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'Why has this guy got his foot in the sink?': challenges, encounters and everyday geographies of practicing wudu

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ABSTRACT

Wudu, an ablution performed (often multiple times) daily which is integral to the spiritual lives of many, has been somewhat neglected from the analysis of the everyday experiences and geographies of Muslims. The lack of general and academic knowledge around this practice can lead to misunderstandings amongst non-Muslims which may reinforce negative attitudes towards the Muslim population. This paper draws on questionnaires and interviews with Muslims, chaplains and organizations to explore the experience of wudu in public spaces such as educational institutions. It explores the experience of performing wudu in public spaces and contributes to existing Muslim geographies in three crucial ways. Firstly, it examines how wudu ablution can destabilize existing social relations. As an often-hidden act in which Muslims tactically use secular spaces for religious purposes, wudu refracts social anxiety and alienation into discourses of etiquette and the messiness of spaces. Secondly, it identifies the challenges related to performing wudu in public within dominant hegemonies of secular and non-Muslim spaces. Finally, the paper considers how the recent COVID-19 pandemic has modified and reinforced the meanings and experiences of wudu amongst its participants.

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Mots clefs

woudou; ablutions; géographie de l'Islam; pureté et pollution; rencontres; géographie du quotidien

“¿Por qué este tipo tiene el pie en el fregadero?": desafíos, encuentros y geografías cotidianas de la práctica del wudu

RESUMEN

Elwudu, una ablución realizada (a menudo varias veces) diariamente y que es parte integral de la vida espiritual de muchos, ha sido tanto descuidada en el análisis de las experiencias cotidianas y las geografías de los musulmanes. La falta de conocimiento general académico sobre esta práctica puede dar lugar a malentendidos entre los no musulmanes que pueden reforzar actitudes negativas hacia la población musulmana. Este artículo se basa en cuestionarios y entrevistas con musulmanes, capellanes y organizaciones para explorar la experiencia del wudu en espacios

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públicos como, por ejemplo, instituciones educativas. Explora la experiencia de realizar wudu en espacios públicos y contribuye a las geografías musulmanas existentes de tres maneras cruciales. En primer lugar, examina cómo la ablución wudu puede desestabilizar las relaciones sociales existentes. Como acto a menudo oculto en el que los musulmanes utilizan tácticamente espacios seculares con fines religiosos, el wudu refracta la ansiedad social y la alienación en discursos de etiqueta y el desorden de los espacios. En segundo lugar, identifica los desafíos relacionados con la realización del wudu en público dentro de las hegemonías dominantes de los espacios seculares y no musulmanes. Finalmente, el artículo considera cómo la reciente pandemia de COVID-19 ha modificado y reforzado los significados y experiencias del wudu entre sus participantes.

«Pourquoi que ce mec a son pied dans l'évier ? »: les obstacles, les rencontres et la géographie quotidienne du woudou

RÉSUMÉ

Le woudou est une ablution faite quotidiennement, souvent plusieurs fois. Il fait partie intégrante de la vie spirituelle de nombreuses personnes autour du monde, mais a souvent été négligé dans les études de la géographie et des expériences de la vie quotidienne des musulmans. L'absence de connaissances générales et académiques concernant cette pratique peut mener à des malentendus de la part des non-musulmans et cela peut renforcer les attitudes négatives envers la population musulmane. Cet article s'appuie sur des questionnaires et des entretiens avec des musulmans, des aumôniers et des organisations afin d'étudier la pratique du woudou dans les lieux publics, tels que les établissements scolaires. Il s'intéresse à l'accomplissement du woudou dans ces espaces et enrichit la géographie musulmane de trois manières cruciales. Premièrement, il analyse la façon dont le woudou peut déstabiliser des relations sociales en existence. En tant qu'action souvent dissimulée, pendant laquelle les musulmans utilisent stratégiquement des environnements laïcs à des fins religieuses, le woudou réfracte l'anxiété et l'aliénation sur le plan social par le biais de discussions d'étiquette et du désordre des espaces. Deuxièmement, il identifie les obstacles liés à la pratique du woudou en public au sein des hégémonies dominantes d'espaces laïcs et non-musulmans. Pour finir, l'article étudie l'effet de la pandémie de COVID-19, comment elle a modifié et renforcé les significations et les expériences du woudou pour ses participants.

