

“THERE WAS A PRIEST, A RABBI AND AN IMAM...” AN ANALYSIS OF URBAN SPACE AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN LONDON’S EAST END, 1685-2010

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London, community, synagogue, church, mosque, settlement, space syntax, immigrants

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between patterns of immigrant settlement and religious practice in the East End of London over the past 350 years. It questions what needs religious attendance satisfied for the incomer and additionally examines the role played by the religious organization; variously as centre for charitable support, locus of social organization in an ‘alien’ culture, bridge between cultures and source of economic opportunity. Using the combination of historical investigation and spatial analysis - applying space syntax methods of mapping networks of movement and patterns of settlement - the paper sheds light on the interconnections between the various roles of the chapel, small synagogue and mosque in this area of first settlement. The paper ends with a discussion regarding the way in which configuration of public space transforms the individual migrant identity. The paper concludes that places of worship satisfy a variety of needs in the life of the migrant and that over time religious need and external practice change – some becoming more, and some becoming less -in tune with those of the host society.

Introduction

This article explores patterns of immigrant settlement in the East End of London over the past 350 years. It questions the significance of the location of immigrant houses of worship, places of residence and work for immigrant social and economic trajectories. It seeks to identify what needs religious attendance satisfied for the incomer and, additionally, to examine the role played by the religious body in the lives of the immigrant. These questions are fundamentally spatial in their character and alongside a traditional historical exposition, this article addresses these questions from a field of research known as ‘space syntax’, which has over the past thirty years demonstrated that there is a closely bound relationship between society and space and has developed a set of methods to support studies of this nature (Hillier and Hanson 1984). The role of the physical context within which immigrant life takes place is frequently overlooked; arguably due to the lack of a systematic method of representing and characterizing social space. This article aims to fill that gap and uses space syntax theories and methods in the case of the London synagogues¹ to explore and disentangle the way in which the shape and form of the urban grid corresponds to social groupings and the manner in which urban morphology adjusts and is utilized by immigrants to create a social network.

Previous space syntax research (Hanson 1989) into the changes in London’s urban morphology after the Great Fire, has demonstrated that the configuration of the urban grid is a primary generator of the “intelligible movement interface” that is formed between local inhabitants and strangers just passing through streets. This constitutes the primary ingredient for social exchange. Space syntax analysis has shown that when viewed as systems of organized space, cities have deep structures or genotypes, which vary across cultures (op cit: 123 et seq). It has been proposed that space is the medium that both generates life in cities by effecting commercial exchange in their ‘foreground networks’ of streets and conserves cultures by controlling encounter and co-presence within their ‘background networks’ of primarily residential streets (Hillier 1996). This closely bound relationship between society and space has been shown to be fundamental to how cities work to structure diversity of minority groups, economic classes and so on (Vaughan 2005). Space syntax research into immigrant settlement patterns in London has suggested that due to the location of the East End on the edge of the economic heartland of the capital, it provides a safe haven for marginal societies to settle and flourish and – over time – to move onwards in their settlement trajectory. Indeed as Wirth observed, the Jewish ‘ghetto’ was typically in a location in the interstitial area of the city (Wirth 1928). Yet simply identifying the area of settlement as being distinctively different due to its occupation by a minority group can overlook the delicate mesh woven by the different individuals, families, businesses and social organizations that such areas contain, including both longstanding inhabitants of the area as well as people from previous waves of migration. Understanding the way in which migrants arrive, settle and connect to their environment is an essential part of previous studies by the authors of this article. Where this study aims to shed new light is to focus on the interconnections between the various roles of the Calvinist chapel, Jewish synagogue and Muslim mosque, and community structure in the East End of London and to explore the specific spatial characteristics of this area of the city that have made it a particularly effective place of first settlement.

This article explores the location – in the spatial sense – and the function, of religion in the lives of immigrants during the period of their arrival and early settlement and considers the significance of the location of their chapels, synagogues and mosques. It examines the various roles of houses of worship and their significance in the life of the immigrant: as a focal point for religious observance, a provider of charitable support, a source of comradeship in an alien land, the bridge from one society to another, and as a facilitator of economic opportunity. The main spatial focus of the East End of London is a frequently mythologized district which lies at the western end of the modern day London Borough of Tower Hamlets,ⁱⁱ and which includes Spitalfields - the 200 hundred acre space which has been the traditional first point of settlement for incomers for centuries. Taking specific periods of immigrant arrival and settlement in turn, the following sections describe the social, religious and spatial situations of the three migrant groups: refugee French Calvinists (the Huguenots) who arrived predominantly in the late 17th and first half of the 18th centuries, Eastern European Jews who settled in large numbers in and around Spitalfields during the last quarter of the 19th century and, finally, Bangladeshis who came as sojourners in the late 1950s and 1960s intending to return home as ‘rich men of high status’. Instead they became transnationals and actors in the ongoing ‘myth of return’; the consequence of which was the establishing of the largest Bangladeshi community outside of Bangladesh.

Although coming from different continents and arriving at different times in history, the three seemingly disparate groups are linked by more than just the spatial chronology of settlement. All three followed monotheistic religions which looked back to Abrahamic roots and believed that God was omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. All three religions were prescriptive and an intrinsic part of the migrants’ backgrounds. As will be shown, religion played a significant role in the process of their settlement in Spitalfields, albeit in differing ways. Of the three groups, it was only the Huguenots that migrated directly in response to religious persecution. It was because of their conviction in the all-embracing Calvinist ‘discipline of life’, that when their newly adopted religion was outlawed by the Catholic monarch and government, they were prepared to leave homes and security behind them and convert their Francophilian patriotism into loyalty to England. In contrast, though their religion had been a source of discrimination, exclusion and Diaspora since the fall of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, contrary to popular belief it was the search for economic opportunity, as opposed to escape from the pogroms of the Russian Empire, that was the driving force in young Eastern European Jews migrating westward in the late nineteenth century. The young men who emigrated from the future Bangladesh in the late 1950s and early 1960s had grown up within a comfortable mantle of religion; it was not until settlement in Britain that some experienced the dark side of religious difference. Thus whilst two of the three groups carried the baggage of discrimination, the third met it at the end, rather than at the beginning, of their journey.

In spite of varying degrees of religiosity, a common feature is the establishing of places of worship in close proximity to their residential clusters by successive groups of immigrants. The need to have a synagogue within walking distance is a fundamental of orthodox Jewish

life; a mosque which is close to home and places of work is not a necessity but a welcome facility for followers of Islam, whilst for the Calvinists - though there was no religious imperative - evidence suggests a preference for a church or chapel near to place of residence and/or employment.

