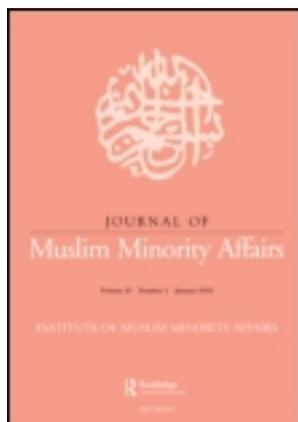


This article was downloaded by: [105.228.97.154]

On: 23 April 2014, At: 05:42

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjmm20>

The Development Impact of Mosque Location on Land Use in Australia: A Case Study of Masjid al Farooq in Brisbane

Yasmeen Vahed & Goolam Vahed

Published online: 04 Mar 2014.

To cite this article: Yasmeen Vahed & Goolam Vahed (2014) The Development Impact of Mosque Location on Land Use in Australia: A Case Study of Masjid al Farooq in Brisbane, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 34:1, 66-81, DOI: [10.1080/13602004.2014.888284](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2014.888284)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2014.888284>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

The Development Impact of Mosque Location on Land Use in Australia: A Case Study of *Masjid al Farooq* in Brisbane

YASMEEN VAHED and GOOLAM VAHED

Abstract

The rapid growth of Australia's Muslim population over the past three decades has presented a challenge to local governments to find ways of accommodating their needs, particularly providing spaces to build mosques. Yet in many parts of Australia, mosque applications have been opposed by local communities and consequently such applications are usually declined by local councils. Many Muslims believe that Islamophobia and racism are behind such refusals. This paper examines the role of urban planning policies in determining the location, architectural form, and the use of mosques, and their impact on the local community, through a case study of the Masjid Al Farooq in South-East Queensland. It seeks to understand whether urban planning policy as well as urban planners can become a tool of integrating the community and, if so, how. This case study reveals that there is no provision in urban planning policies specifically for places of worship. Such applications are treated the same as all others even though they have a very different purpose. Places of worship form an integral part of community and can be crucial at a time when political leaders seem to be placing emphasis on family and social cohesion. Marginalising places of worship will continue to disenchant segments of the population and make them feel like "outsiders". Given the contemporary global political climate, there are no easy solutions. This paper makes policy suggestions that government, planners, and community leaders can embrace so that mosques and those who worship in them are seen as part of the community.

Introduction

Increasing religious diversity of Australia's largest cities is presenting a challenge to local governments to find ways of forging new forms of spatial and social belonging.¹ Australia's Muslim population has grown rapidly over the past three decades. For many Muslims, mosques constitute the pivot of their lives. Mosque complexes are places of high activity as they are used five times a day for congregational prayer in addition to hosting a range of other social activities. Yet in Australia, as in many parts of the Western world, mosque applications have been vigorously opposed by local communities. There has been little research into the effects of urban planning policy upon non-Christian religious groups in Australia and this paper examines the role of urban planning policies in determining the location, architectural form, and the use of mosques, as well as their impact on the local community, based on a case study of the Masjid Al Farooq in Kuraby, a suburb of Brisbane in South-East Queensland (SEQ). A broader aim is to establish similarities and differences between Islamic and contemporary planning and whether, and how, places of worship can be accommodated in present-day Australia. Key questions that

emerge are: Can urban planning policy become a tool of integrating the community? If so, how? Are there specific policies for religious facilities and what role do these play in providing an institutional setting for contestation over religious institutions? What are the modes of interaction between planning authorities and applicants who make a claim upon public space for places of worship? Are planners sufficiently qualified to understand the nature of religious applications?

This paper is based on both qualitative and quantitative approaches as well as the mining of archival material. Newspapers such as *The Australian*; *Sydney Morning Herald*; *Courier Mail*, and *The Age* were consulted via their websites; the website of the Brisbane City Council (BCC) was accessed and personnel contacted, to examine its planning instruments and policies with regard to places of worship in general and the development application of Masjid Al Farooq in particular; statistics were obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' via its website; office bearers of the Mosque were interviewed to establish the history of the mosque; primary data were collected through the completion of questionnaires by residents living in the vicinity of the mosque; and there was visual observation of the mosque and surroundings.

Muslims in the Australian Landscape

White Labour Policy

While Muslims as a percentage of the overall Australian population remain relatively small, the Muslim population has grown rapidly over the past two decades in real numbers. Muslims are also conspicuous because of their residential concentration, manifestation of religious practices in public spaces, and global concerns around their place in Western countries. Contemporary debates about the place of Muslims in Australian society must be seen in the context of long held fears that the country was becoming Asia-nised. Modification of the White Australia Policy in 1956 to allow non-European entry into the country to address the labour shortage led to an influx of migrants from Asian countries as well Muslims from Turkey, Lebanon, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia.² While migrants from Asia are distinct from the majority receiving Australian society, international geo-politics has given these differences an added edge in the case of Muslims who constitute less than 2% of the Australian population but whose numbers more than doubled from 148,096 (0.9% of the Australian population) in 1991 to 340,390 (1.71%) in 2006.³ According to the 2006 census, a third of Muslims were Australian-born and over 80% were concentrated in New South Wales (168,761) and Victoria (109,370). The number of Muslims in Queensland (20,321) was comparatively small, but about two-thirds were concentrated in the wider Brisbane area.

