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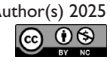

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Between purity and pollution: Water, wudu and the sacred space of the 'pure' body

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Abstract

This paper draws attention to the time-spaces of preparation – such as wudu – as sites where the labour and creativity of constructing the sacred are practiced and their significant role in the construction of the individual's spirituality and expression. In this case, the site of the body and the contexts in which it is located is the focus for understanding how spiritual meaning is produced between the dualisms of purity and pollution, the sacred and profane. It considers how the contradictions of purification practices in spaces that are often socially, behaviourally, emotionally and materially polluting can reinforce the meaning of wudu and contributes to the spiritual life of the individual as they oscillate between purity and pollution. Wudu enables the orientation of the sacred to the spatiality of the body as the site and metaphor of spirituality. Two dimensions of wudu are explored in this paper: how wudu shapes emotional transformation and how the bodily activity, or labour, involved in wudu generates the spiritual. The experience of these dimensions as they combine in different ways to produce meaning for the individual. The paper then concludes that the body in wudu provides a platform for the personal experience of the sacred to the individual.

Keywords

ablution, Muslim geographies, purity and pollution, sacred spaces, water culture, wudu

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Contributions

1. Highlights the importance of adjacent, pre-stages and preparatory spaces of spiritual practice, de-centring traditionally defined spiritually significant spaces such as the space of prayer. Outlines the significance of wudu to the practice of Muslim spirituality.
2. Recognises the precariousness of purity status and the ongoing challenges to purity from the pollution everyday life.
3. Provides rich, detailed accounts of Muslim experiences of practicing wudu and how this contributes to their sense of spirituality.

Introduction

Over the last 25 years, geographers have explored religion and spirituality beyond binary divisions of sacred and profane and the 'official sites' of religion.[1] This paper focuses on the spaces outside of the 'official' sites of religion and spirituality and furthers these explorations by concentrating on the Muslim body and its experiences in public spaces as individuals complete their wudu (also wudhu) ablutions to validate their *salah*, the daily prayers that Muslims are obliged to make. Wudu has been somewhat marginalised in academic study, appearing (if at all) on the periphery of research despite its significance in the daily lives of Muslims. As many practicing Muslims will pray up to five times a day, this can mean wudu is repeated several times during the day. The paper therefore draws attention to wudu, highlighting how the pre-stages and preparation form a key part of the spiritual and emotional rhythm of prayer in corporeal space through the repetitions of purification, pollution and re-purification throughout the day. By de-centring prayer within spiritual practice, the paper explores how the experience of these preparations and the often precarious and contingent contexts in which they take place, shape and produce the spiritual aspect of everyday lives.

When practicing wudu in public spaces, individuals often encounter the social, emotional and material pollution of stresses and structures of working life as well as unhygienic facilities amongst other challenges. The paper elucidates how purity is attained, often within the contradictory surroundings of material and non-material pollution or impurity in the spaces adjacent to prayer, finding that spiritual value and meaning can be generated in this 'oscillatory effect'[2] between pure and impure states thus challenging traditional conceptions of 'sacred space'. Thus, the paper argues, this oscillation between purity and pollution is a moment where the everyday and the spiritual are brought near and overlapping. Through the tension, that is reflected in the ambivalence of water as a source of purification and pollution, the ablution practice creates an opening where the emotional and intimate aspects of wudu prompt a wider set of reflections in participants as the everyday is seen through the lens of the spiritual.

The study is first contextualised within the literature of sacred space, purification and how it relates to the body before explaining the process of wudu. The research project involving survey respondents and interviews conducted with British Muslim participants from 2017 to 2021 is then outlined. The empirical sections then present an analysis of wudu, taking into account gender, ethnicity and religion and the effects of these intersections on the body as key drivers in the generation of spiritual activity.

Sacred space

A foundational text of which many studies of sacred spaces have been developed upon – or in reaction to – is Mircea Eliade's[3] *The Sacred and the Profane*. In this work, Eliade conceptualises sacred space as the hierophany, a manifestation of the sacred within the profane that ruptures an otherwise

amorphous and formless space. Through the establishment or revealing of sacred space, the believer re-enacts cosmological and mythic rituals that act to order the chaos of the disordered world.[4] The insertion of religious symbols, materials or buildings is a repetition of the act of giving order to chaos and distinguishing between sacred and profane spaces. Critically, Eliade's mission to understand how the believer 'attempts to remain as long as possible in a sacred universe'[5] reflects many participants in this research and their concerns to remain within wudu or purified status. Eliade's concept of the hierophany and its role in the distinction between sacred and profane is, of course, not without criticism of the largely binary characterisation of space as well as an uncritical, substantive approach to the sacred that neglects the creativity of humans.[6] Beginning in the early 2000s, geographers provided more nuanced explorations of religion and spirituality, developing analyses that traced how distinctions between the sacred and profane, the religious and the secular was constructed, contested, entangled and transgressed.[7] Highlighted within this milieu were studies of how religion and spirituality operated and were operationalised beyond the 'official' sites of religion such as the church, the mosque, and temple,[8] revealed in the everyday patterns of movement and activity have been foregrounded in numerous studies.[9]