17th-18th century Huguenot and Jewish communities of Spitalfields

The first French Church in London was founded in 1550 by prescient young French Calvinists who were putting down roots across the Channel. The nascent French community took over the lease of the Church of St. Anthony's Hospital in Threadneedle Street and it is here that we find a very early example of religious continuity; the church – or chapel – of St. Anthony's Hospital having been a synagogue in medieval times (Thornbury 1878). Although the divisions of time are not so extreme, this is a pattern which is repeated throughout the period under examination; churches become synagogues and synagogues become mosques - however it is more unusual for a church to stand where previously there had been a synagogueⁱⁱⁱ.

In 1687, following King James II's Declaration of Indulgence, what had been a steady trickle of Huguenot immigrants prior to this date, subsequently became a flood. Not surprisingly, for incomers whose departure had been as a direct result of their religious steadfastness, the Huguenots lost no time in setting up churches and chapels in the immediate vicinity of their settlement. Figure 1 shows one of these churches, notably it is in a court off Threadneedle Street, facing away from the main road and thus symbolically as well as spatially serving the Huguenot community, rather than the City of London at large (see inset, bottom left of image). This tendency towards spatial seclusion changed with the main settlement of Huguenots in the East End – as will be discussed in greater detail below.

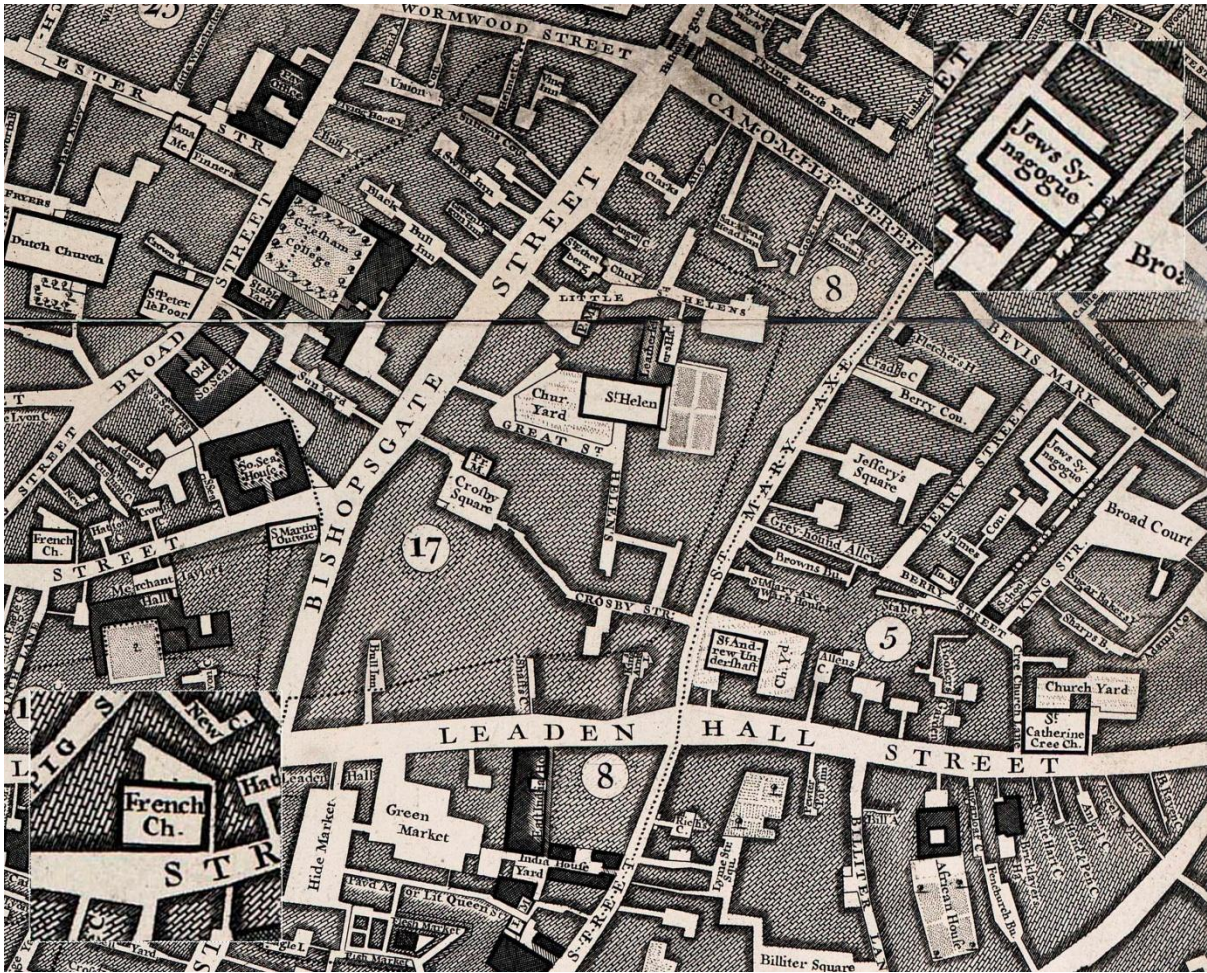


Figure 1: 1746 John Rocque map of London (with permission: Motco Enterprises Limited, ref: www.motco.com). The numbers on this map refer to an index of wards in the original map and do not relate to this article.

Though the French Church had sufficed for the early Calvinist arrivals who settled to the East of the capital,^{iv} by 1687 the church was unable to accommodate ‘the crush’ created by the new incomers (ibid: 132). The decision was taken to establish another church and, in 1688 *L’Hôpital*, was opened in Black Eagle Street as an extension to the Threadneedle Street church which was located almost a mile away. *L’Hôpital* was in the heart of the new community and served as a chapel of ease for those who did not wish to spare the time, or undertake the journey, to Threadneedle Street.

