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## **Shifting religions and cultures in London's East End**

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Recent sociologies of religious community have variously explored the relationship between religious worship and race, class, cultural identity and diversity, often with a view to analysing the link between these categories and various forms of participation and openness (Edwards, 2008; Emerson and Smith, 2000; Emerson and Woo, 2007; Riemenschmitter and Madsen, 2009; Marti, 2009; Porter, 2010). Much of the focus of these works is on identity and attachment to particular religious movements; however, other studies also draw out a relationship between religious practice and the more material dimensions of urban life ranging from differential urban locations of diasporic communities to the gendered re-writing of private and public space (Beaumont and Backer, 2001; Eade and Garbin, 2006, 2007).

It is the assumption of Pinxten and Diktomis's (2009) book *When God Comes to Town*, that the patterns of association and attachment that held together the communities of worshippers in what they call the 'traditional' religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – will have been

radically destabilised by the unprecedented growth and diversity of the modern giant city. Their assumption is that these religions offered an explanation of the meaning of life and social organisation to their groups of believers and that they were able to do so effectively because they did so in a social context that was small (tribes, clans) and predominantly rural (Pinxten and Diktomis, 2009: ix-x). Given this assumption, they assume that these monotheistic religions must undoubtedly be experiencing significant transformation under what they call the modern urban predicament: do they still offer convincing accounts of the meaning of life or cultural practice; how do they survive the encounter with radical religious diversity, or the disintegration of the relationship between church and state? Does religious practice provide a specific social location where cultural specificity is preserved in an increasingly globalizing city? Is religious practice used to survive the encounter with *super-diversity* (Vertovec, 2007) in contemporary London? How does religion cope with increasing secularization across the different religions? \_ These were the questions which informed our research in the East End of London which is a particularly fascinating place to consider these questions, since religious diversity is nothing new as Kershen and Vaughan (in this volume) and others (McLeod, 1995) have shown. Clearly Pinxten and Diktomis's argument that the 'traditional religions' operated in a context that was small, rural and based around a link

between church and state is fundamentally problematic: it is difficult to comprehend the history of Islam and Christianity, which spread themselves across an entire globe of different cultures, nations and states, including cities large and small, persisting over many hundreds of years, on these terms. However, setting this aside, we think that this collection does raise an interesting question about the impact of urban expansion and transformation on traditional religious communities in the contemporary city. How do religious communities form and stabilise attachments to their worshippers in the context of the significant demographic, economic and social flux that Bauman (2003) calls liquid modernity? How do believers develop their religious attachments in the urban context and how do these attachments provide a sense of religious identification able to represent cultural specificities as well as ethnic origin and gender? This has been widely understudied.

The focus in *When God Comes to Town* tends to be on the rapidly urbanizing areas of the developing world. However, in our study in the East End of London we chose to take a slightly different route in order to explore a similar problematic. Instead of focusing on the new world, we focused on the fate of Christianity- and to a lesser extent, Islam- in the context of the transformation of the global cities of the old world, specifically London, under the impact of the significant demographic, economic and cultural transformation occasioned by increasing

urbanisation, immigration and de-industrialisation since the Second World War.

In order to assess the relationship between recent urban transformation in London and the religions ‘of the book’, we chose to focus on the East End which juxtaposes the City of London on the Eastern side, and the eastern part of the central London, which juxtaposes the City on its western side, essentially the E1 and EC1 postcode areas, which have been particularly affected by economic and demographic change. It is not that these areas face challenges or opportunities which are unique to them, but here the recent transformation of London is cast in its most stark and obvious form, with the de-population of large parts of central London, and the transformation of the East End under the impact of significant immigration, particularly from Bangladesh. These changes are well enough known to need no further elaboration here, so instead we will proceed to outline the more substantive methodological and theoretical assumptions that underpin the study.

Before focusing on Christianity, it is helpful to consider the wider religious context. For anyone familiar with the recent history of London, it is immediately obvious that the ‘challenge’ faced by each of the so-called ‘traditional’ religions in East London is quite different. Christianity and Judaism – both with considerable internal diversity-

were well established in East London long before the Second World War, religion having been a central factor in the migration experience for more than three centuries providing a focus for welfare, connection and community (Kershen, 2005). In early twentieth century East London the main challenges the [various](#) Christian and Jewish communities faced were generally to respond to the social transformation of the area, faced with the departure of large parts of the population from which they drew their congregations. Islam, on the other hand, was not a significant presence in the area before the 1970s, and as such the challenge for Islamic communities was in building from scratch and gaining the acceptance of an often sceptical wider public.