Introduction

The experiences and spatialities of Muslims have received significant attention from geographers in Europe and North America over the last 15 years. Issues of belonging, discrimination, marginalization and access to resources and facilities have been prioritized by geographers (Gale, 2013; Hopkins & Dunn, 2016; Hopkins & Gale, 2012; Kong, 2012; Kuppinger, 2014; Metcalf, 1996). Wudu, a demand detailed in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:6) of the

Quran, is an example of the type of everyday practices which have long interested social scientists, who argue that taken-for-granted mundane routines reflect and reinforce how societal power structures of class, gender and ethnicity are implemented and resisted (de Certeau, 1988; Hagerstrand, 1975; Lefebvre, 1991; Rose, 1993).

As an 'everyday practice' of Muslims, wudu can be particularly challenging to maintain due to the lack of public facilities and potential for the act of cleansing to be misunderstood when encountered by non-Muslims. Yet wudu, an ablution performed (often multiple times) daily which is integral to the spiritual lives of many, has been somewhat neglected from the analysis of the everyday experiences and geographies of Muslims. The lack of general and academic knowledge around this practice can lead to misunderstanding amongst non-Muslims which may reinforce derogatory views and anti-Islam attitudes already prevalent in politics, media and everyday life (Allen, 2010; Najib & Teeple Hopkins, 2020). This paper explores the experience of performing wudu in public spaces, outside of the home and mosque ('official' spaces of religion).

This paper contributes to existing literature of Muslim geographies in three crucial ways. Firstly, it examines how wudu ablution can destabilize existing social relations. As an often-hidden act, in which Muslims tactically (de Certeau, 1988) use secular spaces for religious purposes, wudu refracts social anxiety and alienation into discourses of etiquette and the messiness of spaces. In focussing on wudu in public spaces such as public bathrooms, this paper highlights ways in which seemingly transient and innocuous spaces are replete with power and structured through societal hierarchies which govern behaviours deemed 'acceptable' or within 'social norms'. The governance of behaviours and reactions to bodies considered as the racial, ethnic or religious 'other' in public bathrooms can function to assert dominance and power (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2015). Secondly, through identifying the challenges related to performing wudu in public spaces, the paper explores the extent to which Muslims reflect on their sense of self as 'other' in everyday spaces. Finally, the paper considers how the recent COVID-19 pandemic had modified and reinforced the meanings and experiences of wudu amongst its participants.

The following sections first contextualize and bring together time geographies (as a way to approach 'everyday practices') with Muslim geographies, situating this literature within the framework of 'encounters'. The remaining sections then outline the methods and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the research before exploring the empirical material. The findings from interviews and a survey demonstrate the challenges and situations associated with wudu and how these shape the relationship between individuals and the everyday schedules as well as the places and people they encounter in the construction of their everyday geographies.

Everyday geographies, time and constraints

For much of the late 20th century, the sub-discipline of time geography comprised a prominent theme in the understanding of everyday geographies. Iconic of time-geography were the time-space pathways and lines in the work of Torsten Hagerstrand, which represented the movements individuals would make over the day and, crucially, the constraints and barriers influencing these movements. Such constraints and barriers might include access to transport or particular spaces from which the individual is

precluded. The neat lines in Hagerstrand's time--space diagrams can provide a visual and quantifiable method of describing how the physical environments and spaces in which an individual operates impact upon their opportunities and well-being (Crang, 2001). The experiences and impressions an individual accrues in their daily time-space path may also reinforce behaviour and beliefs (Hagerstrand, 1975; see also Pred, 1981; Novak & Sykora, 2007; Ellegård, 2019), relating to, for example, where they are able to complete certain activities or where they encounter barriers. Hagerstrand also identifies 'constraints' which act on the individual to shape their time-space path (Ellegård, 2019; Hagerstrand, 1970): 'Capability constraints', or the human body's own set of constraints produced by the biological need for eating and sleeping; 'authority constraints', wherein restrictions are imposed through legal or other means; and 'coupling constraints', wherein individuals or resources are required for an activity to be completed (Ellegård, 2019). These constraints hold significant implications for the individual's capacity to travel and engage with social and economic opportunities.

This linking of the body's very materiality impact upon the activities foregrounds the corporeality (its needs, capacities and limitations either imposed internally or externally) of humans as a factor in its own mobility and agency. Hagerstrand's (1975) later work speaks to this to some extent; whilst androcentric, it does acknowledge that the body can impose limitations on one's ability to engage with opportunities throughout the day. Gillian Rose's (1993) critique centres on the masculinist perspective inherent within Hagerstrand's time geography; the ideological and cultural assumptions around women's movements creates constraints on their mobility and agency. This is further exacerbated when considering other social characteristics, such as ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation or disability, combined with issues of fear of violence or intimidation, which are not so easily represented by lines on a diagram.

