Islām*. Karachi: South Asian Publishers, 1981.

Furthermore, Haraty, Hayder Jawad Shakir, and Nangkula Utaberta<sup>27</sup> highlighted that in primitive times, the rulers used the mosque to listen the problems of people. In addition, *Mu'āwiyah* was the first caliph of Umayyad who mostly used to sit in mosque to have conversation with well-known expert; *Ibn Uthāl* in the field of Physics. Moreover, Riwayatanti, Nur Indah<sup>28</sup> explored that not only the place of social activities mosque was used as the place for medical treatment of people those injured during war. Ḥaḍrat ‘Āyeshā said that during battle trench (Khandak) Ḥaḍrat Sa’ad got injured and Ḥaḍrat Muḥammad ﷺ took him to the mosques for cure and care of him.<sup>29</sup> Some mosques like mosque *Sulṭān Ḥasan* was fully equipped with the medical experts (doctors). Muslim society used the mosques as courts, polyclinic and pharmacies as well. Shortly, mosques served the Muslim community without any discrimination of race, color, social classes and caste of people. An interesting research was carried out by Mateo, Marivi Pérez<sup>30</sup> who explored that some mosques were considered as the source to Islāmīc group therapy such as fight with the drug abusiveness, hopelessness, depression, miserable, dejection and loneliness. In addition, Kuppinger, Petra<sup>31</sup> elaborated that it is possible when the person spends lots of time in mosque and pray quietly.

## 2.5 Administrative and political role of mosque

According to Islāmīc theory, mosques were considered as the place for political activities. As the history of Islām presents that Holy Prophet used to sit and discuss the economic, social and political matters and issues of *Jihād* with his companions. Moreover, *Anīs ur Reḥmān, Moḥammad, and Ḥabīb M. Alshuwaikhat*<sup>32</sup> highlighted that generally; Muslims practiced to build the mosque

<sup>27</sup> Haraty, Hayder Jawad Shakir, and Nangkula Utaberta. "Contemporary Trends of Research and Writing on Mosques Design: Analysis of The Most Recent Publications." *International Journal of Engineering & Technology* 8, no. 1.9 (2019): 528-532.

<sup>28</sup> Riwayatanti, Nur Indah. "Mosque-Based Islāmīc Cooperative for Community Economic Development." *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research* 8 (2019): 196.

<sup>29</sup> Mokhtasir Al-Bukhari, 152

<sup>30</sup> Mateo, Marivi Pérez. "The Mosque as an Educational Space: Muslim Women and Religious Authority in 21st-Century Spain." *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019): 222.

<sup>31</sup> Kuppinger, Petra. "Informal Place-Making: Mosques, Muslims, and Urban Innovation in Germany." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Bottom-Up Urbanism*, pp. 149-162. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Anisurrahman, Mohammad, and Habib M. Alshuwaikhat. "Determining Sustainability Assessment Indicators for the Holy City of Makkah, Saudi Arabia." *Arabian Journal for Science and Engineering* (2019): 1-14.

after conquest and achieved any battle. According to Salamone, Frank A<sup>33</sup>, Muslims built a special room for their caliph in the mosque which created close relationships between mosque and caliph.

Therefore, all the judicial, economic, social and political issues were discussed in mosques and not only this Muslims used to meet the delegates from other countries in mosques to discuss the international affairs and other issues they used to sign the agreements as well. Furthermore, Hourani, Albert<sup>34</sup> elaborated that Holy Prophet (ﷺ) used to call the people in mosque for special announcement and declaration about any important issue. It was the common practice among rulers of Muslims so *Khalifās* used to call the people in mosque to address them. Trimingham, John Spencer<sup>35</sup> also highlighted that *Hadrat Abū Bakr* (رضي الله عنه) was the first *Khalīfa* of Islam and he was selected the *Khalīfa* in mosque and called his first meeting with people in mosque. *Abū Bakr* (رضي الله عنه) set the example for the other *Khalifās* to address the people in mosque for the successful time. Moreover, Abbasid and Ummayyad *Khalifās* made first speeches after their selection as *Khalīfa* in mosque and handled the administrative issues of the state. So, *Minber* (pulpit) was known as a sign of the authority for the states. So, it is concluded that regarding the pervious discussion, mosques were used for the multi-purposes in history of Islām like educating people and making decisions.