More generally, however, our research suggests that in many ways the challenge faced by all these communities was fundamentally the same: to build a religious community, or at least minister to the public, in a context where religious attendance and affiliation was in no way determined, and could not be taken for granted. Even in areas which appeared to have a ready-made demographic to draw on, there was no guarantee that those people would either continue or begin to attend any kind of religious service, nor was the particular location or kind of service they attended straightforwardly determined by geography, class or ethnicity. This observation is particularly important in the context of contemporary policy, which often treats ‘communities’ as given, stable

entities possessing attributes which are simply 'there' (Cantle, 2001;CIC, 2007; DCLG ,2008; Home Office,2001, 2005a,2005b). Our work on religious communities emphasised to us the extent to which taking 'communities' and their affiliations for granted is a mistake. Simply because the inhabitants of Bethnal Green are predominantly of Bangladeshi origin, and might even self-identify as Muslim, does not mean they will necessarily attend a mosque on a regular basis, and even if they do, it does not determine which mosque they actually go to and how they use religious practices to negotiate their presence in the area. In the modern, globalised, multicultural city there is simply too much diverse, easily accessible religion available for any religious group to take their worshippers for granted, or for there to be a straightforward map between location, identity and religious expression.

This is not to say that we see these different religious communities engaged in some kind of market-like competition for worshippers, or as necessarily engaged in a process analogous to marketing themselves, it is simply to acknowledge that if these communities are to fulfil what they regard as their religious mission they need to make an effort to construct an environment in which not only are the articles of the faith they practice appropriately enacted, but which also ensures that they are able to maintain and spread this faith to others and to provide for the spiritual needs of their worshippers. This generally involves generating a

sense of attachment between individuals and the communities of which they are intended to form and feel a part. Accordingly, given that we see the construction of religious communities as an essentially active and ongoing process of work, we turn our attention to the sets of practices employed by the principal actors in two of these communities- Christian and, more briefly Islamic, since we suggest that they operate similarly to Christian churches from a material/sociological point of view, to create and maintain attachment amongst their worshippers in the face of the transformations they perceived going on around them. For migrant churches given their particular significance in providing a platform for belonging and the maintenance of cultural identity, such attachments appear far easier to forge.

In order to assess the nature of the changes taking place, and the response of religious groups to them, we interviewed approximately 25 people representing the Christian and, in smaller numbers, the Islamic traditions. Due to constraints of time and access the East London Mosque and Ishaatul mosques- the former a very established well funded mosque, and the latter barely visible and located in an old warehouse- were our prime research sites in what is itself a very diverse religious community. (Figure 1 East London Mosque). But also, we chose to focus on the Christian community since there has been little research on this group specifically. The Jewish community has virtually disappeared

from the area, with migration to London suburbs further north and east. Within these broad categories, we interviewed people from a variety of different confessions, including from within the Christian Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists. We asked them about the communities they ministered to, what they sought to do in their ministry, what they saw as their mission, and how they felt their worshippers formed attachments to their communities.

From our interviews, from attendance at the various sites, and from collecting printed material relating to them, we identified three particular forms of practice used by these groups to establish a stable community. As will be evident, there is considerable overlap between these, and we divide them only for the purpose of analysis. The first, and most obvious, is what we might term the practices of worship: the precise nature and ethos of the religious service being enacted in the site in question. This fundamentally religious question is of importance to many, if not all, religious traditions, and yet below the level of the broadest religious distinctions between faiths, at the level of the denomination it does not seem to have been universally determining in terms of the rationale for membership of a particular community. The second set of practices we identified were the basic material and organisational practices: the nature of the buildings themselves, timings of the services, accessibility, and so on. Third, was the social dimension:

outreach activity and community interaction including communal meals, accommodation, home visits, and social activities. Different churches approached these elements in different, more or less distinctive ways.

Ultimately, we found that the mechanisms devised to practice faith, spread the word and form attachment between worshippers and their community, extended far beyond matters of identity or even religious belief: those religious groups that were able to assemble durable communities did so by forming an assemblage that was at once liturgical, material, organisational and social. It is evident from the homology between the different practices for building communities and generating attachment to them across the different denominations and faiths, that although there are considerable contextual differences, the different religious organisations deploy similar practices of community shaping.

### **Worship Practices**

The most obvious place to begin is with the element that most religious people would probably identify as the most fundamental: the practices of worship. Clearly people attend the religious site of their faith- be it churches, mosques or synagogues, and these most fundamental patterns of attachment are rarely transgressed, except in the notable instance of deliberate inter-faith interaction. It is equally unsurprising that there are

frequently strong mappings between particular ethnic or national groups and certain religious affiliations or modes of liturgical practice. For example, at both the Ishatul Mosque and the East London Mosque, the congregation were identified as largely Bangladeshi (interviews).

However, interviewees at both mosques noted that they also drew in people from other backgrounds. For example, our respondent at the East London Mosque noted that they drew in people from India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Somalia (interview).