Contemporary Perceptions of Muslims

Negative mainstream public perception of Muslims in Australia may be attributed to watershed incidents such as the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 by Al-Qaeda, the Bali bombing (2002) in which many Australian lives were lost, and race riots in Cronulla, Sydney, in 2005. Contemporary issues such as the arrival of mainly Muslim asylum seekers by boat and the wearing of the *niqab* (face covering) by Muslim women are perpetuating negative stereotypes about Muslims who have faced increased verbal and physical harassment over the past

decade.⁴ According to Rane et al. the discourse of politicians, media, and commentators points to

... perceived incompatibility of Islam with the broader Australian public. Much of this commentary has espoused a remarkably negative and overly reductive picture of Islam and its adherents.⁵

Opposition to Mosque Development in Australia

The word “mosque” originates from the Arabic *masjid* which literally means a place for prostration before God. Muslims are required to perform obligatory *salah* (prayer) five times daily. While *salah* (prayer) can be performed anywhere, there is greater reward in offering it congregationally, which signifies the cohesiveness of the *ummah* (global Muslim community). Mosques are not built solely for prayer. They are comprehensive in their function. Many modern mosques have amenities such as medical clinics, libraries, gymnasiums, adult classes for women, madrassas for children, drugs awareness programmes, and funeral services.⁶

There has been strong opposition to mosque development in Australia over the past decade. In 2003, for example, the Baulkham Hills Shire Council rejected an application from an Islamic group to build a mosque in Annangrove in north-western Sydney. This was overturned by the Land and Environment Court in New South Wales. Justice J. Lloyd warned that the consenting authority should “not blindly accept the subjective fears and concerns expressed in the public submissions [which] appear to have little basis in fact”.⁷ Laura Buggs has written that opposition to Islamic schools in Camden and Bankstown in metropolitan Sydney was based on arguments that the schools would be incompatible with the surrounding environment; the absence of Muslims in the area; and a “moral panic” about increased crime. Such concerns are absent when Catholic or Anglican schools are built. Residents’ real fear, however, is that the schools would attract Muslim families to the area and change its racial and religious composition.⁸ In Camden, community opposition was so intense that in 2007 two pigs’ heads were lodged onto metal stakes at the site.⁹

In response to these and other refusals of mosque applications, Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay opine that:

... opposition to mosque development in Sydney had depended heavily on stereotypes of Islam as fanatical, intolerant, militant, fundamentalist, misogynist and alien.¹⁰

In contrast to other parts of Australia, opposition to mosque development has been muted in Queensland where there have been few written submissions and no coordinated local community opposition to development plans.¹¹

Australian Planning Policies on Places of Worship

The establishment of places of worship, and especially one involving a religion that is viewed with suspicion, is a challenging proposition because of its impact on land use. Contemporary urban planning, which has its origins in the USA where suburban sprawl was criticised for creating car dependency and for leading to social isolation, promoted neighbourhoods that were diverse in terms of use and populations; had increased

possibilities for walking and public transit (compact cities); and accessible public spaces to develop “community”.¹² Leonie Sandercock critiqued modernist planning for homogenising people’s values and placing emphasis on the material as opposed to the aesthetic. Contemporary cities are changing as a result of global migration, which has led to social diversity, indigenous peoples’ demands for rights, and pressure from organised civil society for citizenship and civil rights. Sandercock calls for planners to place the socio-cultural dimension of human life at the centre of planning, a vision that she refers to as “Cosmopolis”. She urges planners to understand power relations in society, break out of the existing planning mould, and adopt new and bold ideas and practices.¹³ The researchers agree that principles of diverse neighbourhoods, reduced dependency on automobiles, and liveability should be taken seriously, and within that scheme provision can be made for mosques.

Australian Planning Policies

Australia has centralised land use planning policies. While multiculturalism rights are included in Australian legislation, such rights can be denied to minority groups through exclusionary land-use policies that deny applications for the development of places of worship by framing such applications as land-use issues rather than as furthering the freedom of religion, thus circumventing the implications of multiculturalism.¹⁴ There are three tiers of government in Australia: Federal, State, and Local. State governments are responsible for town planning but implementation occurs through local governments. During the 1990s, there was an expansion of statutory¹⁵ regional planning across the state. The SEQ Regional Plan 2009–2031 governs development in Kuraby. SEQ is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia; its population having reached 2.8 million in 2008 and expected to grow to 4.4 million by 2031.¹⁶ Development is managed by the Sustainable Planning Act (SPA) no. 26 of 2009, which replaced the Integrated Planning Act (IPA) (1997). While the IPA had established performance objectives, called “desired environmental outcomes”, in which there was no prohibited development as long as established zoning goals were met, the SPA can restrict or prohibit development as decision-makers must achieve ecological sustainability.

Places of Worship in Brisbane

The Brisbane City Plan (2000) does not deal specifically with places of worship. According to BCC Town Planner Eve Vickerson, “Places of Worship” are defined as “Community Uses”. Chapter 3 of the *City Plan* states that “land in the Community Use Area may be either privately or publicly owned and accommodates a range of community uses”.¹⁷ This includes cemeteries, community facilities, education, health care, and railway activities. According to Vickerson, Community Use Applications are assessed against the relevant sections of *City Plan 2000* only. Impact assessable applications require public notification, in which members of the public can make submissions which the assessment manager has to take into consideration during the assessment process. Planning proposals are monitored by the IPA established regulatory body, IDAS (Integrated Development Assessment System).¹⁸

Mosques in Queensland

The number of mosques has grown steadily in Queensland due to the expanding Muslim population. There are now mosques in Mareeba, Cairns, and Townsville in Far North

Queensland; at Mackay and Rockhampton in Central Queensland; in Bundaberg, the Gold Coast, and there are around 13 mosques in Brisbane in such suburbs as Holland Park, Lutwyche, Eagleby, Darra, Algester, Rochedale, West End, Logan, Kuraby, and Bald Hills, which opened in April 2005. In addition, there are prayer facilities at the Brisbane International Airport, the Dreamworld theme park and the Harbour Town Shopping complex. Muslims in Gympie have also acquired a property and are in the process of establishing a mosque. Unlike many migrants and refugees of other faiths, particularly Christians who in most instances arrived to readymade churches, Muslims had to establish institutions from scratch.