Recent studies have further elaborated how the religious and secular are co-constituted, relational and interdependent upon each other to enable meaning and values to be constructed.[10] As Hopkins et al.[11] suggest, in the context of young people, religious practice and identity is negotiated across a variety of different spaces and places of varying formal and informal faith, religious and spiritual coding. Within Islam, there is no requirement for a 'sacred' space for ritual, hence many Muslim's flexibility regarding where they pray (in this study, spaces such as car parks to shop changing rooms had been discussed by participants), and mosques have often been employed for purposes other than religious practice.[12] Jones' study of young Muslims in rural Wales notes participants utilise spaces of 'fixed temporariness'[13] that require active modification and intent to produce the sacred amongst the secular. These studies reflect Muslim geographies more widely where Muslims are accommodated as a minority community within a majority non-Muslim Western society.[14] Resultantly, and instead of a focus on space within which the individual dwells, there is an emphasis on the ritual cleanliness of the spatiality of the body, its orientation and movement during prayer.

A recent intervention from Sidaway, along with Najib, has argued for the need to avoid treating Muslims as 'objects of scrutiny'[15] or 'laboratory' subjects[16] in ways that exploit. Sidaway further argues that a 'Critical Muslim Geographies' should engage Islam's own working terms, including an engagement with the *Deen* or way of life that informs behaviour and values rather than a 'repackaged' geography of religion.[17] Sidaway's concerns resonate with longer term discussion of the scholarly and media treatment of Muslims within the West, through the lens of a post 9/11 and Islamaphobia context and the repression of women.[18] Many geographers have indeed similarly sought to develop accounts the relationship that draw on the continuities, rather than contrasts between the sacred and profane, religious and secular, and highlight the values that characterise Muslim experiences of space and place.[19]

Kim Knott's[20] work drawing on Lefebvre's spatial analysis framework to highlight relations between the religious and secular. Lefebvre's approach to spatial analysis has provided much theoretical insight to the spatiality of religion and spirituality.[21] Whilst Lefebvre's orientalist outlook has been noted by Sidaway, as Clayton observes across the breadth of his writing, these views are not overly prominent.[22] Observing that there is 'no data irrelevant for the study of religion, and that there are no places in which religion may not, in some sense or other, be found',[23] Knott 'opens' up space to reveal the symbols, relations, presence and performance of religion in everyday contexts through which space becomes a '*medium*, a *methodology* and an *outcome'*.[24] Similarly, Gökarıksel[25] argues that the social and cultural values of the environment and accompanying spatial regimes

shape the experience of 'corporeal piety' suggesting a co-dependency of the sacred and profane. The veiling practices of Muslim women in Istanbul highlight the transformation of the body and its identity through clothing into a signifier of the religious self, creating difference and separation from the (then) secular context of Turkiye. As Lefebvre suggests, the oscillation between representation or the symbol and spatiality in which it dwells results in a flickering effect between the two illusions that is just as important as each illusion individually. Each illusion – in this context, the religious and secular or sacred and profane – 'embodies and nourishes the other'.[26] This oscillation is apparent in the sites of transition, the spaces where the body are prepared for connection and representation of the sacred through processes of removing the self from the profane through purification.

Purification, the body and wudu in spirituality

The purification of sacred sites through ritual and separation of the sacred from the profane[27] reinforces a narrative where the material world is at best a distraction and at worst an existential thread to the sacred. Echoing parts of Eliade's argument that the sacred imposes itself on the profane, Mary Douglas[28] advances that the construction of dirt or pollution is a way for societies to organise and bring order to the world; an expression of a symbolic system that reflects and reinforces shared societal or moral values. The sacred is found in its reverse categories and values, the impure, the taboo and the unfixed which must be transformed and transcended through ritual setting apart of the sacred.[29] Matter becomes taboo, polluting or dirt when it is out of place, between socially constructed boundaries.[30] As many of the taboos or feelings of disgust for dirt or polluting matter arise from the body and its fluids which transgress its boundaries through the skin or orifices, the body should also be viewed as a symbol for society.[31] Clearly this relates to wudu, the act of ablution that cleanses the body from an earthly hold so that it may be acceptable to a higher power. The requirement for wudu after bodily contact with the opposite sex, for example, illustrates how the values of Islam in relation to gender are translated into an embodied act.