By 1700, there were a total of nine Calvinist churches/chapels, within a small radius of the centre of Spitalfields (Figure 2). Their location mirrors the clustered density of the refugee population and is suggestive of the migrants’ likely occupations. For whilst the more affluent new arrivals such as shop keepers, silversmiths, goldsmiths and military men put down roots to the West of London, silk weavers and those in need of charity, labeled as ‘humble occupants’ by F.H.W. Sheppard, settled to the East of the City in the small and cheap houses which were built in the early 1680s (Sheppard 1957: 3). The eastern edge of the City of London held a dual attraction for certain Huguenots. It was the area of silk weaving, and thus an obvious source of economic activity for the technically more sophisticated weavers from France; equally as important was the fact that the French Church was the source of charity for

the most indigent incomers. It was the centre for the distribution of the Royal Bounty set up by William and Mary as well as monies collected from sympathetic English citizens – such as Samuel Pepys - and the more affluent Huguenots. What developed was a well organized nexus of community with the French Church at its heart. The church maintained almshouses and rooms for the storage of clothes and other items and also provided the services of teachers, a doctor and a surgeon. In addition the church elders oversaw the distribution of funds to the ‘deserving’ poor. In return the Church exercised stringent control over its congregants and was said to ‘intervene at every stage of refugee life’ (Cottret 1991: 241). Thus it is understandable that once settled, and perhaps not as much in need, a less intrusive place of worship might be preferable; one which was not an extension of the mother French Church.



Figure 2: Nine chapels north of Wentworth Street, in main Huguenot settlement around Spitalfields on the 1746 John Rocque map of London. Location of chapels marked with black circles is based on Gwynn, 2001. (Reproduction of Rocque map image with permission: Motco Enterprises Limited, ref: www.motco.com).

In his *Survey of London*, Sheppard writes that it was only in the 1680s that workers' housing was built in the area around Spitalfields, the southern part remaining a 'teasel ground' (Sheppard 1957: 3). The location of the chapels, i.e. modest places of worship, marks out the boundaries of the early Huguenot community which appears to have been clustered to the west of Brick Lane as the immigrants took up residence in the newly, albeit poorly built, properties. It is clear here that urban form was playing a role in drawing clear boundaries for the nascent settlement: particularly to the south and west, where Bishopsgate, the old Roman road at the edge of the City of London, created a sharp division between east and west. Just one church lay to the north east, on the very edge of Spitalfields. The Church of St. Jean (or John) was the second Huguenot church to be established in the district. The church register shows that the congregation was composed chiefly of 'silk weavers ...who hailed from Pays de Caux in Haute Normandie and from Picardy' (Huguenot Society of London 1928: Xi). The congregating of worshippers from the same village, town or region and/or employed in the same trade, is a characteristic of religious practice in Spitalfields. This provides an explanation for the close proximity of places of worship.

By the late 1730s *L'Hôpital* was no longer large enough to contain the burgeoning community, which looked to Threadneedle Street as its mother church. In 1743, *La Neuve Église* was built on land purchased for £900 by David and Claude Bosanquet – members of Threadneedle Street. This was to become the iconic building of the immigrant religious presence in Spitalfields. Unlike the smaller Calvinist chapels in Spitalfields, *La Neuve Église* was a substantial building, measuring eighty-six by sixty feet. The exterior, with its tall arched window and triangular pediment with a sundial in its tympanum (Figure 3), 'was bold in scale and quietly dignified in expression' whilst, in keeping with Calvinist tradition, the interior was austere (Sheppard 1957: 222). One of the characteristics of Calvinism was its belief in sobriety and temperance, somewhat at odds with this was the use of the vaults below the church for the storage of beer for the local brewery and of the drunken and immoral behavior of some of its congregants (Kershen, 2005: 82).

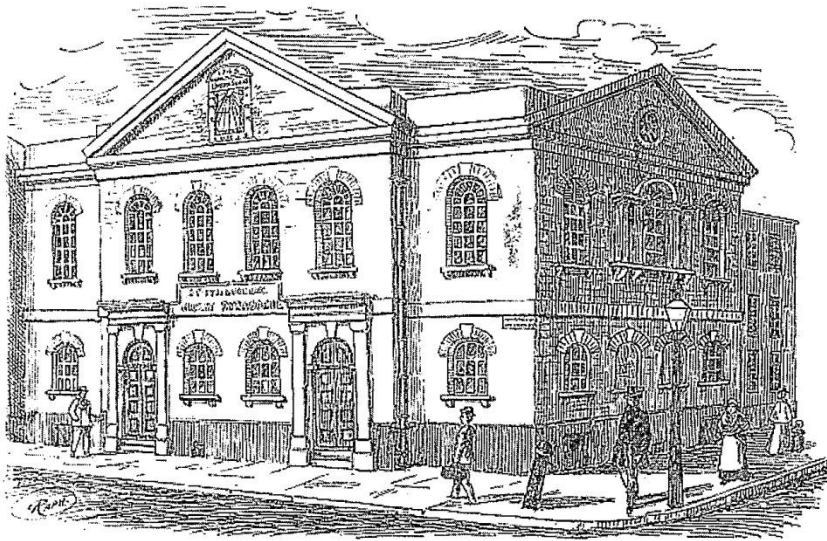


Figure 3: La Neuve Église Church with inscription *Umbra Sumus* (we are shadows) on sundial. illustration from Kershen, 2005: late 19th century, courtesy of the Jewish Museum of London.

As the number of immigrants declined, so the membership of the French churches in Spitalfields dwindled. Records show that *La Patente* closed in 1785 and *L'Artillerie* in 1786, whilst other chapels fell upon hard times. Evidence shows that, at the same time, the more anglicized and affluent members of Threadneedle Street and *La Neuve Église* were moving westward, or transferring their loyalty to the Hawksmoor designed, handsome, Anglican, Christ Church, which stood at the other end of Church Street (Kershen 2005: 83). Did this signal an eschewing of Calvinism in favor of a more relaxed form of Christian worship or simply the outcome of intermarriage, Anglicization and upward economic mobility or, what was most probable, both?