Suleman Sabdia has been witness to the rapid growth of Islam in SEQ over the past three decades. Sabdia, who was born and educated in South Africa, migrated to Australia in 1978. A chartered accountant by profession, he spent two years in Adelaide before relocating to Brisbane in 1981. Over the past three decades he has been involved in the Islamic Society of Holland Park, Islamic Council of Queensland (ICQ), and the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC). Sabdia's recollection points both to the growth of mosques as well as their importance for Muslims:

The first objectives of the Muslims was mosques ... If I can mention that in 1981 there was one mosque in Brisbane and that was Holland Park. Its committee members comprised largely of Muslims from Pakistan and a sprinkling from Fiji. There was one lone Bosnian member of the committee. So the preoccupation of those early Muslims was to have a *Musjid* of their own and they were pre-occupied with this. The Fijian committee established the Islamic Society of Darra; the Arabs started the Islamic Society of West End; the Bosnians started the Islamic Society of Rochedale which is now called Islamic Society of Eight Miles Plains; and I think that occurred for the best part of the first twenty years. It is only after that that the Muslims felt the need for other institutions for the benefit of the community and they saw the need for Islamic schools, Muslim women got together and developed the Women's Muslim Association to meet the requirements and needs for women's issues.¹⁹

The Mosque in Kuraby

The Masjid Al-Farooq in Kuraby was established by migrants from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia, who began arriving in Australia from the mid-1970s. By the mid-1980s approximately 30 Muslim families were living in the Eight Mile Plains area. The need for a suitable place to pray and educate their children became urgent and the Islamic Madressah of Sunnybank Ltd. was formed to locate suitable facilities. The committee purchased an Anglican Church at 1408 Beenleigh Road, Kuraby, at the end of 1989. The decision to purchase the church was pragmatic since it bypassed the myriad of bureaucratic development challenges as the land was already designated a place of worship. The population of Kuraby, according to the 1991 census, was 1003. The *City Plan* described Kuraby as a "Potential Development Area" with densities of up to 25 dwellings per hectare "encouraged". Planners thus envisaged residential development in the vicinity of the mosque but probably did not expect that many of the incoming residents would be Muslims. The *City Plan* also envisaged "construction of an overpass and redirection of Beenleigh Road at the existing railway level crossing."²⁰

Thirteen donors funded the purchase of the property.²¹ The building initially functioned as a *madrasah* and subsequently a *jamaat khanna*.²² During the fasting month

of *Ramadaan* the nightly *taraweeh*²³ prayer was performed communally. To perform the *taraweeh* prayer, *huffaz* such as Hafez Suleman Moolla, Hafez Hathurani, Mawlana Hamadullah Bhutto, and Rashid Omar were brought from South Africa for this purpose. Some of these visiting luminaries implored the trustees to perform communal prayer on a regular basis, and the first *Jumuah* congregational prayer was performed by Mawlana Hamadullah Bhutto c. 1994.²⁴

Refurbishing the Mosque

The original building was a simple wooden structure, dilapidated in parts. It was 75 years old and the Committee put a new roof and added two classrooms at the back. The trustees realised that this building was inadequate and began a fund-raising drive to build a new structure.²⁵ Funds were collected over a period of six years and Charles Ham & Associates lodged plans to the Council on 19 October 1995 on behalf of the Committee to build a new double story building to be used as a “Place of Public Worship” (mosque). A statutory declaration was lodged on 9 November 1995. According to Yusuf Limbada, the design deliberately tried to keep the principles of the “Queenslander” so that it would not look out of place in its surroundings. They also built a moderate minaret, unlike the minarets at some other mosques which cost a fortune, so that it and the mosque would be less conspicuous.²⁶ The proposal met with the broad aims of the development plan, but the Council had to consider several issues. Section 18.5 of the *Town Plan* required car parking spaces at the rate of one per 12 sq. metres of gross floor area (GFA). Council allowed for 24 spaces as opposed to the 43 required by the regulation because street parking was available and the Kuraby Railway Station, located 280 metres from the mosque, has public car parking facilities. Another consideration was whether the Railway Level crossing intersection would pose a traffic problem. According to Council’s report, “the proposal ... will not have an adverse impact”. Of significance is that when the statutory declaration was submitted, there were no public submissions. Council officially granted permission for the proposed development in May 2000.²⁷ Dr Craig Emerson, then member for Rankin, acknowledged the sterling work on the local community in developing the mosque when he stated in a Parliamentary debate on 22 March 2004:

I want to pay tribute to the wonderful contribution the local Islamic community makes in our area. The Kuraby Mosque was established in 1987.²⁸ Around 2,000 people are associated with the mosque. Worshipers at the mosque were born in over 15 different countries, including South Africa, various European countries, New Zealand and Australia. General attendance at the mosque is around 100 for morning prayers, 150 in the evenings and 500 on Fridays. The Islamic community embraces the local community and schools with open days at the mosque. Some members of the Kuraby Mosque belong to the local Islamic Women’s Association, which offers support to both Islamic and non-Islamic members of the community, including respite care and nursing care ... This is a vibrant Islamic community and its members make a wonderful contribution to and are marvellous citizens in our local area.²⁹

The Role of the imams

One of the problems faced by Muslims in Australia was finding suitable *imams* who were well versed in theology to lead the congregation. In the formative years, the *imams* were

imported from overseas. Mawlana Hamadullah Bhutto of Pakistan was the first full-time *imam* of the mosque, serving from c 1994–1998. When he departed to pursue business interests, Feizal Chotia was appointed *imam* and religious instructor in December 1998, shortly before the mosque was redeveloped. Chotia, who was 28 at the time, was a graduate of the Madrassah Arabia Islamia in Azaadville, South Africa, as well as a graduate of the Rand Afrikaans University where he completed a BA (hons.) degree in Islamic Studies. Chotia was affiliated to the Jamiatul Ulama (Council of Theologians) of South Africa and had taught in *madrassahs* and Islamic schools, and conducted Islamic educational programmes for teenagers in South Africa and in Perth before moving to Brisbane.³⁰ Chotia left shortly after to open his own *madrassah* on the Gold Coast.