Wudu as a response to bodily impurity – and the lack of control over certain transgressions of the body – is discussed in detail by Katz.[32] Katz outlines the argument that wudu and the need for purification of the body is in response to biological events that cannot be controlled by humans (for example, birth and death) and therefore present an existential and chaotic threat to desired orderliness of society.[33] However, Katz eventually concludes the lack of control of such events cannot be a sole factor in determining the need for purification as certain conditions (such as incontinence) are fully or partially excepted from the regulations of wudu. Katz presents a binary and oppositional model, resonating with Eliade, whereby human-made pollution not only prevents the union with God but also makes the site fit for inhabitation by demons. Purification therefore empowers humans in this cosmological dualism and wudu brings this dualism to the scale of the body.

In order for wudu to be in accordance to *fard* (legal aspects) three areas of the body must be washed or wiped. These three areas include: washing or wiping the face from the hairline to the bottom of the chin, and from one side of the face to the other, from right to left ear lobe. Washing of the hands and feet is also considered a compulsory part of wudu, hands must be washed from the tips of the fingers to the elbows and feet from the tips of the toes until the ankles. The last *fard* part of wudu is wiping the head with wet hands, although fully wiping the head is preferred, wudu is considered complete if a quarter of the head is wiped. Whilst wudu is largely connected with *salah*, wudu is also considered as a practice of self-care or relaxation as evidenced through discussions with participants. Citing the healing and calming properties of both ritual acts and water, wudu is recommended in everyday life during moments of anger, fear, doubt and worry. In this sense, the body can act as a key site for the production of religion, spirituality and identities. As with the

affective qualities of wudu, Holloway[34] notes how the body produces belief as the sacred becomes corporeally experienced through the affective registers of the senses. In the process of enacting belief or ritual – even temporarily – by modulating certain sensory inputs or regulating or posing the body in particular techniques (such as the corporeal actions in *salah*) the individual creates moments within the profane time-space in which the sacred is revealed in the spatiality of the body. Moreover, its manipulation, modification and maintenance further bring forth new experiential, spiritual, social, cultural and political constellations of symbols including the foregrounding of the sacred in relation to the profane through embodied practices. Woods[35] builds on this work, arguing that scholars should begin with the premise that spirituality is a latent quality within humans that can be awakened and connected through affective and sensory experiences. Updating Eliade's notion of the hierophany being where the sacred reveals itself, Woods terms this as an 'embodied hierophany' of spiritual awakening in the individual. Like Holloway and Ivakhiv,[36] there is a requirement for some labour or activity on the part of the individual to connect or align the internal subjective self with the collective centre of the sacred.

Sacred space and purification of the individual are often presented as dry spaces separated from the polluting and porous qualities of the body, resonating with a reluctance to engage with the fluid and messy observed by Longhurst.[37] Water disrupts the boundaries between the body and surrounding environment as well as other bodies or entities present, hence challenging the separation of purity and pollution.[38] When water is present, it is often physically or socially separated from dry spaces although still acting as significant and defined components of many sacred spaces. Water comprises around 70% of the body, and the body's immersion into water can produce renewing effects for the individual.[39] Yet there are also ambivalent symbolic meanings with water preceding the land in the Genesis creation myth as well as being punishment for a sinful humanity in the story of Noah.[40] This ambivalence continues into the everyday usage of water as an entity which can bring cleanliness or dirtiness, survival or disease, joy or repulsion, calmness or stress, rehydration or risk. As Watson[41] asserts, water is both a natural resource essential to life and a force of nature that cannot be separated from the cultural representations and practices it enables. This dual characteristic as life-giving and life-destroying suggests a transcendent quality of a non-human vector into the everyday human activities and relations that has the capacity for a transformational effect on the individual. Watson[42] also considers wudu through the lens of habit whereby social and cultural values modulate the practice and mediate encounters with other, non-Muslims in proximity (and indeed, those outside of proximity through often negative representation in the media). Elsewhere, the authors have explored the challenges for Muslims performing wudu in public spaces including encounters with others and the difficulties of non-purpose designed facilities.[43] For Muslims, cleanliness both of body and the spaces where worship will take place are considered essential, as a prerequisite to salah or prayer, ritual cleansing or wudu must be completed. Indeed, for Muslims, wudu is considered an extension to the act of worship, and a medium through which to obtain closeness to God.