As we have seen, though small numbers of Huguenot refugees began arriving in England from the middle of the 16th century, it was not until the last quarter of the 17th century that they arrived in any significant numbers. But they were not the only outsiders settling at the eastern edge of the city of London around this time. In 1656, Oliver Cromwell agreed to the readmission of the Jews - expelled in 1290 - and the open practice of Judaism in England. In this he was encouraged by the overseas trading links of Jewish merchants (Kershen 2005: 35-36). The ward of Portsoken, on the edge of the City of London had been a traditional place of settlement for individuals without full rights of trade in the City and would have facilitated mercantile activity within it for a group such as this (Wolf 1934: 117-118). Analysis of Jewish names (Arnold 1962) in the tax census of 1695, shows that 80 percent of all Jewish inhabitants of the City parishes within and without the walls, 681 of the 850 total Jewish population, were living in a tight cluster of six parishes, all located within the walls, but on the eastern edge of the City. At their highest density, they were around 9 percent of parish population.^v

The newly arrived Sephardi^{vi} community initially held services in a house in Cree Church Lane, just off Houndsditch. By 1701 they were able to erect a purpose built synagogue in Bevis Marks, less than a mile from the French Church in Threadneedle Street. The synagogue is still in use today. The two migrations are parallel in time of arrival and proximity of settlement, but though both enjoyed freedom of worship in England after suffering religious discrimination, rarely, if at all, are they examined under the same spotlight. And though there are similarities between the two in their pattern of behavior in the early period of settlement, there is one significant difference. For whilst the French arrivals clearly saw no problem in signaling their presence by the establishment of nine Calvinist chapels in close proximity by the end of the 17th century, a primary concern of the Sephardi incomers was the need to reassure the receiving society that they had no intention of seeking converts or encroaching upon Gentile territory (see inset in Figure 1 above, where ‘Jews Synagogue’ is notably set back within a courtyard; see also image of the synagogue today).

The creation of a hidden space – an ‘enclosed sanctuary tucked away from public gaze’ (Kadish 2002: 387) - for Bevis Marks synagogue and the relationship between it and its community can be measured by formal spatial analysis. Space syntax analysis is commonly based on the axial map, the set of fewest and longest lines of sight passing through every public space in a city’s street network. The analysis measures the relation of each line to the network of the whole system, termed ‘global’ relations, or the relation of each line to the immediate surroundings, termed ‘local’ relations, thus providing an index of spatial accessibility and levels of integration and segregation (Vaughan and Geddes 2009). The City of London census for 1700 reveals that the largest numbers of Jewish inhabitants had settled in parishes with the most easily negotiated, and spatially integrated, streets.^{vii} This suggests that the Jewish inhabitants needed to be in a spatially advantageous position in relation to the city’s street economy in order to carry out their mercantile activities.

It is striking to note how the synagogue itself was in a secluded location (Figure 4), at least two turnings inwards from the main streets of the area, whereas the Anglican parish churches, and to a lesser extent the Huguenot chapels, were open directly to the local streets (Hanson 1989). In accordance with *Ascama One*, one of the first laws or *Ascamot* under which the new community would operate, the establishment of another house of prayer was forbidden within six miles of the existing synagogue. Arguably there was a subtext, one which sought the elimination of any local competition which might dilute membership and funds. Yet it is also evident that the synagogues were explicitly serving their local community, but avoiding any advertisement of their existence to chance passers-by to the neighborhood. It may be that this was a feature of the insecurity of this relatively new settlement or simply a function of not needing to have communal structures to form part of the ‘foreground network’ of the city. This strategy of invisibility continued well into the 19th century, as will be shown below.



Figure 4: Bevis Marks Synagogue outside gate. The synagogue is set back from a quiet street with its façade perpendicular to its entry courtyard. Image courtesy of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation.

Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants from central and Eastern Europe began arriving shortly after their Sephardi counterparts. Initially they attended services in Creechurch Lane, but these were of a somewhat alien nature and, in 1690, the Ashkenazim established their own house of worship. By 1722 the community had become sufficiently well established to build a synagogue in Dukes Place, a mere stone's throw from Bevis Marks. Unlike their Sephardi counterparts, the Ashkenazim imposed no restrictions on the opening of other synagogues and, in 1726, a group of central European gem dealers opened the *Hambro* in Fenchurch Street. In 1761 a third Synagogue was established within the City of London's boundaries, in Leadenhall Street. These three places of worship were central to the activities of the established Jewish community, subsequently described as 'cathedral synagogues' (Kadish 2004) and, in 1870, they were linked under the heading of, the United Synagogue. They satisfied the needs of the more affluent Jews in London, congregants who, as they became more integrated, became less observant. Significantly these were in more prominent locations, arguably demonstrating a greater confidence in their place in society (Glasman 1987-8).

18th-19th century Jewish community of Spitalfields and Whitechapel

Throughout the 18th century there was a steady trickle of Central and Eastern European Jewish immigrants to London. The new arrivals set up their own, smaller *chevrot*^{viii} close to their places of work and home; in some cases just temporarily transforming the workshop into a place of worship. By the end of the 18th century there were at least three, one south of

Whitechapel Road, which served the Jewish old clothes dealers clustered around Rosemary Lane (now Prescott Street), the other two in close proximity to Houndsditch and both Bevis Marks and the Great. None were within the boundaries of Spitalfields, the district which by the end of the 19th century would become known as ‘little Jerusalem’.

The pattern of Jewish immigrant arrival and the opening of synagogues reflecting place of origin or trade, pre-dates the large scale immigration of the 1880s and 1890s and can be traced from the mid-19th century onwards. As had the Huguenot refugees before them, many new arrivals chose to worship with those from the same town or village; for example the *Grodno* synagogue, *Kovno* synagogue and *Warsaw* Synagogue. Some synagogues were established in what had once been Huguenot chapels; the buildings’ neutral external appearance, internal galleries and lack of ostentation making them ideal for conversion. Sandys Row Synagogue, established in 1851 by Dutch Jews, had been a Huguenot church until 1801, whilst the *Eye of Jacobs Society’s* religious base was previously the Artillery Lane chapel. Commenting on this trend, in 1877 the Chief Rabbi, (of the United Synagogue), acknowledged that, ‘It would always be more convenient for a congregation in want of a synagogue to purchase a disused church or chapel than erect a fresh structure.’^{ix}

The map of synagogues in the East End of London reveals that as the number of immigrant arrivals increased, so the *chevrot* burgeoned. By the close of the 19th century there were at least 40 active small houses of worship in Spitalfields and its immediate environ (Figure 5).