This is an equally prominent feature in churches, which, because they use a variety of national languages, often not only give their services a national flavour, but frequently carry them out in the native language of that community as a way of catering for them directly. For example, at St Anne's Underwood Road, East of Brick Lane and north of the East London Mosque ( Figure 2 St Anne's ), a Portuguese and Brazilian community has taken over a church vacated by the Irish community which had largely left the area, catering for both local Portuguese residents and the Portuguese community across London. Likewise, St Peter's Italian Church in Clerkenwell was built to cater for the needs of poor immigrants, and it is argued that 'the popular identity of St Peter's still strikes those who take part in any of its religious services', part of an attempt to retain or reconstitute the feel of life in Italian villages decades ago (Stanca, 2001: 69). There was initially some

dispute about whether the church should cater for the Italian community alone, or for all Catholics in the area. The plan had originally been to open the church to all nationalities, however the first parish priest was determined that sermons should only be delivered in Italian. However, within a few years the church had broadened its remit to include confessions in English, Spanish, French and German, and the Polish community used the crypt as a chapel (Stanca, 2001: 85). Nonetheless, to this day the church delivers all but one of its masses in Italian (Stanca, 2001:89). There are also Vietnamese, German, Nigerian and Maltese churches in the area.

Beyond the ethnic dimension, several churches have developed a particularly distinctive approach to the liturgy. St Andrew's Anglican Church in Holborn is strongly Anglo-Catholic in orientation, something which is likely to attract and repel equal numbers of the Anglican community, but which might be expected to attract a loyal following amongst Anglicans of that particular persuasion. However, although one might expect this to be of fundamental import to worshippers, they seem on occasion to be more pragmatic about their affiliation or attendance. For example, the Church of Our Most Holy Redeemer in Exmouth Market, Clerkenwell, also represents a highly distinctive version of Anglo-Catholicism, which might be expected to deter many local people and attract those particularly attuned to Anglo-Catholicism from across

London. At Holy Redeemer, mass, as it is called, is drawn from the Roman Missal and their liturgy was described by the parish priest as being ‘entirely Roman Catholic’ (interview at Holy Redeemer). The church offers a low mass on weekdays and high mass on Sunday, during which mass is said facing east. There is lay assistance with deacons, altar servers carrying a thurible and crucifer, and morning and evening offices are read from the Roman Breviary

(<http://www.rainbowinformation.com/hr/worship.html> 16 March 2011).

However, despite this very strong visual and liturgical orientation, the parish priest, Father Paul, believes that the vast majority of the congregation, which numbers between 70 and 100 on a Sunday, is drawn from the local area and very few people travel significant distances to the church (interview). This might be explained by the fact that Anglo-Catholicism is an historic feature of the church, rather than a recent addition, so is unlikely to be off-putting to anyone who has lived in the area for any length of time. (Figure 3 Holy Redeemer Church).

Equally, there is no reason to assume that a distinctive approach to the liturgy necessarily leads to a large congregation, although it may lead to a loyal one. City Temple in Holborn describes itself as ‘a church for the 21st century with its roots in the historic church revolution of the 1500s’ with what it calls ‘a multicultural international congregation gathering people from all over London’, drawing in worshipers from six

continents ([www.city-temple.com/](http://www.city-temple.com/) 16 March 2011). Their ambitious and distinctive idea, according to the current pastor Rod Woods, is to blend the historic reform tradition with the renewal movements of the 1980s and 1990s, which emphasised the importance of a living encounter with God, transforming the character to a form closer to that of Christ (interview at City Temple). (Figure 4 City Temple).

In general, the pattern of worship we observed at City Temple is close to that of charismatic Christianity, with the singing of hymns being facilitated by the projection of the words on a large screen above the congregation, and an emotive evangelical sermon. In general the Sunday congregation numbered about 50 people, with slightly more present during the week. The congregation included individuals, couples and families and people of heterogeneous ethnic backgrounds. Although it was by no means the smallest congregation we encountered, there was some disjunction between the relatively small number of people and the vast building housing them, and some concern was expressed about the lack of numbers, with this being attributed to the lack of a resident population. The same might be said of nearby St Andrew's Holborn, which despite its Anglo-Catholic stance attracts about 30-40 people to its main Wednesday evening service, and about 20 people on Tuesday and Thursday lunchtimes, numbers which stand in marked contrast to their very popular Friday Forum, which is not a service, but a lecture and

discussion which attracts between 60 and 200 people. The relative success of churches whose liturgy caters for ethnically or nationally homogeneous [groups](#) as opposed to churches whose liturgy does not have such a focus, is perhaps best illustrated by the enormous success of the guest congregation which uses City Temple, the House of the Rock, a South African (largely Afrikaaner) charismatic church which regularly attracts 300 people and which has a database of 5000 members in London who attend at some point during the year.