## **2.6 Role of Mosques at present**

During discussing the role of mosques in the Islāmīc history, it presented a role remarkable in every aspect, now the role of mosques will be discussed at present. Time has changed now and nowadays mosques are being used for worship and for the discussing educational affairs. Currently, the role of mosque in social and political affairs has being reduced. Moreover, administrative officers and rulers do not practice to sit in mosques and discuss the current issues of masses and governmental matters.

However, mosque in Muslims countries has limited role to play because the Ministry of Education has established the schools (for General education), *Madrasās* (for Qur'ānic education), colleges and universities for sciences and social sciences as well. They also have the institutions for the governmental matters. In addition, the role of mosque for resolving social issues has reduced

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<sup>33</sup> Salamone, Frank A. *Routledge encyclopedia of religious rites, rituals and festivals*. Routledge, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Hourani, Albert. "Islām and the Philosophers of History." *Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no. 3 (1967): 206-268.

<sup>35</sup> Trimingham, John Spencer. "A history of Islām in West Africa." (1962).



because ministry of social welfare is working to solve the issues not only this ministry of health and administration is also performing their tasks so mosques are not being used as hospital for the patients. Furthermore, countries have separate courts for the decisions so mosques are not being used as court these days.

Cetin, Murat<sup>36</sup> elaborated that the role of mosques as the educational library has declined because of many reasons, book reading habit among people is very rare these days, and if someone wants to read something, their educational institutes have separate library for the learners. Moreover, internet and media have provided these facilities for the readers as well. Besides, there are number of external factors, which reduced the role of mosque as library like Atalian and French troops internationally robbed and damaged so many libraries. Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, and Manuela Marín<sup>37</sup> explored that during Spanish's conquest in Tunisia in 980/1572 attackers robbed and damaged the number of books in *Zaytūna* mosque. Furthermore, Royal library of Alexandra was fired by the Roman general during Caesar's Civial war fought in 48 BC which was the great loss of history.<sup>38,39</sup> These are the major causes, which reduced the role of mosque in present. In addition, Qur'ān has clearly warned for such acts and conditions as follows:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ مَنَعَ مَسْجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ وَسُئِلَ فِي خَرَابِهَا. أُولَئِكَ مَا كَانَ لَهُمْ أَنْ يَدْخُلُوهَا إِلَّا خَائِفِينَ لَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ وَلَهُمْ فِي الآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

And who are more unjust than those who prevent the name of Allah from being mentioned in His mosques and strive toward their destruction. It is not for them to enter them except in fear. For them in this world is a disgrace and they will have a great punishment in the Hereafter.<sup>40</sup>

Contrarily, in such countries where Muslims are in minority mosques are being used for multipurpose functions. For the Muslim community, mosques are considered as the integral part because in some country's mosques are playing the

<sup>36</sup> Cetin, Murat. "Back to Future; Essence of Mosque Design and a New Generic Architectural Typology." *Lonaard Journal* 1, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>37</sup> Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, and Manuela Marín, eds. *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*. Vol. 12. Brill, 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Syme, Ronald. "History or Biography. the Case of tiberius Caesar." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* H. 4 (1974): 481-496.

<sup>39</sup> Thiem, Jon. "The great library of Alexandria burnt: Towards the history of a symbol." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 4 (1979): 507-526.

<sup>40</sup> Holy Qur'ān. Sura Baqarah:114

role of community centers. Cesari, Jocelyne<sup>41</sup> revealed that mosque play the role of bondage for the Muslim members and families to have the socialization and interaction in European countries. Hence the status of the mosque is effective in European countries more than the Muslim countries since it is considered as platform to perform the cultural and social issues.

### **3. Discussion and Conclusion**

The role of mosque in present and past gives a vivid picture of its various functions. The study indicates the national and international role of mosque. As the historical documents explored that mosques have played its vital role in Muslim history however, in present era, the mosques are playing very limited role. However, it is concluded that the role of the mosque varies from country to country. Mosques have played a significant role all over the world which cannot be neglected. It is the need of time to revive the role of mosques and equip them with new books, technologies and trained administrators. Imām of mosque should be empowered and educated that he may deliver the knowledge with confidence. The governments should play their role for the revival of mosque in this modern era.



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<sup>41</sup> Cesari, Jocelyne. "Mosque conflicts in European cities: Introduction." *Journal of ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 6 (2005): 1015-1024.