Water thus plays a purifying role for many people of faith and spirituality including Muslims. Yet water can also be disruptive. As well as opening to the individual to spiritual connection, it can also leave the body vulnerable to risk through natural disaster or a vector for domestic contamination including, as shall be seen later, bodily fluids.[44] This ambivalence and continuities between sacred and profane – as well as the oscillation between representation and spatiality[45] – is increasingly accepted in the social construction of sacred spaces including the body as a site for the inscription, regulation and experience of religious and spiritual identities.[46] Muslim conceptions of the world likewise omit the stark binary divisions of Eliade's sacred and profane whilst finding orientation and regulation of social relationships and bodily behaviours to draw spiritual meaning, as suggested in Najib's and Sidaway's promotion of the

Deen for understanding Muslim Geographies. A significant part of the construction, or emergence, of spiritual activity is the pre-stages or preparation. The following sections outline how the body is emotionally transformed through such preparation and then the production of spirituality through bodily labour in the case of wudu amongst British Muslims. Before this, we first outline the methods used in this study and the impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic as well as the positionality of the author and research team.

Surveys, interviews and Covid-19

Research for this paper began in late 2017 and evolved through several phases of interviews and a UK-wide questionnaire survey. The initial intentions were to find out more about Muslim's experience of wudu outside of home and the mosque and how this shaped their social relations, identity and values as a Muslim. This is particularly important as much of the UK population is largely unaware of the wudu practice, its media representation being 'othered',[47] in a context where Islamophobia is a continuing presence in the years since 9/11.[48] During the research, the Covid-19 pandemic happened. Public messaging during the pandemic focused on issues of hygiene centred around the hands and face, therefore coinciding with the practice of wudu with the potential to change research participants attitudes towards their ablutions. Later participants were asked about their experience of wudu within the pandemic, and consequent changes in accessibility of public spaces and working from home during lockdowns. This research therefore brings together data gathered before the pandemic reached the UK in early 2020 and after the main series of lockdowns had ceased in late 2021.

Interviews were conducted by the author team, comprised of the authors and a research assistant. The majority of interviews conducted with Muslim participants about their experiences were carried out by those in the team with greater familiarity with Muslim communities and culture. This often led to participants speaking more confidently about particular issues that might be unfamiliar to a non-Muslim audience. Although Schenk[49] draws attention to more complex positionalities between Muslim participants and researchers, this study presented a more straightforward set of relations. Interviews conducted by the non-Muslim interviewer were slightly more didactic in character with the interviewees more cognisant to detail particular terms, concepts or processes that they perceived the interviewer would not be familiar with. This latter issue of positionality demonstrates the significance of rapport through shared identities to knowledge production.[50] Additionally, a Muslim female interviewer conducting interviews led to female participants feeling comfortable to discuss more intimate issues relating to body, age and cleanliness in maintaining wudu, for example in discussion of childbirth and hormonal changes impacting on some Muslim women's wudu habits.

Participants were recruited via a purposeful sampling strategy through both contacts of the researchers and questionnaire respondents. The interviews sample was composed of Muslim men and women, aged 20–50 and in employment or education. This profile was selected as the sample would likely be actively mobile throughout the day and therefore experience maintaining or renewing wudu status in public spaces. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face (pre-pandemic) and then mostly online following the pandemic. It was expected this latter format might be more challenging to conduct and to make participants feel comfortable discussing an intimate process. However, these online interviews were generally easier to organise as participants did not have to travel and for the most part, they felt comfortable opening up and discussing the topic leading to some rich insights which will be explored later. In total 26 interviews were conducted, 11 face to face and 15 online which were then transcribed and thematically analysed. All but one of the participants in this series of interviews have been anonymised and assigned pseudonyms. The

Table 1. Age and sex.

Age	Sex			Total
	Male	Female	Other	
16–17 years	4	5	0	9
18–24 years	3	17	0	20
25–34 years	15	26	0	41
35–49 years	54	57	1	112
50–64 years	23	17	0	40
65–74 years	7	4	0	11
Total	106	126	1	233

exception to this was one participant who explicitly asked on the recording for their real name to be used and this request has been respected.