Where churches have seen a dramatic decline another strategy to create a community is to entirely reconstruct the existing theological rationale. Thus, at St Paul's Shadwell Anglican church, in 2002 the decision was made by the Bishop of London and the Bishop of Stepney to adopt the controversial practice of church planting (Murray, 2001) and to bring a congregation from the Holy Trinity Brompton in West London to St Pauls, a practice seen by many as an extreme version of evangelical Christianity. Such objection to an imposed set of new practices and an imported congregation expressed by many locally, did not however deter the plant from Holy Trinity Brompton to St Pauls where the congregation grew from single figures to over 100 virtually overnight. Rather than reattaching a local community to the church, instead, the majority are white middle class young professionals from Bethnal Green and Hackney. One local vicar expressed his ambivalence

thus: ‘they sometimes behave as if no one has ever done these sorts of things before- they said ‘they are bringing light to the dark places of the East End’ that put people’s backs up. I have very mixed feelings about them. How much it could be called a local church is a moot point’.

Worship practices in East London reveal the way in which religious institutions such as Churches and Mosques negotiate diversity in London and cater for the local communities they are located in. Offering religious services in different languages such as Portuguese and Italian is an effective liturgical strategy that allows the selective inclusion of targeted believers across London. In a similar way, the specific approach to liturgy and theological rationale enacted by the Anglo-Catholic churches in the East End allows for a multicultural international congregation to gather people from all over London.

### **Material and Organisational Practices**

Worship practices and the national and ethnic components were by no means the only element that our informants understood to provide attachment to the religious community. Just as important, sometimes far more so, were more practical and material elements, like the nature of the building in which the services were held, or the times of the services themselves.

There is nothing novel about an attempt to engineer a sense of attachment through architecture, a strategy particularly evident in the six

churches designed by Hawksmoor between 1714 and 1729 which have built a strong collective identity around their shared history. St George in the East offers one illustration, hit by a bomb during the Blitz which destroyed the original interior, melting the bells and burning the galleries, it was rebuilt in 1964 in the form of a modern church interior constructed inside the existing walls. As the current vicar explained:

'We haven't changed [the](#) building since the 60s- it's very much protected and seen as part of its time. Some people think it is a scandal the interior was never recreated- but it was gloomy dark wood'. The local congregation interviewed expressed considerable pride in their building, while the church has a highly informative and extensive website, where the materiality of the church is central to its promotion and frequent references are made to the unique design of this, and the other Hawksmoor churches.

This strategy was by no means confined to renowned architectural sites. As might be expected from its Italian heritage, the Roman Catholic church of St Peter's, was constructed principally for the Italian settlers based in Clerkwenwell. The basilica style church was built in 1863 by the Irish architect John Miller-Bryson, based on a reworking of the Basilica of San Crisogono by Francesco Gualandi (Bertoncini, 2007: inside cover). From the 1880s the church appears to have been the origin for the Procession of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which it is claimed

was the first public manifestation of the Catholic faith since the Reformation (Bertoncini, 2007: 22) (Figure 5 St Peters)

Likewise the Anglo-Catholic Holy Redeemer on Exmouth Market very squarely locates itself in the Anglo-Catholic tradition in its material form and trappings, something evident not only in the robes of the parish priest, who wears Anglo-Catholic vestments and a *beretta*, but in the overall appearance of the church, designed in the Italianate style by John Dando Sedding according to the ideals of the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement, in marked contrast to the prevailing gothic tradition. The church was designed to stand as a beacon in the local community, drawing attention upwards from the poverty of the area below (interview at Holy Redeemer, <http://www.rainbowinformation.com/hr/histoty.html> 16 March 2011). On entry the church could easily be mistaken for a Roman Catholic church, given the nature of its statues, decoration and the presence of confessionals, as well as the advertising for rosary prayers. This point was put to the parish priest, who laughed and responded ‘Well, I would regard us as Catholic’ (interview at Holy Redeemer).

Another Roman Catholic church, the Guardian Angels on Mile End Road, links its distinctive liturgical orientation directly to its built form. The church itself was opened in 1903 on the site of a previous Catholic church built for the large local Irish community. The current

congregation includes not only Irish and English worshippers, but West Indians, Vietnamese, Poles and a wide variety of other migrants who have settled in the local area. What is most distinctive about the church, however, is its following of the Neocatechumenate path, following the stages of the Catechumenate step by step over a number of years. This began in 1975 and they now have five 'communities', distinct bodies of around 40 worshippers exploring the meaning of their faith together, the longest lasting of these having been running more than 25 years. The parish priest attributes the success of this church, in comparison to several others in the area, to the unique experience this pathway offers (interview).

This following of the Neocatechumenate has had a direct impact on the structure of the church itself, which was remodelled in 1988 according to the plans of a Roman architect who established the principle upon which the church was designed, intending to manifest the ideas of the Second Vatican Council. The church is essentially organised in the round, with the idea that the community is not an audience facing the priest but that together they are gathering around the Table of the Eucharist. A central part of this gathering, particularly at Easter, the focal point of the church year, is baptism, and therefore the centrepiece of the church is a large walk-in baptismal font. The font is octagonal, signifying the seven days and the eighth eternal day, decorated with,

amongst other things, the symbols of the four Evangelists surrounding the throne of God, a black stone at the base signifying Christ, and seven steps to the bottom marking the seven deadly sins on the way down and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit on the way back up (interview). (Figure 6 Guardian Angels church).