Chotia was replaced by Mawlana Yusuf Peer, who served the mosque from 1999 to 2001. Mawlana Peer completed his *hifz* in Pakistan and studied Islamic Theology at the Al Azhar University in Egypt. He taught for a few years in South Africa until an offer was made for him to take up the position in Brisbane. Mawlana Peer's *imamate* coincided with the growth of the mosque from a fledgling institution into one of the most highly patronised mosques in Brisbane. Mawlana Peer left at the end of 2002 to join the Islamic School. For several years Dr Mohamed Abdalla and several other *imams* filled this role on a part-time basis until another South African trained *imam*, Akram Buksh, took over the *imamate* of the mosque in 2007.

The reason for tracing the Imams of the mosque is to illustrate two points. The first is that contrary to perception of *imams* as powerful individuals who wield enormous influence on the wider Muslim community, the *imams* of the Kuraby mosque have enjoyed short tenures and, as paid employees of the mosque, mainly fulfil roles pertaining to prayer and education. Second, there is a national debate about foreign trained versus locally trained *imams*. The relevant point is that often *imams* are brought from overseas, mainly from South Africa in this case, because those who control the mosque are familiar with their ways. Such *imams* do not have a negative influence and are not out of touch with Australian realities since Islam is a minority religion in South Africa as well.

September 11 and its Aftermath

Masjid Al Farooq, or the Kuraby Mosque in Brisbane, did not escape the ramifications of the September 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York. The mosque made international news when the old building was petrol bombed on 22 September 2001. Dr Abdalla lived close to the mosque and describes what happened:

I was the second person to see it, really, because the window of the bedroom of my son overlooks the mosque, so my wife woke up at about quarter to three in the morning at the sound and the light of the fire. She was quite frantic and scared, so she woke me up. I jumped out of my bed... and through the window I saw the huge fire, and of course we realised it was the mosque that was on fire. My first fear was [for] myself and the neighbours who are so close by. I called the fire brigade and then straight away went to my neighbours who are a couple of elderly Australian people, knocked at their door at that time, and they opened it and I said, "Are you okay? Come to our house if you are frightened." They said, "No, we are fine". The old lady said, "I was going to put the fire out with the hose!" And then I went to check on the other elderly lady who lives very close to the mosque, she's about 85 years old, and she

was shaking, and she was very frightened. Having confirmed that the fire is not close to us, I came straight to the mosque. The fire brigade was already here, and then I started calling the members of the congregation, the Muslims, and I think within half an hour we had about 10, 15 brothers, within a couple of hours we had about 60 people here.³¹

According to Dr Abdalla, the attack was not entirely unexpected:

We'd been having a lot of threats, and a lot of people coming around, I mean, even physically people daring to come. There'd be 40 or 50 of us standing out there and some people would come and, you know, they'd break the bottle and start threatening ... of being killed, or we're coming back to get you, and things like this. So we were anticipating that something like this was going to happen.³²

Many Muslims expressed hurt over the attack on "their" mosque. According to then Imam Yusuf Peer, felt a sense of deep injustice at what had happened:

Something that has been bombed and taken away without any justice it's totally wrong. Of course any place of worship to be bombed or to be gutted down or to be vandalized is totally, you know, devastating, and totally unacceptable.

This feeling of pain was shared by many Muslims, as reflected in the following montage of reactions:³³

- There 's been a lot of disappointment hurt obviously, a religious place is always a focal point for any community, and this has struck at the heart of the Muslim community, being the mosque. I must say there has been anger, but not directed at any particular person or persons, but we understand the climate that we live in.
- You cannot really describe such a feeling because this is not your house. I mean, you might have a different feeling if you see your house burning, but this is the house of God, the house of Allah has been burned.
- Because I attend this mosque every day, when it actually happened it felt like someone was saying, "Your house has actually been burned down", that 's the way it hit me, you know that 's the way I felt.
- My children literally live at the mosque, this is their place where they play around. They spend the entire afternoon here after school. What if these children were in the mosque? They have been scared, because they would have gone on a camp out, and when they came back there was no mosque there. They were shocked. They just came home—normally they talk about what a wonderful camp it was, but this time it was, "Oh, Mummy, I don't believe it."
- There were a lot of Korans (*Qur'ans*) and books that were in the children's names that were burnt, and children are very possessive of their things. They were traumatised, they were crying, because this institute was very, very dear to them. And I think they have sort of grown up a little bit in the matter of a few weeks, and they always remember the day, because 11th September was the bombing, 22nd September was their bombing.
- My son, three years old, he does not know anything about the fire, but now at home he 's building a mosque with his building blocks, and then he drops it and he says, "The mosque is burnt". And I say, "I'm going to the mosque now," and he says, "I can't come with you. Maybe the naughty man will burn me."

The mosque management did not exploit the bombing for publicity. According to trustee Mahmood Surtie, whatever was affected by the fire “was removed the very next day. We felt that we don’t want this thing to be embedded in the minds of the young children who were in this *madrasah*, and we didn’t want any more negative publicity”.³⁴ Dr Mohammed Abdalla, now head of the Griffiths University Islamic Research Unit, emphasised that many in the wider Australian community:

showed their goodwill. We had a church that came to us and said, “We are ready to give you 30 men to guard your mosque.” We had people come with flowers to the mosque, we had people come wanting to clean the mosque for us.³⁵

In the weeks and months following the bombing, several political figures visited the mosque, including then federal Labor leader Kim Beazley, State Government minister and local member, Stephen Robertson, and Uri Themal, Director of Multicultural Affairs in Queensland. During his visit to the mosque on 28 October 2011, Labor leader Beazley said:

One of the things that is making this country a great country is the unity of all our communities - that we have a community built on many cultures, on many races, and on many religious backgrounds. And the ability for all of us to exist with one another, to take pleasure in each other’s achievements and beliefs, is central to Australian civilisation now. I think it’s enormously important in these troubled times that we are a united community. I must congratulate you on the way that, despite the problems that you’ve confronted, you’ve come together as a community, that you bear it without bitterness, and that you want only to express the fellow feeling that you have with all your fellow Australians in these times. That’s a magnificent contribution.³⁶