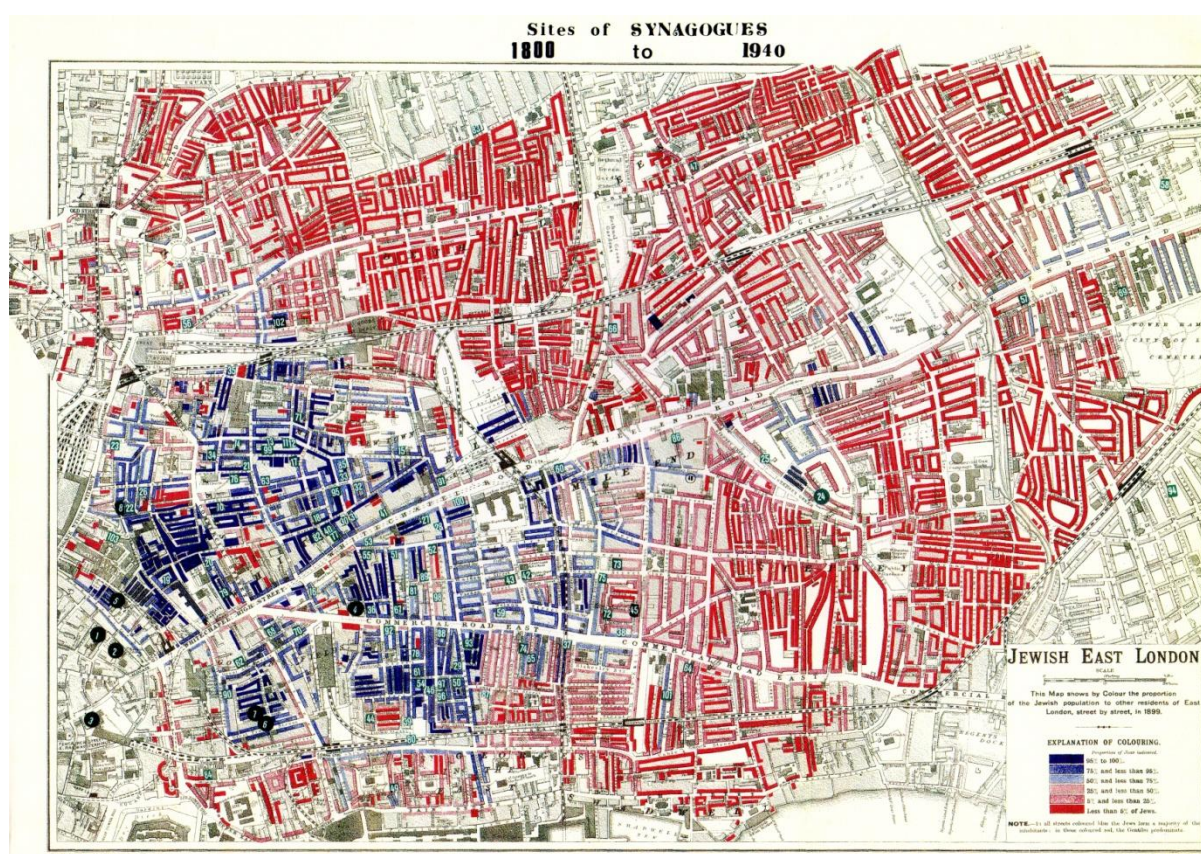


Figure 5: Reproduction of map of Jewish East London from Russell and Lewis, 1900, with overlay of synagogue locations dating from 1800-1940 identified and hand-drawn by Samuel Melnick.

The map highlights the clustering of places of worship in and around Spitalfields, while the later expansion of the community south of the Whitechapel Road and eastwards into Stepney, with the emergence of further *chevrot* is also apparent. Just as in the early 18th century, so in the late 19th century, the new immigrants were crowded together in the poorest quality properties; the density of the community is identified on the map by the streets coloured blue and also by the number of small synagogues, in some instances standing almost cheek by jowl.

Notably, a multiplicity of synagogues is not necessarily a marker of religiosity. The small *chevra* was far more than a place of worship – for many it was a second home, a club, or sometimes the headquarters of a friendly society which provided benefits during sickness, unemployment and old age; its outward appearance often masking its multivarious role within the community. It was singularly a male meeting place (women were separated from the men by a curtain or screen, or sat in a gallery on the upper level), where current political, social and economic issues could be debated, before, after and frequently during the service. For many male migrants the *chevra* became the centre of their transposed lives, a bridge between *der heim*^x and this somewhat dubious New Jerusalem, where, in some cases, life was even harsher than it had been in the *shtetl*. As the East End was the heartland of the cheap tailoring trade, for some the *chevra* was a kind of labor exchange where machiners, pressers and tailors might pick up information about possible jobs. Though in later years, those looking for work would gather on the corner of Greatorex Street (just off the Whitechapel Road), in what was known as the *chaser* (pig) market, where workshop masters would select workshop hands. In spite of being a meeting place for workers, synagogues were not the headquarters of the multiplicity of short-lived Jewish tailoring trade unions; these, in common with their English counterparts, were based in the inns or public houses.

Figure 6 shows a space syntax model of the area of Spitalfields/Whitechapel overlaid with the location of synagogues and other Jewish communal institutions.

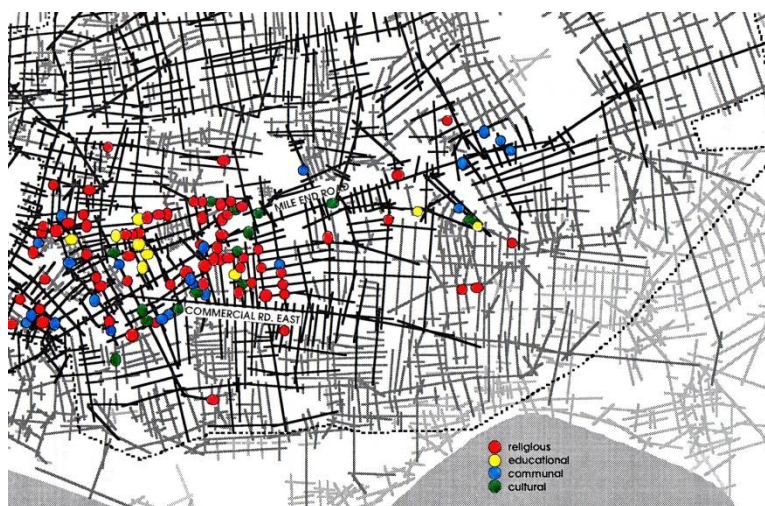


Figure 6: Space syntax analysis of East End accessibility (in a scale from black for spatially integrated to pale grey for segregated streets) overlaid with Jewish institutions.