In contrast, genuinely historic churches, that is those that pre-date self-conscious nineteenth-century historicism, were not necessarily constructed with quite the same aim of signifying a particular confession or liturgical orientation through their structure, but they also generate attachments through their appearance, and can signify their orientation through their interior decoration. St Andrew, Holborn retains some medieval elements in the tower, but is essentially a Wren church, remodelled after bomb damage in the Second World War. The church has many significant associations, including the notorious high church preacher Henry Sacheverell, rector from 1713-24; Thomas Coram, founder of the Foundling Hospital, who is buried in the church; William Hazlitt, who was married there and Benjamin Disraeli who was received into the church there; William Marsden was inspired to set up the Royal Free hospital after an encounter with a destitute woman on the steps of the church. The church was almost destroyed by bombing in 1941 and it did not reopen until 1961, at which time it was designated as a guild church for the local working population, rather than a parish church,

given the almost complete absence of any residential population in the area.

Like the Holy Redeemer, the church is strongly Anglo-Catholic in orientation, with the striking presence of a statue of the Virgin with votive candles, three icons and a new, motorised suspended crucifix icon at the front of the church. These icons are produced in the Monastero di Vallechiara near Rome, with which the church maintains a connection. In addition to the high church decoration, the church is organised so as to promote a feeling of participation: although the pews are mobile, at the time of visiting they were set up in a broadly semi-circular fashion around the altar, producing an effect something like a church in the round.

Given that the church is directed towards serving the needs of the working population, it is perhaps not so surprising, albeit unusual, that the church is not open at weekends at all; rather, it opens Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, to fit in with the working day, with an additional service at 7pm on Wednesday, which forms the main service of the week; there are also services on Tuesday and Thursday lunchtimes (interview at St Andrews). Similar practices are undertaken at Holy Redeemer, where masses are held at times to make them accessible to people in all walks of life, particularly at lunch times and for people on the way home from work (interview at Holy Redeemer). City Temple

also holds lunchtime prayer fellowships on Mondays and services on Thursdays, alongside the weekend services, as well as dinner followed by worship on Thursday evenings from 18:45 ([www.city-temple.com/ThisWeek.asp](http://www.city-temple.com/ThisWeek.asp) and [www.city-temple.com/Church.asp](http://www.city-temple.com/Church.asp) 16 March 2011).

In addition to the standard services, St Andrew's also runs something called the 'Friday Forum', which is essentially a lecture series addressed to the local business community. This takes place from 13:10-13:35 and includes lunch, a lecture and debate on a wide range of social and ethical questions. Less frequently there are also fortnightly bible study meetings and pilgrimages to places as diverse as Ely and Rome (interview at St Andrew's). The congregation itself is mixed, with some regular members, some who attend only for a brief period (often in relation to mobile work patterns) and some visitors; like most of the churches we attended, there were several people who travelled some distance to be there for the Wednesday service. In addition to their own congregation, the church is also host to a Russian Orthodox congregation that is currently without other premises.

Near to St Andrews stands a second historic church, St Etheldreda. This church is located just off Holborn Circus in Ely Place. Originally the chapel to the palace of the Bishop of Ely, St Etheldreda's is unique not only because it is the only part of the palace complex to

survive, but because it is the only complete building in London dating from the reign of Edward I. Of course, the Reformation brought an end to the church's links with Rome, however in the nineteenth century the Rosminians (otherwise known as the Institute of Charity or the Fathers of Charity), who were active from nearby St Mary Moorfields, managed to purchase the church back and restored it to the Roman faith, making it the first Roman Catholic church in England to operate from its original historic premises (Cunningham, 1992/2003: no pagination).

Given the almost complete absence of any resident population in the immediate vicinity, the church draws its congregation either from those people who work in the many offices around, or who come from other parts of London specially to attend the church itself. Masses are held on Sunday at nine and eleven (in Latin) and on weekdays at 1pm, catering for office workers. The historic building is the unique point of attraction for many. In her introduction to the church's guidebook, Mary Kenny recalls that they travelled from Bloomsbury to attend the church because it was 'ancient, holy, and full of charm' (Cunningham, 1992/2003: foreword). For Kenny it was the intimacy of the building that particularly marked it out from other churches, with a sense of 'tradition and continuity' reinforced by the use of Latin for the main Sunday mass (Cunningham, 1992/2003: foreword). Likewise, our informant at the church stressed that many of those who came to London

specially to attend the church, and particularly to get married or have their children christened there, did so because of their attachment to the building itself. Many of them met when colleagues in the area, but returned to the church for special occasions because of the associations it held for them (interview). (Figure 7 St Etheldreda Church).