Christian–Muslim Relations in Kuraby

According to Dr Abdalla, in the years since September 11, local Muslims began to engage the surrounding community rather than withdraw into a shell in order to “break the fear of the unknown, otherwise we will become exclusivist, and we’ll develop a ghetto mentality, and that is not positive for the Islamic community”.³⁷ The approach of the Mosque leadership was to engage the surrounding community. As Dr Abdalla points out:

... my personal advice to the Muslim community was that we should not allow fear to stop us from interacting with the wider community. This is the only way we can begin to break the fear of the unknown, we have to explain to people, otherwise we will become aloof, we’ll become exclusivist, and we’ll develop a ghetto mentality, and that is not positive for the Islamic community... Our faith should not stop us from going out there and explaining to people. It’s not about conversion, it’s not about forcing people into the faith, it is just to create understanding which leads to harmony and leads to a better pluralistic society.³⁸

“Open day” interfaith meetings, participating at meetings of Rotary clubs, engaging the Queensland Police, and arranging mosque tours for schools are all parts of the activities carried out by the local Muslim community. According to Dr Abdalla, the response of the public has been positive: “When people come inside and see the way we worship and that

everything is normal, that we are actually human beings after all, they become quite surprised.” Masjid Al Farooq provides a fulcrum around which local community life revolves. The education of children was the primary concern of founding members and the *madrasah* occupies a pivotal part of the activities on most afternoons. In addition, education classes are held for women; a lecture/sausage sizzle is held on Saturday evenings to occupy the youth productively; while guest lecturers from overseas visit the mosque on a regular basis. Fund-raising Barbeques and auctions are held annually at the Wally Tate Park to raise funds. The mosque draws a large number of attendees daily, with the highest attendance on Friday afternoons.

The Mosque Expansion

Rapid population growth has made it difficult to accommodate worshippers at peak times. The population increased from 1003 in 1991 to 1673 when the application for the development of the mosque was lodged around 1995, and reached 6692 in 1991. The number of dwellings increased from 330 in 1991 to 2243 in 2006. The first count of Muslims took place in 2001. There were 276 Muslims. Over the next five years there was a 200% increase to 804. Housing construction has been ongoing since 2006 and the population at the end of 2011 census, we estimate, was around 9000–10,000, with a substantial increase in the number of Muslims. This is based on personal observation about the number of Muslims moving into the area. The growing Muslim presence in the community is evident in the increasing numbers of Muslim shoppers at the Underwood Shopping Centre and the profusion of butchers and restaurants catering specifically for Muslims. Population growth has resulted in the mosque being congested at certain periods of the day (mainly around sunset), week (Friday), and during special religious occasions, such as the month of fasting (*Ramadan*).

Problems of Overcrowding

During peak periods many worshippers cannot be accommodated within the mosque and management decided to effect changes to ease overcrowding. At a pre-lodgement meeting with the BCC on 13 May 2010, Council ruled that the proposed development was an Impact Assessment Material Change of Use Application and requested a Traffic Assessment Report; Noise Impact Assessment; and Code Compliance Report.³⁹ The proposed change was defined as “development” in terms of Section 2.2 of the SPA and made subject to Code Assessment. Section 2.5.1 requires Council to seek the “views of the surrounding community”, while Section 2.5.2 requires public notification. The development application, lodged in February 2011, included a deck over the existing car park, which was to be semi-enclosed to minimise potential acoustic impact, an enclosed main entry foyer, additional washroom facilities, lift, and covered entrance walkways on the western side of the building. These changes were considered by the applicants to be consistent with the SPA 2009; SEQ Regional Plan 2009–2031; and the *City Plan*.

The application stated that a Traffic Assessment was not necessary because the mosque was accessible by public transport and that the development would not increase traffic as most attendees lived in the immediate vicinity and walked or cycled to and from the Mosque. The development was not intended to increase the number of worshippers but accommodate the increase in attendees due to more Muslims “living and/or working in the area”. The proposed deck was intended to accommodate the existing

“overflow” of worshippers during peak periods when many were forced to pray in the car park and on the open air grassed area in front of the mosque.

Council Reaction to Mosque Application

The Application was submitted on 11 February 2011. Eve Vickerson, Council’s Assessment Manager, wrote on 14 March 2011 requesting the GFA of the existing and proposed development in order to determine the number of additional car parking spaces required⁴⁰ and actual times when the deck would be used. She advised that direct access to the mosque from the proposed “side entries” on the western boundary would not be supported and amended plans should remove these. Public notification of the proposed development was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the SPA. Letters were mailed to surrounding properties on 28 March 2011; notices were erected on the mosque property on 29 March 2011; and an advertisement was placed in the *Courier Mail* on 29 March 2011. The public had time to comment until 20 April 2011. Only three submissions were made in opposition to the development.⁴¹

Opposition to the Extension Plan

It is striking that the proposed development did not generate the same level of opposition as witnessed in other parts of Australia. The three submissions pointed specifically to the logistical problems created by the presence of the mosque rather than the character of Muslims per se or Islam as a religion. There is a strong focus on traffic congestion, parking problems, and noise, while stressing acceptance of Muslims in the community. This is in contrast to Sydney where Dunn et al. point out, “opposition to mosque development had depended heavily on stereotypes of Islam as fanatical, intolerant, militant, fundamentalist, misogynist and alien”.⁴² Vickerson responded on 1 June 2011 that Council required a traffic impact report; requested details on the activities carried out at the mosque, and insisted on additional on-site parking spaces as the enclosed balcony was considered GFA. On 14 June 2011, the mosque submitted a revised plan omitting the deck, the central point of its proposed development, suggesting that it had conceded defeat on the original development plans.