Imposing a spatial analysis on the Russell and Lewis map highlights the various patterns and relationships extant and demonstrates that the Jewish settlement had a specific spatial realization: for whilst the shop-keepers and tradesmen occupied the most spatially integrated streets in the entire area, these were only a few turnings away from the deepest parts of the district.^{xi} Considering the established importance of the market-place in 19th century Jewish life, it is possible that this ‘few step’ logic can be related to the spatial economy of the 19th century city, which assigns market-place transactions to the most important place of encounter between visitor and inhabitant. It is significant that when the location of synagogues and other Jewish communal institutions are spotlighted these are found to be located relatively deeply within the interstices of the neighborhood, in the streets of greater spatial segregation and higher density settlement, such that the local neighborhood is contained and protected; (the exception here being the Mahzike Hadath) whilst the inner life of the community is contained on the more private streets and its external life is preserved for the public streets, which are much more integrated into the spatial network.^{xii}

20th century and Bangladeshi settlement patterns

The coming of the underground, integration, discrimination, upward economic mobility and the Nazi bombing raids which targeted the East End, were the forces behind the movement of the Jewish community out of the East End in the first half of the twentieth century. In that movement we can identify the template set down by the Huguenots late eighteenth century transition from French Church to English. The second phase of Eastern European settlement marked a movement away from the traditional *shtetl* manner of worship to that which had taken on a far more ‘English’ appearance. Dog-collared reverends, English sermons and an absence of the exuberance that once resonated through the *chevrot* of Princelet Street, Hanbury Street, Fieldgate Street and the many others clustered in and around the streets of London’s East End, were the hallmarks of the synagogues that were emerging in the newly Jewish suburbs, and which served a changing Jewish community. This constituted a shift to a greater confidence in spatial prominence and architectural distinctiveness, with both Modernist and ‘Byzantine’ styles emerging although the post-war reversion to a more anonymous single-storey ‘box’ has been claimed by Kadish (2002) to be symbolic both of a “psychological return to rootlessness”, a more “authentic Jewishness” as well as “insecurity about Jewish identity in Britain”.

As the Jewish exodus from the East End gathered pace, a new migrant community was putting down roots. Young men from what was, at that time East Pakistan, were migrating to England and, whilst some headed for the factories of the Midlands, others made for London to seek their fortunes in the traditional first point of settlement for new arrivals, the East End^{xiii}. They were not the first to arrive from the Indian sub-continent; lascars (Indian seamen) had been part of East London life since the eighteenth century. But it was in the 1950s and 1960s that the signs of a Pakistani/Bengali^{xiv} presence became identifiable, in the shape of the young men on the streets, and more significantly, in the form of Pakistani/Bengali owned restaurants, which in those early years acted as community and advice centers. One of the earliest of these was a café in Cable Street, on the south side of

Whitechapel Road. It was here that the Pakistani Welfare Association (PWA) – after independence to become the Bangladeshi Welfare Association - was founded in 1952. Unlike the church and synagogue based charities that had served needy refugee Huguenots and Eastern European Jews on arrival, the Association did not provide material aid. Rather it was a source of advice and direction; a place where East Pakistani workers could receive guidance with form filling, letter writing, employment and accommodation. (Though social benefit was available for some, those entitled did not always know how to apply for it). In 1964, in keeping with the movement of the immigrants north of Whitechapel Road as a result of the demolitions in Cable Street, the PWA took premises on the corner of Fournier Street and Brick Lane, adjacent to what was to become the *Jamme Masjid* mosque.

In those early years the young Bengali bachelors, most of who were living in overcrowded, unsanitary rooms, showed little concern for the requirements of Islam. Their lax religious behavior has been recorded by Caroline Adams and Katy Gardner, and recently reconfirmed by author interviews. One elderly Muslim restaurant owner, who has been in England for 45 years, stated, ‘my son is much more religious than I ever was’.^{xv} The young sojourners visited pubs and betting houses and consorted with white women. As one of Adams’s interviewees admitted In the early days we never thought of having halal meat ... just avoided having pork’ (Adams 1987: 160). Arguably, the young men were not eschewing their religion but rather putting it on hold until either they returned home or, as was the case for the great majority, brought over wives and children and, by so doing, transformed casual bachelor enclaves into a community.

The emergence of a family centered community encouraged the adoption of a more religiously based life. As early as 1910 a decision was taken to build a house of prayer for the - albeit small - Muslim community in East London, it took another 30 years for three houses in Commercial Road (south of Whitechapel Road) to be converted into a mosque which was used by lascars, restaurant workers and other Northeast Indians (this was before the partition of 1947) on a Friday night. However, this did not satisfy the burgeoning community of Bengali Muslims in Spitalfields, which as their Calvinist and Jewish predecessors had centuries earlier, sought a prayer house close to their homes and places of work; one which they could manage and run in accordance with the “Sufi/Filtoli theme”^{xvi} of prayer to which they were accustomed. In 1974, with funds raised from Bengalis living in the area (as the Huguenots had done 232 years before) and the High Commission of Bangladesh, the building at the corner of Fournier Street and Brick Lane was purchased from the *Mahzike Hadath*. Two years later it re-opened - as mentioned above - as the *Jamme Masjid*. Significantly, it was located at the junction of two streets which linked the local district directly to the main thoroughfares in and out of the capital. Another aspect of spatial continuity can be found at the street scale. Fournier Street was originally called Church Street and whilst at one end it has the mosque at its western end it is anchored by the great Hawksmoor designed Christ Church Spitalfields. In between these two religious counterpoints, the street’s Huguenot middle class large houses have been transformed, first through decline into multi-occupancy slums and a subsequently through gentrification by City banking pioneers from the 1980s onwards. The Mosque acquired even more significance when the visiting President of

Bangladesh attended prayers there and subsequently approved a donation from his government for further improvements. Thus, not only did the *Jamme Masjid* announce the presence of Islam in Spitalfields, but for the local Bengali immigrant population of the 1970s and early 1980s, it was a structural manifestation of the financial and political support of the Bangladeshi Government and its High Commission in London.

For 35 years the exterior of the building remained as it has been since 1743, a religious space which, except for the posting of prayer times and notices externally, made no overt pronouncement of its Islamisation. This changed in February 2010 when a 90' high minaret, which is illuminated at night, was mounted on the pavement next to the building (Figure 7). Though meeting with considerable resistance from certain of the local inhabitants, the minaret – which must be removed if/when the mosque closes – is the most obvious, opponents might say blatant, spatial announcement yet of the Muslim presence in Spitalfields.



Figure 7: Jamme Masjid minaret and mosque, Brick Lane.