Alongside interviews with these individuals, the lead author also conducted a series of interviews with representatives of mosques, Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), shopping centres and an airport. Again, these were both face to face before the pandemic and then online after the pandemic with an additional interview in a HEI conducted via email. Many of these interviewees used this research as an opportunity to express some frustrations with the organisations they worked with and challenges of managing diverse communities (particularly in the context of multi-faith spaces), resonating with debates regarding positionality of the 'outsider' researcher eliciting particular discourses.[51] In some cases, the lead author was also viewed (by non-Muslim interviewees) as an expert from whom knowledge could be gained due to their position as a researcher in the subject.[52] All participants and their respective organisations have been anonymised and assigned pseudonyms. Gender, age range and self-defined ethnicity is provided in parenthesis for individuals quoted referring to their experiences.

An online survey was also conducted in 2019 (pre-pandemic), targeting a wider demographic and promoted via selected Muslim community organisations social media channels. This questionnaire mixed quantitative and qualitative, open and closed questions to provide a wider perspective on the experiences and challenges of wudu in public spaces. Of a total 233 respondents, 45.5% identified as male and 53.6% identified as female. The sample demographics are summarised in Table 1. As with the interviews, gender, age range and self-defined ethnicity is provided when these respondents are quoted however no pseudonym is assigned to these responses.

Emotional transformations of the body through wudu

Wudu has a significant emotional component as it enables separation from the complexities and anxieties of the everyday. Participants in this research were often in full time work or education, often with family responsibilities, and therefore could be very busy throughout the day. This transition from the everyday and profane to the sacred enables a time-space of meditation, contemplation and reflection on the mental or emotion state of the individual.[53] Indeed, whilst the primary aim of the wudu is to prepare the body for *salah*, the meditative benefits of wudu are also acknowledged in Islamic teachings with one Hadith (teaching of the Prophet) completing wudu with cold water to manage anger. Breaking from the day to complete wudu could bring difficult logistical challenges but once able to perform wudu the effects could be renewing.

> Just basically cleaning your mind as much as you can. [. . .] And I think it brings calm as well, I think it just kind of like tones everything down. I think with life we are just so fast paced, whereas I think with wudu it just brings that calmness back into your life. It just helps you to prepare for calmness basically. (Noura (F, 25–34, ethnicity not stated)

> Clean[l]iness for ritual worship. Also good for de-stressing and cooling down on a hot day. Refreshing. (Male, 35–49 years, Asian/British-Indian)

> It means I can pray, it is also a way to release stress and feel relaxed, especially when having a difficult day. (Male, 18–24 years, White-British)

Often, this calming effect was attributed to the physiological sensation of bringing the skin into contact with water, 'feeling cleaner', as noted above, bringing positive interruption to the day, and that wudu brings as 'calming' or 'chill'. There is a value to be excavated in the interruption to the obligations and responsibilities that reflects the liminoid qualities of pilgrimage when removing oneself from the everyday is as significant as the activity.[54] There is also a link made to its preparation for prayer and the importance of taking the time before prayer to get in the right mindset. Wudu acts as an important transitionary moment to prayer.

> But when I do ablution it kind of helps me, like, wipe the slate clean and, yeah, it kind of helps me refresh my mind and sort of wash away all the negativity that I might have done or thought about or saw and it just helps me like reconnect with myself again. (Kiran, F, 25–34, British-Pakistani)

Hamoudi (35–49, ethnicity not stated) reflects these comments further:

> [. . .] when you do your wudu, you're more in control of your emotions, or that's what I feel, anyway, you're not running around like a headless chicken.

Hamoudi's use of the word 'control' resonates with prior interventions from Eliade, Douglas and Katz. Wudu is a mechanism for creating order from the potential disorder of the emotions associated with stress and, reading into Hamoudi's comments of emotions getting 'too high', anger that clouds judgement and can lead to negative behaviour. Noura reflects that the state of wudu reverberates across her actions.

> My religion teaches me to keep calm, and because like I said, especially when I am in wudu, even though [. . .] getting angry would not break my wudu, but it just makes me think about my actions a bit more, so I am a bit calmer, I don't lose my temper.

The work of the individual in wudu that helps to calm the mind and its emotions resonates with Holloway's[55] call for considering the labour involved in creating sacred spaces. As with Noura's comments, being able to 'connect' or 'concentrate' on the relationship with God is predicated on being in a calmer, more relaxed mindset. In this sense, the emotions are the pollution to which wudu cleanses and purifies the body of, separating the sacred (the calmness) from the profane (the anger or stress). This labour of purification becomes a key part of Noura's (and other participant's) daily life resonating with Sidaway's proposal for the *Deen* as a key way of understanding Muslim geographies. The emotionally transformational qualities are also noted by Hamoudi and a survey respondent:

> Even the physical benefits, you are cooling your body down, refreshing yourself, which helps in all aspects, whether you are feeling tired or you are feeling depressed or stressed or anything, wudu itself can change your emotions.