Survey of Local Community⁴³

Twenty residents were surveyed to assess the attitude of the residents of Kuraby towards the mosque, and its impact on the community. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, as well as through questionnaires which were placed in the postal boxes of houses in the vicinity of the mosque. All 20 respondents live fewer than 3 kilometres from the mosque; most lived in the area for longer than 15 years (1 individual lived in the area for 51 years and 2 others for over 30 years); and there were 11 women (55%) and 9 men (45%). Thirteen respondents described themselves as being of “Anglo-Celtic” background, while five were of “South Asian” background. An assumption is made that the majority of those who described themselves as “Anglo-Celtic” are Christian. According to the 2006 Census, 58% of the residents of Kuraby were Christian and 12% were Muslim. In terms of gender, age, and religion, the sample was broadly representative of the general population of Kuraby.

Results

The questionnaire sought to establish the perceptions of safety given the growth of the Muslim population in the area. The overwhelming majority (16 of 20 respondents) described the area as “safe” or “very safe”, suggesting the absence of the “moral panic” that has emerged as a key discourse around the presence of Muslims in other parts of Australia. Thirteen of the 20 respondents said that they had some knowledge of Islam. Only 6 of the respondents knew Muslims through direct contact with them, the others relied on newspapers, the radio, and television for information about Muslims. Since 16 of 20 respondents had Muslim neighbours, this suggests that there was little direct contact between Muslim and non-Muslim neighbours. That the media seems to be crucial in shaping perceptions about Muslims is a concern, for various studies have alluded to anti-Muslim bias in the media. Respondents’ acknowledged that there was a negative perception of, and racial prejudice against, Muslims in the wider Australian community, and those who knew Muslims personally held a more positive attitude. Most respondents felt that Muslims were not unusual but tended to keep aloof, lacked humour, and did not mix easily with the wider society. They also pointed to cultural difference such as dress, gender segregation, and face covering as factors creating a distance.

On the whole, while respondents may not be intimate friends with Muslims, there was no obvious animosity. Nineteen of the 20 respondents described their neighbourhood as “multicultural”; most felt that Kuraby was orderly, peaceful, and clean; but that in the process of expansion, the suburb has lost its sense of “community”. The tenor running through their comments was that while the suburb did not have racial or religious tension- or crime-related problems, Muslims tended to mix with fellow Muslims and coalesce around the mosque. There was no conflict with the non-Muslim segment of the community but little to draw people together.

Attitudes towards the Mosque

All the respondents were aware of the presence of the mosque in the neighbourhood, with one person remarking “you have to be blind or deaf not to know”. Only 6 of the 17 non-Muslim respondents had visited the mosque, however, suggesting that mosque authorities need to engage better with the local community. The majority of respondents felt that the mosque generated traffic, noise, and parking problems, but it did not drop property prices or increase crime rate, draw unwelcome persons, or led to Islamic fundamentalism. The majority did not find the structure imposing and were happy with its location. For most residents, the main concern was the additional traffic and parking problems during prayer services, such as the Friday afternoon congregational prayers and the nightly prayer during the month of *Ramadaan* which attract large number of workers.

The responses to the questionnaire suggested that, on the whole, the presence of Muslims and the mosque has not stirred the same passion as in other parts of Australia. Residents were generally accepting of Muslims and regarded them as worthy of citizenship. Although visibly Muslim, the researcher was treated with courtesy and warmth by those who were interviewed. However, the mosque is a source of irritation because of the traffic and congestion, and respondents tended to focus on these problems. The question that arises is what can be done to address the logistical problems in a way that is satisfactory to those for whom the traffic is a problem and for Muslims who need to attend the mosque.

Recommendations

While mosque debates have been explosive in many parts of Australia, opposition in Kuraby has been subdued and tends to focus on practical objections concerning traffic, noise, and parking, rather than being expressed in racial, religious, or cultural terms. In returning to the key questions, it is clear that the mosque has had a dramatic impact on land use in Kuraby, some of it direct and some indirect. A proportionately larger number of Muslims live in Kuraby than in Brisbane as a whole. According to the 2006 census, 12% of the residents of Kuraby gave their religion as Muslims, as against 1.1% in Brisbane. Clustering around the mosque underscores its importance to Muslims—they function as “community centres”, places where Muslims pray, socialise, educate their children, prepare the dead for burial, get married, and collect money for the needy. The mosque has had an indirect impact on the types of businesses operating in the area – butchers, restaurants, Islamic schools, specialty clothing stores.

Local Planning Authorities and “Places of Worship”

Local planning authorities have not adopted policies specifically for “places of worship”. Development proposals are assessed against stringent Council regulations contained within existing planning instruments. The presence of religious communities who attend places of worship several times a week, or even each day, requires a rethink. Most of the tension surrounding Masjid Al Farooq is due to traffic and parking congestion. The presence of an open-level railway crossing less than 50 metres from the mosque is a major contributory factor to traffic in the late afternoon/early evening when multiple activities take place at the mosque site at the same time that there are more frequent stops at the railway crossing. The obvious solution is to address this crossing. *City Plan 2000* mentions “the construction of an overpass and redirection of Beenleigh Road at the existing railway level crossing”. However, according to the BCC website this has been put on hold. It is the contention of this study that an overpass will resolve the bulk of the traffic problems, congestion, and even parking around the mosque. The area at the crossing would become a cul-de-sac, eliminating traffic build up and create additional parking spaces. In the absence of such a bold step, traffic problems could flare into unnecessary confrontation that may be portrayed as religious in nature.

Planners and Social Commitment

Development decisions are taken by local councils. Council rejected the two entrances that lead to the Wally Tate Park in 2011. Given that many attendees park at the Kuraby Station and Wally Tate Park, these unobtrusive entrances would facilitate movement in and out of the mosque and eliminate pedestrian traffic on Beenleigh Road. A query to the Council was met with the explanation that it is against policy to allow private property entry to Council land. This is short sighted in the context of this particular development. Leonie Sandercock’s call to planners to adopt a socially committed approach that will make a difference to the quality of life of the heterogeneous peoples who live in most cities in the world today is apposite.⁴⁴ Leaving the status quo will compound the situation. An earnest attempt must be made to address the problem.