The *Jamme Masjid* has a 3,200 membership – including women - and caters for little but prayers. Its far grander counterpart, the successor to the mosque established in the 1940s, is the East London Mosque in Whitechapel Road, which attracts and serves the younger, more

globally engaged Muslims of East London.^{xvii} This Mosque has strong connections with the Arab World and received more than one million pounds towards its (re)building costs from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. It can accommodate up to 3,000 male worshippers and offers ‘separate facilities for female worshippers’, should they wish to avail themselves of this. It is one of the few mosques in the United Kingdom which is permitted to broadcast the call for prayer – (the *azan*), though not five times a day. It follows a ‘Maudoodi-ist management theme’ and is managed by a combination of Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Somalis, and Arabs. It is a true communal centre, providing educational and recreational facilities for all ages and both genders as well as coordinating with publicly funded bodies in the fight against drug taking by local youngsters. In addition to providing classes for children and adults, a library and some housing, the Mosque is a participant in a variety of interfaith programs – as its website announces, it is both – ‘a place to meet, a place to learn, a place to celebrate and a place to pray’.^{xviii}

Because there is no legal requirement for the registration of a mosque, unless it is also a charity, it is impossible to accurately quantify or chart the location of the rooms, flats, houses, sheds (or even car parks) that have provided, and continue to provide, facility for Friday prayers for the Muslim community in East London. For whereas during the rest of the week a Muslim can pray alone, on a Friday (the rest day in Islam) an imam is required to lead prayers. As well as the Great and the East London Mosque, there are around 57 mosques in the East London postcode area and at least two in what were formally synagogues, the majority under Bangladeshi management.^{xix} Of those in the E1 post code, seven or eight are within easy walking distance of the East London Mosque, and are variously under Deobandi, Maudoodi and Sufi themes. Notably, whilst the East London Mosque takes a prominent position on the main, Whitechapel Road, the remainder are in ad hoc premises following the model of local improvisation of building reuse (both in time and space), reminiscent of the Jewish *stiebels*; located on the main thoroughfares of the area’s local network of streets. For example, *Darul Hadith Latifah* is in a ramshackle community centre, set perpendicular to the local library; *Baitulaman Mosque* is in prefabricated huts close to railway lines, but a short distance from a local high street^{xx}. Is it the preference for a specific ‘theme’ as the ‘Muslims in Britain’ website categorizes the different factional styles of worship, or the preference for a more intimate atmosphere where the worshippers are amongst people they know, that determines which prayer house is attended? For older, first generation immigrants, such as Bangladeshi restaurant owner John Mustafa, it is not just the act of worship, but as he explains, ‘it is as much being with people you know, that you want to meet and keep close to socially as well as religiously’. This intimate dimension of worship in the community may be the reason that smaller mosques continue to be used even whilst larger and better appointed ones are constructed.^{xxi}

Discussion

There is no doubting the spatial and devotional continuity that is identifiable when analysing the arrival and settlement of the three main immigrant groups to enter East London in the past 350 years. Though the initial ‘cathedral’ houses of prayer of the Calvinists and Jews were on

the border of the area, in all three cases – Huguenots, Eastern European Jews and Bangladeshis - the regular places of worship of the artisan and semi/unskilled immigrants were the chapels, *chevrot* and mosques in and around Brick Lane, the hub of migrant work and residence: a direct correlation between home/work/prayer.

This article has proposed that places of worship provided a spatial locus for communal solidarity – not just for religion, but to organise networks of self-support (especially for the communities which preceded the welfare state). The fact that these structures existed to serve a local, minority (in some cases marginalised) community, meant that they need not be located on the main thoroughfares of the city. It is only in recent times that mosques have proudly presented their presence with purpose-built buildings on the main roads of the area. On the other hand, first steps towards acculturation demanded a presence on the main roads of the city and evidence has been brought to bear on how external relations were facilitated through the mutual encounters and exchange of the market place – whether figuratively by developing industries, weaving by the Huguenots and tailoring by the Jewish immigrants - or literally by buying and selling in the market place. The position of the market place in immigrant society could be seen to be the threshold between the interior and exterior worlds.

Charles Booth wrote how the market place of Petticoat Lane ‘is the exchange of the Jew, but the lounge of the Christian’.^{xxii} It is the nature of market transactions to equalise relationships and to transcend the barriers of society. Petticoat Lane was where the community made contact with the outside world. Analysis of the spatial structure of the East End has demonstrated that its location on the edge of the heart of commercial London as well as its fine-grained texture of well connected main streets and hidden back streets has enabled the creation of a foreground network of external relations and a background network of internal social solidarity, supported by religious institutions.

The anthropologist Victor Turner coined the term *communitas* to describe the transformation of community to the liminal state of ritual celebration - characterized by the 'temporary suspension of all social differentiations and manifestations' (Turner 1969: 96). Hillier (1989) develops this idea in the context of early modern London, to suggest that communities have four transformations: from internal manifestations, when differences are maintained and spatially separated (such as domestic space); through to *communitas*, where community is bounded and ritualized and undifferentiated - the religious buildings described here fill this definition; through the 'partial mixing' of outside space, where type differences start to disappear; to the state of total mixing in the urban realm, where differences completely vanish to create a 'virtual community' – virtual as in prior to social interaction. What is apparent from our analysis of the street structure of the East End of London in relation to immigrant communities is that they create a state of 'partial mixing', where individuals are not fully intermingled with society at large. It can be argued that the particular structure of urban space in this area, partly due to it being in the space on the edge of centre, away from the urban economic centre of the city, is sufficiently strong as to enable certain social differentiations to be maintained, but sufficiently weak to constitute a co-presence of locals with strangers from other streets within and around the area. This spatial structure enables a

state of co-presence which is shaped by the specific pattern of space of the area, which is integrated at a large scale, but locally segregated.

When analysing the religiosity of the three groups we note the changing levels of religious fervour. The Calvinists left France because of their religious ardour, the Eastern European Jews, though pushed by economic necessity, carried their religion with them as had their ancestors for almost two millenia in the diaspora. In Russia and Russia Poland – although referred to as *der heim* - Jews had occupied a middle place, not full citizens and yet not serfs, the traditions of religion not only gave emotional succour, it reinforced identity - in the *shtetl* they were full citizens of the Jewish community, while in Britain, in time, they or they children could/would be citizens of the state. For the Bangladeshis who arrived in the 1950s and 60s it was national, rather than religious, identity which for them was uppermost. Commonality with their fellow East Pakistanis, in one independent nation state, as opposed to with their fellow Muslims in the Ummah – the community of fellow believers. As the decades of settlement passed so the levels of religiosity and places of worship altered. Most Huguenots transferred to the English church, forsaking the puritannical ways of Calvinism; the children of the Eastern European immigrants transferred to the anglicised ‘orthodox synagogues’ or took up with a new religion - communism, whilst many second and third generation Bengalis, unlike their parents, have become more observant of the tenets of Islam and in some cases, less ‘British’ and more Muslim,