Interestingly, this attention to buildings and religious artefacts is by no means confined to churches. The remaining synagogues in the East End similarly emphasise the importance of keeping material traces of a religion which was highly visible and vibrant in the locality throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and whose traces have been progressively obliterated as the population dwindled with outmigration to the suburbs and synagogues close or are sold into the private sector or reconstructed as mosques. Attempts to reattach the small local Jewish population, or Jewish populations from further afield, to the synagogues through valorising architectural and material elements of the site have met with resistance or financial constraints. Most significant is Sandys Row Synagogue, which is the oldest Ashkenazi synagogue in London - built in 1867 on the site of a French chapel and the last remaining synagogue in Spitalfields, has been vigorously pursuing funds to refurbish its Grade II listed building. As a result, in the last decade there has been a resurgence of interest in the site as new and old members alike have chosen it to host their family celebrations, and a heritage centre

dedicated to the Jewish East End and the Huguenot experience has been established. In the vicinity also stands the Bevis Marks Sephardic synagogue on the very boundary of the East End which has held services since 170 and now both local residents and business people. (figure Bevis Marks 8 Synagogue).

However, it is not only historic buildings that are of visual or architectural significance, something recognised in recent work on the visibility of Islam in the Western city (Hill, 2011). At the East London Mosque work is currently underway on a large community centre. This is in a striking contemporary style, and the architect who designed it, who also did the original mosque, stated to our interviewee that he would no longer build the mosque in the same style if he could start again, but would build something like the new community centre that fitted more into the general pattern of London's contemporary buildings. Our interviewee concurred that it was 'very South Asian looking', but he also recognised the significant impact of the mosque on the East London skyline and felt that it had added a different flavour to the area, something he noted was also marked in the Museum of Docklands exhibition (interview). The mosque is also the only one (currently) in the UK that has the call to prayer [check], which again adds a different dimension to its presence (interview).

Finally, the materiality of several of the sites revealed local contestation of various kinds. According to Father Osvaldo the windows of St Anne had protective fences as the local Bangladeshi community repeatedly threw stones to break the glass. Other religious sites concealed their religious activities from public view, making no attempt to change the look of the building from its previous use, such as the community centre at Stepney Settlement, or the old warehouse appearance of Ishaatul Mosque.

Material and organizational practices provide a fundamental basis for religion to survive the encounter with radical religious diversity in London. Through their visibility and material existence in the city they either re-affirm their role for local religious communities or they contribute to inscribe and negotiate diversity in London's heterogeneous urban landscape.

### **Social Practices**

Although they might be considered peripheral in religious terms, almost all the religious communities visited were involved in a variety of social practices which clearly had considerable importance for them and for their worshippers. At St Peters Clerkenwell the church community itself recognises the profound changes it has undergone in recent years, with

the changing nature of the London Italian community and its move away from the local area (Stanca, 2001: 89). Accordingly 'the Church finds itself having to work with a more dispersed community, scattered across a wide area, and in effect the conventional fabric of a parish around the church simply does not exist' (Stanca, 2001: 89). The solution to this is that the church 'sponsors a number of activities that make it not just the traditional point of reference for the wider Italian presence in the UK but also, and more importantly, the heart of a living and continually evolving local community' (Stanca, 2001: 89). These activities are defined as baptisms, weddings, first communion and confirmation, a pilgrimage and a service to remember the Italian war dead (Stanca, 2001: 89). However, these are activities common to almost any parish church and it is unclear what marks these out as different. Of more interest perhaps is the set of community activities undertaken by the church, such as its role as a drop in centre, hosting narcotics anonymous, St Peter's Project (a charity for drug addicts, now housed at Kings Cross) or the clubs they run for different age groups. These include clubs targeted at older people who migrated to Britain from Italy many years ago, as well as two youth clubs, a toddlers group, knitting clubs, prayer clubs, choirs, and a guitar club. Some of these attract over 100 members. They also host a mini-Olympics every two years, hiring a stadium in north London for three days of events attended by 1000 people with 800

participants (interview with Father Carmelo). There are also events run in concert with the Italian Embassy and various Italian clubs and associations (Stanca, 2001: 89). The church also became famous for its musical recitals, and was involved in caring for members of the Italian community who found themselves in hospital or in prison, and was also involved in running an Italian school (Stanca, 2001: 86-8).

These sets of practices are not new (Cox, 1982), but what was clear is that continue to act to maintain a vibrant religious community. Masses currently attract around 1000 people (the church has capacity for 900 seated, 1500 standing), with many more for baptisms and weddings (interview with Father Pedro). The congregation remains principally Italian, but also draws in people from Asia, Somalia, South America and Sri Lanka, with confirmation classes and marriage courses opening the church up to new members. Almost none of the congregation lives in the local area, they come from all over London, with some travelling an hour to participate (interview with Father Carmelo), like other metropolitan churches ( for example, Holy Trinity Brompton) the church has wider reach than simply a local one.