The mosque already exists and the problems cannot be resolved by ignoring them. Some action has to be taken. In the short term, it is recommended that plans to construct an overpass in Kuraby be resuscitated; parking problems be addressed through creative

thinking, such as building suitable additional parking in the car park area of the Wally Tate Park or extending the parking facility at the railway station. Mosque authorities can approach the Council with such a proposal. The Federal government could also be approached for funding from one of its programmes aimed at community improvement. Once additional parking has been provided, a resident parking permit scheme can be introduced in nearby streets to prevent mosque attendees from inconveniencing residents. Mosque authorities should engage with the local community about the mosque and its role in the community. In the mid-to-long term, the local Muslim community in Kuraby should engage with the Council with a view to locating a suitable site to build a second mosque because the Muslim population is continuing to increase and the present mosque cannot accommodate them all.

Embracing Multiculturalism

More generally, planners should receive training on the cultural and religious needs of minority groups. Furthermore, development requests should be seen as validation of minority cultural rights and not simply as a matter of urban policy. This is a delicate task, for recognition of diversity should not essentialise religious groupings. For example, there is concern about Muslims congregating in certain areas. This thesis has argued that this is to a great extent driven by the need to reside in proximity to a mosque. Thus building of smaller but more mosques that are spread out may reduce Muslim residential concentration. This raises the thorny issue of funding, for many Muslims are recent migrants or refugees, and lack resources to build and sustain such facilities. In the interests of long-term cohesion it may be a worthwhile project for the Federal government to consider some form of subsidisation. “Town hall” style discussions involving planners, local political authorities, mosque management, and members of the local community, to discuss proposed development applications may help to avert potential conflicts.

Conclusion

The *City Plan* should make provision specifically for places of worship. The contention is that all planning applications are treated per diem. Even though places of worship may attract significant number of people into an area, it is different to an application to build a stadium or park or clubs. The traffic generated is different, the volume of traffic is different, and even noise level emitted by these venues differ significantly. Such places form an integral part of the community and can be crucial at a time when political leaders seem to be placing emphasis on family and social cohesions. Marginalising places of worship by placing them on the outskirts of suburbs will not be sending out the correct message—they should be visible and accessible. There are no easy solutions. One possibility applicable mainly to Greenfield sites is to set aside land in residential areas (just as land is set aside for parks and recreational facilities) for places of worship and assess them on the basis of performance criteria. Another approach may be to require developers to set aside land for community uses in addition to parks. More thought needs to go into working out the exact mechanics of this. Changing design and architecture of such building sites makes people uncomfortable because it is a sign of cultural change. Assessments must ensure that the size, type, and architecture of any development is consistent with the built form of the surrounding area and that sufficient car parking, landscaping, setbacks, etc. is accommodated, so that mosques do not appear as out of character.

NOTES

1. L. Sandercock, *Sustaining Canada's Multicultural Cities: Learning from the Local*, Ottawa, ON: Breakfast on the Hill Seminar Series, 2004. Quoted in Narcisa Medianu, "Diversity and Urban Citizenship in Canadian Cities", Paper presented at the Simons Foundation Harbor Centre, 15 November 2007. Accessed May 18, 2011. <<http://journals.sfu.ca/humanitas/index.php/humanities/article/viewFile/18/22>>.
2. P. Kivisto, *Multiculturalism in a Global Society*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002, pp. 34–43. See also A. Moran, *Australia. Nation, Belonging, and Globalization*, London: Routledge, 2005.
3. A. Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2003.
4. See S. Poynting, "The Irresistible Rise of Islamophobia. Anti-Muslim Racism in the UK and Australia Before 11 September 2001", *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2007, pp. 61–86 for a discussion on the rise of anti-Muslim racism in Australia in the period from 1989 to 2001. The paper argues that the rise of Islamophobia after 11 September built on existing patterns of racism, which evolved from anti-Asianism to anti-Arab racism to anti-Muslim racism. Also see N. Kabir, *Muslims in Australia. Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History*, London: Kegan Paul, 2005. For Kabir, perceived threats posed by Muslims includes them taking jobs, lowering the standard of living by "contaminating" Australia through intermarriage, and rebelling in the future. Kabir concludes that: when it comes to consideration of race, religion and nationalism what overrides race and religion is national security. [Some] will continue to discriminate against Muslims as an out-group, as long as the conflict with members of the Islamic world, such as Iraq or militant Islamic groups, persists (p. 330).
5. H. Rane, N. Mahmood, B. Isakhan, and M. Abdalla, "Towards Understanding what Australia's Muslims Really Think", *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 1, No. 21, 2011, pp. 1–21.
6. S. Zaimche, *Education in Islam: The Role of the Mosque*, Manchester: Foundation for Science, Technology, and Civilisation, 2002. Accessed October 10, 2011. <http://www.muslimheritage.com/uploads/ACF2C23.pdf>.
7. H. Mourad, "The Development and Land Use Impacts of Local Mosques, Bachelor of Planning thesis", The University of New South Wales, Sydney, pp. 36–38.
8. L. B. Bugg, "Religious Freedom and the Right to the City: Local Government Planning and the Rejection of Islamic Schools in Sydney, Australia", Irmgard-Coninx Stiftung Twelfth Berlin Roundtables on Transnationality: Cultural Pluralism Revisited, Religious and Linguistic Freedoms. Berlin, Germany, International juried essay competition, 2009. Accessed August 5, 2011. <http://www.google.co.za/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4SKPT_enZA405ZA405&q=Religious+Freedom+and+the+Right+to+the+City%3a>.
9. E. Murray, "Sydney Islamic School Rejected", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 2009. Accessed August 15, 2011. <<http://www.smh.com.au/national/sydney-islamic-school-rejected-20090602> bfo.html#ixz-z1Ueuc7B75>.
10. K. M. Dunn, N. Klocker, and T. Salabay, "Contemporary Racism and Islamophobia in Australia: Racializing Religion", *Ethnicities*, Vol. 7, No. 7, 2007, pp. 564–589.
11. *Ibid.*
12. P. Gordon and H. W. Richardson, "A Critique of New Urbanism", Paper presented in November 1998, Meeting of American Collegiate Schools of Planning, Pasadena, CA. Accessed May 11, 2011. <<http://www-bcf.usc.edu/~pgordon/urbanism.html>>.
13. L. Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities of the 21st Century*, London: Continuum, 2003, pp. 211–212.
14. L. Bugg and N. Gurran, "Urban Planning Process and Discourses in the Refusal of Islamic Schools in Sydney, Australia", *Australian Planner*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 2011, pp. 281–191.
15. "Statutory" means that plans are required to follow a legislated planning process that includes mandatory components, and is afforded a suite of non-mandatory implementation tools (DIP).
16. *Department of Local Government and Planning*, Queensland. Accessed July–September 2011. <<http://dlgp.qld.gov.au/>>.
17. E. Vickerson, correspondence by email, 25 July 2011, <Eve.Vickerson@brisbane.qld.gov.au>.
18. IDAS is an acronym for Integrated Development Assessment System which was established by the IPA 1997. This regulatory system establishes a common statutory system for making, assessing, and deciding development applications, regardless of the nature of the development, its location in Queensland or the authority administering the regulatory control.
19. Interviewed by Goolam Vahed.
20. Brisbane City Council 2011, *The Brisbane City Plan (2000)*, Chapter 4. Accessed June–September 2011. <<http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/planning-building/tools-forms/city-plan-2000/city-plan-2000-document/index.htm>>.