In conclusion, what needs did attendance at the chapel, chevra or mosque satisfy in the early stages of settlement? There is no doubt that for the Huguenots, it was Calvinism that had driven them out of the homeland, in the chapels of Spitalfields they were free from threat and persecution and could worship as they wished, in addition, for those who had escaped with little but their faith, charitable provision was high on the agenda. For the Jewish and Calvinist pioneer immigrants, a familiar environment containing fellow workers or those hailing from the same town or village, was important. If such places of worship did not exist, they were soon established. For the optimistic Bengali sojourners this was not the case; for them it was the local cafe or welfare association that provided support and help with applying for social benefits. For those in financial need, as one Bangladeshi recalls, ‘when we arrived six or eight of us lived together in one room, if someone needed money, they were helped by the others, and paid back when they could.’ Charity was for sending home to the *desh*, where the need was greater. Religion in the *bidesh* came later, sometimes enforced by the arrival of fundamentalist co-religionists.^{xxiii}

Establishment of houses of prayer and attendance are the outward signs of immigrant religiosity. But what does this tell us about the level and place of ‘faith’, in the personal life of the immigrant? What impact does the move from one country or continent to another have on the internalisation of faith. Does belief weaken or strengthen as traditional practices are faced with the cultural differences of the host society? This study has shown that the external practices do change, some becoming more, and some becoming less, in tune with those of the host society. The question of whether these changes are indicative of the diminution or of the reinforcement of belief must remain unanswered for now.

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Notes

ⁱ Future work will apply space syntax methodology in the East End of London to the mapping of Huguenot places of worship in the 18th century and mosques in the 21st century.

ⁱⁱ The Borough was created in 1965.

ⁱⁱⁱ This is indeed not a one-off occurrence Strype (1720) notes that the Parish Church of St Stephen had been 'a Synagogue of the Jews, then a Parish Church, then a Chappel [sic] to St. Olaves in the Jewry... and was then incorporated a Parish Church' (Book 3, Chapter 4, page 63).

^{iv} The community in the West of London were served by the Savoy consistory and other conformist and non-conformist churches founded in the years after 1690. See (Gwynn 2001): 129-36.

^v Due to the fact that precise street locations are only given by Arnold for the census 'without' (outside) the City walls, the analysis relates to parish percentages rather than percentages for a single street space, as was possible in the 1895 analysis shown below. It is evident from examining the original records in the Guildhall (London Guildhall: *London Inhabitants Without the Walls*; Records Office Guildhall, typed list from 1695 assessment list.) that Arnold did not omit the addresses by accident. The parishes within the City walls generally comprised a very small number of streets in comparison with those outside the walls and the provision of precise street addresses outside the walls is probably (according to experts consulted at the Guildhall) due to these parishes being considerably larger than those within the City walls, necessitating greater precision in pinpointing the location of households for tax purposes.

^{vi} Sephardi Jews were those that settled in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa after the fall of the second temple. Ashkenazi Jews were those who had settled in Central and Eastern Europe. Though both held the same basic religious beliefs their liturgies and rituals are subtly different.

^{vii} The measure of integration is used in space syntax research as an indication of the relative busyness or quietness of streets as they are used (or likely to have been used in historical research). The index has been tested on a wide variety of towns and city around the world as they are now and as they were in the past (see Griffiths 2010). Such research has consistently shown that densities of movement flows and patterns of use correspond closely to this variable, which indexes the relative accessibility of a street compared with all other streets within a given distance.

^{viii} A *chevra* (plural: *chevrot*) was a small synagogue – sometimes a room in a house – which was used for religious purposes.

^{ix} *Jewish Chronicle*, 7 September 1877. *La Neuve Église* is perhaps the most famous example of this form of religious continuity and change, having started life as a chapel, in 1899 it became the synagogue of the *Mahzike Hadath* at a conversion cost of some £6,000^{ix} - in 1974 it was purchased by the local Muslim Bangladeshi community and is now the *Jamme Masjid* mosque. Arguably, this is continuity at its most visible and iconic.

^x Home – as in the point of emigration.

^{xi} It is significant that in many instances a prerequisite of work be given out by tailoring wholesalers to workshops was that the latter be no more than ½ a mile from the wholesale outlet.

^{xii} Charles Booth's police walk notebooks attest to this, showing that the market streets were almost transformed by the high density of Jewish inhabitation: 'Wentworth St. itself thronged every day by stalls, both buyers & sellers nearly but not altogether Jews. Women bareheaded, bewigged, coarse woolen shawls over shoulders. More like a foreign market scene than anything English' (Booth 1886-1903: B351 108-109).

^{xiii} For detail of the background of Bangladeshi arrival and settlement in East London, see Kershen, 2005.

^{xiv} In the 1947 partition of India, the nation state of Pakistan was created. In 1952 a bitter civil war began between East and West Pakistan, the outcome of which was the granting of independence to East Pakistan which in 1971 became the sovereign state of Bangladesh in 1971, Thus immigrants who came from East Pakistan until 1971 were Pakistan, subsequently becoming Bangladeshi.

^{xv} Interview, 12 April 2011.

^{xvi} As stated on the Muslims in Britain website, www.mosques.muslimsinbritain.org.

^{xvii} For the early history of the East London Mosque see Ansari 2011.

^{xviii} See www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/vision.

^{xix} According to the website list of the London Central Mosque at www.iccuk.org.uk.

^{xx} See www.mosques.muslimsinbritain.org/maps for map of mosques within the East London area.

^{xxi} It is perhaps worth noting that the London Central Mosque in Regents Park which opened in 1977 (although approved by the government and presented with the park location in 1944), funding came from Saudi Arabia but at present there is no Bangladeshi representative on its trustee body).

^{xxii} The full quote illustrates how alien Jewish life seemed at the time: 'old Petticoat Lane on Sunday is one of the wonders of London, a medley of strange sights, strange sounds, and strange smells... Many, perhaps most, things of the "silent cheap" sort are bought in the way of business; old clothes to renovate, old hinges and door-handles to be refurbished up again... Other stalls supply daily wants - fish is sold in large quantities - vegetables and fruit - queer cakes and outlandish bread.' (Booth 1902: Vol. 1, 66-67).

^{xxiii} Evidence from a student in discussion pre 9/11.