Nearby Holy Redeemer is also involved in an array of community work. This operates at a low level, such as keeping the church open so that twenty or thirty people a day can come in just to use the church as a place for quiet reflection or to talk. In addition mass is taken elsewhere,

once a week in local schools and once a week in the Peel Centre, which caters for both youths and the elderly. But the church also has strong links with the local community. The church itself commissioned a report by two academics (Thake and Murdoch (1997), which sought to investigate the nature and transformation of the local community.

According to the parish priest, when local people read the report and found it tallied closely with their own impressions of the area, this led to increasing acceptance of the role of the church and the priest was subsequently invited to sit on local forums, community projects and social action groups (interview at Holy Redeemer). This has given the church a profile and sense of impact in the local community which is not only tied to the annual procession through the streets on feast days and celebrations, for which some local restaurants provide food.

In addition to the school, the church also employs a youth worker two days a week and administers the Exmouth Market Centre, based in the parish hall. This 'community and art space' operates a twice weekly lunch club, an early years project of music and play, various dance classes, drama groups, a chamber orchestra, activity and keep fit groups, and residents associations, charities use the premises for meetings and so on (interview at Holy Redeemer, and

<http://www.rainbowinformation.com/hr/exmouthcenter.html> 16 March

2011). The church is heavily involved in the centre, particularly through

their administrator Janette, who deals both with day to day issues in the parish and manages the centre itself.

St Andrews Holborn also offers a variety of outreach services. The most obvious is the listening service, offered Monday to Thursday, 11:00-15:00. This is not a counselling, nor do they aim to offer religious direction, rather they just ensure that there is someone in the church whenever possible to listen to peoples' problems and, if necessary, to act as a referral service to other more specialised organisations, including Analytica Consultants who operate from the church (interview at St Andrew's; *St Andrew's Holborn Listening Service* leaflet). Analytica operate both traditional psychotherapy and what they call a 'Psychological Wellbeing Assessment Service'. In 2009 negotiations were underway with MIND for the provision of CBT-informed therapy and Body/Drama Therapy (St Andrew Holborn Transformation Project Newsletter, Autumn 2009). This all forms part of their larger Transformation Project which involves landscaping the gardens around the church (which area is actually managed by the corporation of London), as well as the introduction of new icons into the church, to provide an air of peace and calm, and the letting out of church space to a locally based legal company that runs relaxation classes for its employees. Indeed, the church offers a variety of rooms to let as conference facilities.

Charitable work has long been a central part of the activity of St Andrew's. The church directly administers three distinct charities for the poor of the parish area: the St Andrew Holborn Charity, the Bromfield Educational Foundation and the Alexander Stafford Charity, which can give grants to either individuals or organisations for either the relief of need, or education. In addition the church acts as a co-ordinator for charitable work, offering an annual event at which all the charities they support come together and network, swapping experience, knowledge and contacts (interview at St Andrew's Holborn). The church also operates Thavie, a service which enables charities to buy in differing degrees of administrative assistance they cannot provide for themselves (see [www.standrewholborn.org.uk](http://www.standrewholborn.org.uk)). Their charitable connections also bind the church into the local community in other ways: the vicars and priests of the nearby churches of St Alban's, St George the Martyr and St Etheldreda's are all trustees of their charities, as is the Master of Charterhouse (interview at St Andrew's). Another link to the local community is provided by Christ's Hospital School, who use the church for their annual service.

Given that the aim of the Rosminians is to carry out charitable work, it is no surprise that missionary work is central to St Etheldreda's. At the time of the initial research (November 2009), the parish newsletter records an appeal for the Association for the Propagation of

the Faith, the Catholic missionary society (St Etheldreda's Parish Newsletter, 2009). At the time of writing (March 2011), the church is engaged in collecting funds for a new clinic in Kwalukonge in Tanzania, raising funds through an organ recital.<sup>1</sup> The church is noted for its music and as well as organ recitals the church claims one of the very few professional Roman Catholic choirs in the country, and it employs both an organist and a director of music; the church's music is available both on CD and on the website.

Other churches have adopted different strategies. At City Temple one of the central aims of the church is 'Building Christian community' and one of the chief devices the church uses to attempt to achieve this is what it calls its Citadel Residential Community. These are people from a variety of backgrounds, not only those who work at the church, but, it is claimed, students and employees, all of whom live at City Temple itself, and in various ways 'commit themselves to building a dynamic Christian community in the heart of London'. This is an exacting task, as every member of the residential community 'covenants to live a Christian lifestyle, participate faithfully in the ministry of City Temple, and give a specified amount of practical and ministry service at City Temple each week' ([www.city-temple.com/Community.asp](http://www.city-temple.com/Community.asp) 16 March 2011). In order to build this community the Temple offers an intern programme

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.stetheldreda.com/news](http://www.stetheldreda.com/news) 15 March 2011.

designed to enable young people from across the globe to come to London, committing 70 hours per week to service of the Temple, experiencing a variety of ways of ministering. This includes ministering to the homeless, with provision of shelter, washing facilities and clothing for 30-50 homeless people between January and March (interview at City Temple), but also less expected practices, like extending religion into the workplace, through placements in schools, businesses, government and so on, targeted at 'the transformation of our communities, cities and the world' ([www.city-temple.com/Volunteers.asp](http://www.city-temple.com/Volunteers.asp) 16 March 2011). All this is part of what the church calls its Citadel Vision, the aim of which is to 'develop an urban international Christian fellowship' centred around prayer, community, worship, outreach and training ([www.city-temple.com/Vision.asp](http://www.city-temple.com/Vision.asp) 16 March 2011).