> Being clean, close to Allah, washing away sins. Helps to keep away depression (Female, 50–64 years, Asian/British-Indian)

Hamoudi links the physiological qualities of wudu with a change of emotion that can ready the individual for prayer. Such experiences draw attention to how the bodily-material actions can enable the spiritual to occur and the sacred to be revealed. The symbolic completion of wudu illustrates the interdependence of wudu and *salah* – as wudu is required for *salah* and *salah* is the motivation for wudu – and reflects the co-dependence and relational qualities of the sacred-profane and religious-secular dualism as well as inferring their entanglements. Several participants also considered purity to be state of protection with one referring to angels protecting the individual in wudu and alternatively protection from demons, illustrating the value of cleanliness reinforced through the theological lens.

Conversely, the need for wudu could also be a source of anxiety when it cannot be completed. Several participants and respondents would note how not being able to complete wudu – for reasons of time or lack of facilities – would cause unease for the day, reflecting how the obligation to wudu could also be polluting distraction as well as purifying activity. One survey respondent cited mental health reasons for not being able to complete wudu in public spaces. The body is also central to this analysis as it is maintenance (through the cleaning and touching of the body with water) that connects the abstract qualities of the sacred (purity) with the subjective materiality of the individual's body. The body then becomes the 'oscillating' illusion[56] between illusions of inner purity and outer pollution where emotional meaning for the individual is constructed as part of the relationship with God.

The emotional benefits of wudu can also be compromised by issues relating to the materials and facilities required for wudu – water, plumbing and drainage, privacy to name but a few requirements – that can create challenges for its completion. When asked if there were any difficulties in completing wudu in public spaces, 88% of survey respondents replied 'yes' with a division between gender with 81% of men versus 94% of women reporting difficulty; preparations for connecting with the sacred were not experienced equally across gender. Participants reported that they would therefore attempt to reduce their need to wudu by decreasing their intake of food and drink despite this causing discomfort during the day. One participant who had experienced multiple childbirths, leading to the need to go to the toilet more often, felt female bodies were disadvantaged by wudu obligations more so than male bodies. Following the pandemic, some participants suggested this situation had been improved by working from home and the greater flexibility it offered.[57]

Beyond the suitability of the facilities there was also the issue of encounters with others who may not know or be sympathetic to wudu which created precarity in the perceived security of these spaces. There were few instances of outright harassment or hostility displayed towards participants or respondents in this research however the discomfort of others and been looked at was widely reported throughout the sample with only a few respondents suggesting more positive experiences of encounter. A lack of privacy, particularly in relation to gender where 22 (or 9%) survey respondents reported concerns despite no direct question on this issue. Concerns included female toilets being inspected by male cleaners (therefore restricting how comfortable women felt about removing headscarves or revealing the body and hair) as well as a few respondents being concerned about sharing single-gender facilities. Feelings of anxiety and embarrassment – including in front of colleagues at work – were common and could often lead to strategies of waiting for shared toilets

to become empty before beginning wudu or speeding up the process to complete it before other people enter the room:

> Generally no questions asked but people do give odd looks. I try to complete it quicker than usual which takes away the spiritual experience. (Female, 35–49 years, Asian/British-Pakistani)

Such factors can therefore impact upon the experience of wudu and the construction of spaces for salah. The oscillating or flickering effect[58] is subject to stuttering by external factors. The continuation of these practices by individuals in this research – with relatively few examples of participants abandoning wudu and salah in public spaces altogether – refocuses the construction of sacred spatiality of the body through its ritual purification in wudu and reinforces of spiritual meaning in contexts which are often challenging to the maintenance of wudu status.

Bodily labour of spirituality through wudu

Participants and respondents alike had much reflection of the spiritual aspects of wudu and how it links with their wider relationship with God. As with the emotional qualities of wudu, there is an emphasis on the embodied practice and how the body becomes a metaphorical sign for the theology. Many participants considered wudu through the lens of cleaning sin before prayer. This theological and abstract lens then took a practical and embodied turn.