21. The first group of trustees was made up of the Sabdiya brothers Suleman, Hoosen, Yusuf, and Sikander of South Africa; Iqbal Omar, Memood Nathi, Hajee Badalla, and brothers Yusuf, Ayub, and Ebrahim Limbada of Zambia, Iqbal Patel of Zambia, and Ahmed and Yusuf Hussein of Zimbabwe.
22. *Jama'at Khana* translates literally to a "congregational place". *Jama'at* means a congregation and *khana* means place, hence a *jamaat khana* is a place where Muslims gather to offer communal prayer. This could be once a week to offer the Friday *Jumuah* prayer. For example, workers in Brisbane city rent premises to offer the *jumuah* prayer which has to be offered communally to be regarded as *jumuah*. A mosque is a place dedicated permanently for prayer. It is formally designated as a mosque by a committee in charge and has to offer the five daily prayers communally.
23. *Taraweeh* prayers, according to Hanafi Muslims, comprise 20 *rakaats* performed in pairs of two. This prayer is performed after the nightly *Esha* prayer and it is customary to complete a *khatm*, that is, complete the recitation of the entire Qur'an during the month. Thus, the person leading the prayer has to be able to read the entire Qur'an by rote.
24. Telephonic interview, Ismail Moolla, 27 July 2011.
25. Telephonic interview with Yusuf Limbada, 19 July 2011.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Records obtained from the Brisbane City Council. The approval was based on plans numbered 196TP01B received 20 November 1997; 196TP02A (received 22 September 1997), 196TP03A (received 22 September 1997), 196TP04 A (received 22 September 1997; 196WD01C (dated 6 August 1999) and 196TP01B received 20 November 1997. Frank Andrews, Assessment Manager, Development Assessment Team South, approved the project on 9 December 1997 based on recommendation dated 3 December 1997 by Amanda Mahoney, Planning Officer, Development Assessment Team South. The Islamic Society of Sunnybank Ltd. Submitted DRS/USE 707618 on 3 May 2000. "Decision Notice" under section 3.5.15 of the IPA 1997 was issued on 19 May 2000 when the Council Delegate Decision was made. Permission was given for development under section 3.5.33 of the IPA 1997.
28. According to most trustees, based on oral testimony, the mosque was established in 1989.
29. Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Hansard 22 March 2004. Accessed July 14, 2011. <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/reps/dailys/dr220304.pdf>.
30. Crescents newsletter, 1 December 1998.
31. These voices were broadcast on the programmes "Encounters" on *ABC Radio*, produced by David Rutledge, 28 October 2001. Accessed July 2011. <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/encounter/stories/2001/404240.htm>
32. *Ibid.*
33. These voices were broadcast on the programmes "Encounters" on *ABC Radio*, produced by David Rutledge, 28 October 2001. Accessed July 13, 2011. <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/encounter/stories/2001/404240.htm>.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Mohamad Abdalla on Kuraby Mosque, Brisbane, "The Religion Report", *ABC Radio*, 30 March 2005. Accessed July 14, 2011. <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/reprpt/stories/s1339992.htm>.
36. These voices were broadcast on the programmes "Encounters" on *ABC Radio*, produced by David Rutledge, 28 October 2001. Accessed July 13, 2011. <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/encounter/stories/2001/404240.htm>.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Mohamad Abdalla on Kuraby Mosque, Brisbane, "The Religion Report", *ABC Radio*, 30 March 2005. Accessed July 14, 2011 <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/reprpt/stories/s1339992.htm>.
39. Pre-lodgment Meeting Minutes, 13 May 2010. <http://pdonline.brisbane.qld.gov.au/MasterView/modules/applicationmaster/default.aspx?page=wrapper&key=A003010235>.
40. Table 12 in Transport, Access, Parking, and Servicing Planning Scheme Policy requires car parking rate of 1 space per 10m².
41. <http://pdonline.brisbane.qld.gov.au/MasterView/modules/applicationmaster/default.aspx?page=wrapper&key=A003010235>.
42. Dunn, "Contemporary Racism and Islamophobia in Australia", *op. cit.*
43. The survey was carried out by Yasmeen Vahed in 2011 for her honours thesis for her Degree in Town Planning at the university of Queensland.
44. Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II*, *op. cit.*, p. 233.