The church also runs courses training people to learn ministry, and 'to equip people for effective living and ministry in the workplace and the world' ([www.city-temple.com/CTInstitute.asp](http://www.city-temple.com/CTInstitute.asp) and [www.city-temple.com/SpecialEvents.asp](http://www.city-temple.com/SpecialEvents.asp) 16 March 2011). However, how current these activities are is uncertain, because at the time of writing the former was advertising that there were no courses in 2008 and they would recommence in 2009. The current status of City Temple is perhaps best illustrated by its website, which advertises itself as 'City Temple,

Church and Conference Centre' ([www.city-temple.com/](http://www.city-temple.com/) 16 March 2011). The conference centre, with facilities for up to 900 and a dedicated catering staff, clearly provides significant income for the church, something common to many of the buildings we visited, but to see these facilities granted equal billing on the website header is somewhat surprising. Clearly the church does not reject the business world and actively seeks to develop links to it as a way of acting in the world. One of the church administrators highlighted the fact that organisations as diverse as Amnesty, Oasis, and Sainsbury's use the church for product launches and meetings (interview at City Temple). This not only provides the church with much needed income, but has the additional benefit of drawing attendees into contact with the church, thereby making them aware of its existence.

Similar practices were undertaken by the mosques we studied. The Ishatul Mosque offers a variety of social activities designed to assist members of their community, such as services to assist victims of crime, or mentoring for families with problems. They also offer health advice. Like several other communities they offer celebrations with food which are open for anyone to join (interview). The East London Mosque is a huge organisation involving the participation of some 22,000 people every week, with as many as 2000 at lunchtime prayers. Religious services are only one of the five categories into which the mosque

divides its work, the others being education, social welfare, community cohesion and economic regeneration. Educational work is taken care of by the schools attached to the mosque, while there are also health projects, raising awareness of food issues and health services, as well as a listening service for women, and shops on the premises which not only keep the community functioning through the income generated, but also provide jobs for up to 50 people. As well as building dedicated facilities for women, the community are currently constructing a new visitors centre for non-Muslims and the press in an attempt to deal with the huge current interest in Islam.

## **Conclusions**

This research suggests that contrary to what might be expected, below the level of the particular faith espoused, attachment to a religious community is not simply determined by any one factor, such as ethnicity, nationality, worship practices, liturgical preference, or locality. Rather, attachments are generated and sustained by a variety of interlocking factors, religious, social, material, geographic, economic, which coalesce to generate a feeling of belonging or involvement, or simply provide convenience and conviviality for particular individuals. There seems little reason to privilege any one of these factors over others, although it is clear that there are some which render the

generation of communities difficult. Clearly, material and organizational practices are key to recruiting worshippers and creating a sense of community around religion. Communities in areas with very little in the way of a local residential community to draw on inevitably have smaller and more transient congregations, drawing principally on the highly mobile, frequently changing population of workers for their worshippers. However, even these churches manage to find a way to carry out their work and to generate communities of one kind or another, by shaping their environments, social and material, and deploying an array of creative practices to encourage participation in and attachment to their ministry. This is the case of St Etherelda.

The liturgical approach is also significant, particularly in those ethnic specific congregations or culturally and linguistically differentiated congregations which cater for larger numbers of worshippers coming from outside the locality where the church or mosque is located. This was illustrated in the case of St Anne, St Peter, and East London Mosque, but was particularly relevant at City Temple which hosts two different liturgies, charismatic Christianity and House of the Rock.

It was clear overall that loyalty was constructed across a range of dimensions including social practices which were often complementary to religious aspects and represent a strategy of ensuring the cohesiveness of the congregation. To summarise from our cases it emerged that social

practices maintained a vibrant religious community in a number of the sites (St Peter, St Paul, East London Mosque) and can give the church/mosque a profile in the local community (like Holy Redeemer); and that religious function increasingly converges with service provision (St Andrews charity work but also St Peter and East London Mosque) and community cohesion (for example, Holy Redeemer's community "art and space"). An increasing "professionalization" of faith was also observed, such as City Temple's focus on training with intern programmes, as were links with local business at this site where the conference centre and space of the church is used for products launches and meetings. There are a plethora of strategies, as we have indicated in this article, but what is clear, from this study at least, is that building and maintaining attachment to religious sites appears to involve a complex and differentiated set of processes.

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