> [. . .] reflect on that period from your last salah to your next salah, and what perhaps each of those body parts has done in that time period, so when you wash your hands you think okay what sins have my hands committed from the last salah to this salah? And, then similarly with your mouth – have I said anything? And, so on and so forth for each of the body parts that you wash during ablution and for me[. . .] (Kira, F, 35–49, White-other)

> When preforming [performing] wadu my sins are washed away with the water as it drains away from my body . . . (Female, 35–49 years, Other-Kashmiri)

Being human, each day will bring the individual into moments of errors in judgement or behaviour that could be reflected on with regret. There is a universality to this whereby the material body and material cleansing potential of water is symbolically linked with theological and emotional to enable (if momentarily,) a separation and transformation of the individual to align the sacred within[59] to the sacred which is perceived external to the individual. Water deployed through the structure of wudu enables these 'sins' to be reflected on as the body is haptically explored through the process of cleansing. Kira's commentary here is particularly illustrative as she maps out the social and moral activities on the spatiality and topography of the body with each body part assigned specific forms of sin. As with Kiran and David, there is a separation between the profanity of the body that commits the sin and the sacredness of the individual reinforcing the sense of ordering that is expressed in the work of Douglas and Eliade. This sense of wudu being a time out of the profane world is continued in the discussion with Hussein (M, 35–49, British-Pakistani):

> Although you can carry on your wudu, you know, for different prayers if you can maintain it, but I think it is recommended that you do wudu every time, because it gives you an opportunity to basically take yourself out of whatever you stained yourself with, remove that, and then go back to the world.

This sense of being 'stained' and reflecting on sins is continual as Hamoudi reflects:

> [. . .] so if you're eating stuff which is making you have to refresh your wudu, then maybe that's a sign for you to try understanding, why is that happening, shouldn't I be in a situation where I don't have to do this?

Wudu acts as a register for Hamoudi, a prompt for reflection on his lifestyle (resonating with the *Deen*[60]); if a particular pattern or habit (such as food) is requiring wudu then is that activity necessary? Elsewhere the issue of diet and its direct consequences for maintenance of wudu became apparent as certain foods or beverages (such as coffee) increase the likelihood of needing the toilet and additional wudu. One mufti in this research noted the Prophet had instructed the belly should be one third full of food, one third of liquid and one third of air. Wudu, and the frequency in which it is performed, is then a continual measure of this guidance. For many, wudu was critical for self-understanding in the relationship between the individual and God.

> [. . .]] you start being in a state where I'm acceptable to stand in front of Allah [. . .] to feel that closeness to Allah (Hamza)

> [. . .] if I go out and I am not clean, I don't feel . . . I don't feel connected or I would haphazardly use the word worthless, in the sense that I feel . . . I feel vulnerable and I feel . . . I don't deserve what I receive from God, in some sense. Because I am not placing myself in a position of being in the best state in front of Him, and that is everywhere isn't it – it is not just in a situation where it is difficult for you to do so. (Kira)

> Purity- preparation for prayer, resetting one's orientation to God, physical cleanliness. . . (Female, 50–64 years, White-British)

Cleanliness enabled by wudu then provides an embodied sense of connection with God for these participants. The survey respondent's comment echoes Eliade's suggestion that the body is modified and orientated towards the sacred through this process of ablution. Cleaning the body is also an intimate act of self-care, an intimacy shared between only the individual and God. As noted earlier, for Noura this is a case of 'cleaning your head' and brings with it what Hussein's terms 'experiential knowledge' as the internal self is brought into unity with the external body:

> [. . .] and so it connects your spectrum of. . .from outside to the spectrum of what's within, and how it all comes together and connects with the divine light. It is difficult to capture in words, but it does have an aura of experience which is sort of experiential knowledge

He continues:

> Yeah, so your prayer actually starts when you're doing wudu, it doesn't start when you say Allahu Akbar. Wudu itself for me is part of the prayer

For Hussein, wudu was then more than just the preparation but a state of mind in which the individual can be 'illuminated' as much as possible to the emotions that arise throughout the day and cloud the mindset. The cleanliness of wudu serves to clean away these clouds.

The ambivalence of water is also present as the process of wudu can also be a messy one. Washing different parts of the body – particularly the feet – can cause water to be spilt on the floor and this issue was a theme throughout interviews and survey responses. Participants and respondents alike were critical of other Muslim and non-Muslim users who would leave the facilities in an unpleasant state, reflecting some diversity in how people use and experience these spaces in preparation for prayer. The survey question regarding cleanliness in educational or work setting toilets

elicited 75 comments from respondents. In many public toilets, of course, it is not just water on the floor and for many individuals commented on the contradictions of a purifying ritual occurring in often unhygienic conditions and proximate to facilities for waste bodily fluids as well as other bacteria:

> We have wudu facilities but it is not clean! What's the point of using facilities to clean ourselves, if it isn't clean? (Male, 16–17 years, Mixed Asian)

> The uniral [urinals] are open and next to hand wash basins which breaks the sanctity of making wudu (Male, 65–74 years, Arab-British)

> Obviously you have elements of you are avoiding bacterias and viruses and different ailments that can occur just from touching things and being around things. I think that was really brought to light during the pandemic because we were told to just wash our hands continually [. . .] (Kim)

Bad smells, urine, dirtiness and general distrust of the hygiene of these spaces dominated many of the 75 responses to the survey question. Water, of course, can obscure many of these entities and so becomes a potential and perceived vector for contamination. The contextual space in which wudu occurs then is not always ideal and this state is often outside of the individual's influence or control, transferring ritual emphasis on the body for the subject and object of purification. Historically the risks regarding the lack of human control of water have been considered in terms of floods and storms, the threat here is both symbolic and material-bacterial demonstrating continuity with the power and danger of water[61] in an individual and spiritual sense. There is a contradiction of the intent of wudu – to purify and cleanse – and the experience of many participants in the spaces in which wudu is completed. The facilities themselves can be messy and unhygienic with polluting substances (e.g. urine) found in close proximity to where wudu is being performed, hostility or perceived hostility from others who share the facilities and a concern for privacy, particularly between genders. Impurities of hygiene and the anxieties within the surrounding space are mentally separated from the purification of the body; an imaginative work of symbolic ordering, more than a re-organisation of the materialities around the body.

Conclusions: the labour and politics in time-spaces of preparation

As outlined in the earlier sections of the paper, recent approaches to sacred spaces and their construction have acknowledged the variable formats of these sites as they are nestled spatially and temporally between alternative offers and uses for the space.[62] Such approaches anticipate the ways in which the secular or profane may become crucial in the construction and formation of the religious and sacred.[63] This paper has widened the formation of sacred space further by drawing out the relations between sites where the main spiritual or religious practices occur and those sites which enable and support these practices, demonstrating the importance of the latter. These sites are connected through the material continuity of the body as well as its transition from an impure to pure state. The outcome of this research foregrounds the emotional and spiritual work centred upon the transformation and separation of the body from the material, social context around it – often associated with spaces of ritual and the sacred – in the site of preparation. This has consequences for how these preparatory time-spaces contribute to the individual's sense of spirituality. Additionally, the social and cultural constructions and contestations of these sites were also considered, finding that conflict and challenges to religious practice are not confined to the official spaces of worship but the unofficial and preparatory spaces as well. Significantly, this paper has

drawn attention to the spatialities and temporalities of preparation, adjacent to worship and highlighted the importance of these sites to the dignity of users. This is particularly heightened in the case of wudu which necessitates moments of vulnerability and intimacy in preparing for spiritual connection.

The paper has also analysed such sites in the example of wudu ablutions, highlighting how it is central in the controlling and ordering that enable the sacred to be revealed within profane space, the processes of purification that enable the distinction of sacred space.[64] The process of wudu was shown as an act of modification and maintenance of the body enabling the hierophany to be revealed in bodily and temporal scales. An important outcome of the focus on the preparatory or pre-sacred spaces is how the sacred is constructed at the scale of the body and transition the individual undertakes in navigating from pollution and impurity to purity. This is not a linear process but one with challenges, particularly in relation to physical facilities and other people present. Bodies in this research have been caught in spaces that present pollution – in the form of material impurities, but also social and emotional impurities – when trying to attain purity for spiritual connection with God; a time-space between purity and pollution and a flickering oscillation[65] between representation and spatiality. The paper contributes to existing geographies of religion and spirituality by arguing how this tension helps to reinforce the spiritual moment, revelation and learning for the individual. Practices such as wudu help make visible the material and non-material pollution that the individual has accumulated since the last ablution, enabling a reflection on this impurity as the strive to purity. The oscillation[66] between the pure and impure and sacred and profane 'enrich and nourish' each other. The co-presence of purity and impurity reinforce the sacred-profane duality on an embodied, social and emotional scale. Processes of managing and separating these dualities enabled the sacred, the 'embodied' hierophany,[67] to be revealed in a mutually-constituted relationship with the profane because of the reflective labour they enable. These secular or profane contexts shape the subsequent experience of the sacred and religious in prayer or *salah* and are therefore an active part of the individual's spiritual expression and relationships.

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