Hagerstrand (1975) later surmises that the accomplishment of a task or action indicates its prioritization over other opportunities and the overcoming of constraints on these actions. Such a view can reflect a masculinist outlook of dominance over the prevailing conditions. As Rose (1993) outlines, the perspective of time geography, with its clearly delineated pathways, is part of a historical denial of the corporeality of the body, which classifies the female body as 'biologically leaky' and 'hormonally contingent'. In contrast, the male body is constructed as able to transcend and repress its subjectivity. Najib and Hopkins (2019) draw on this perspective when tracing how fear of Islamophobic attacks can restrict Muslim women's mobility to familiar patterns of movement and perceived 'safe' spaces.

Clear limitations exist in the perspective and experiences offered by Hagerstrand's work on time geography. However, Hagerstrand does not deny the constraints caused by the physical and physiological body, albeit these are not foregrounded. Indeed, he also refers to the different dimensions, or 'worlds', in which people operate: the material reality we share (World 1); thoughts and ideas (World 2); and cultural constructions, rules and expectations (World 3) (Ellegård, 2019). The multiple-worlds approach in which the individual operates is particularly relevant to the activities and movements of individuals motivated by and identifying with religion and spirituality. Moreover, Hagerstrand offers a language which powerfully expresses how different factors enable, modulate and constrain the individual's engagement in society. This paper deploys this language to examine how participants enable and integrate religious obligations such as wudu to co-exist with the mundane responsibilities of everyday life.

Muslim geographies, encounters and 'otherings'

Geographies of religion and spirituality have received significant attention over the past two decades. The prose, 'poetry and politics' (Kong, 2001) of how people engage in their faith and religious – spiritual practice in everyday life and the conflicts and contestations which emerge have invited many studies including those of Muslims and their geographies. However, many such studies foreground tension and conflict between a homogenous Muslim-identifying community and surrounding society and this has been exacerbated in the post-9/11 era (Hopkins & Gale, 2012; Kong, 2012; Najib & Teeple Hopkins, 2020). Researching geographies of Muslim students 'in' institutions, Hopkins (2011) observes how the university campus can be contradictory and contested. His participants express both feelings of relative security and the accommodation of diversity and yet also a target of enhanced surveillance in some cases (in the context of the aftermath of 9/11 and the 7 July 2005 London bombings). Furthermore, experiences of marginalization were voiced regarding facilities and resources for Muslims such as prayer rooms or halal cafes being spatially separated and distanced from the main campus locations.

The foregrounding of the Muslim body as a political unit – to be either feared for the radicalization of men or sympathized with in the repression of the female body – is apparent in much mainstream discourse of Muslims and reflected in academic research. For example, research on how Muslim bodies dress, particularly the female Muslim body and practice of veiling and modest dress, have drawn on narratives of repression and elevated the body to a site of analysis within and beyond academic writing (Gokariksel, 2009; Kong, 2012; Listerborn, 2015; Najib & Hopkins, 2019). These politicized discourses of veiling practices have been more recently countered by themes of the fashion and empowerment of Muslim women (Gokariksel & Secor, 2015; van Wichelen, 2007). Furthermore, visible markers such as the veil or subtle practices, gestures or phrases can identify Muslim identities and frame interactions. Yet such markers can also allow Muslims to, as Kuppinger (2014, p. 362) suggests, '[...] not only add "their" spaces to existing spaces, but indirectly question the dominant secular nature of cities'. In terms of Muslim women's 'strategies' for negotiating everyday practices and spaces, research has explored not just their avoidance of particular parts of the city but also how they subtly negotiate their visibility, such as by beginning new jobs with their hair unveiled before gradually covering it (Najib & Hopkins, 2019). Both van Wichelin (2007) and Gorkarksel (2009) argue that the spatial regulation of the body which is performed in veiling and the social relations it cultivates allow women to develop self-identity and difference within otherwise non-Muslim hegemonic spaces.

Visible indicators of cultural or religious Muslim identity can also attract forms of 'micro-aggressions', such as intentional or unintentional stares and hostile attitudes. These behaviours, documented by Bibi's (2022) research participants in the Oldham area of Greater Manchester, UK, as well as Najib and Hopkins's (2019) study of Muslim women's mobility in Paris and Listerborn's (2015) study of violence against Muslim women, suggest a general sense of unease and alienation within these communities.

Markers of difference or otherness to a hegemonic discourse of public space can lead to imagined boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Certain figures are conceptualized by Koefoed and Simonsen (2012) as the 'stranger', a spatial relation mediated through

encounters which transgress these imagined boundaries. Koefoed and Simonsen consider 'strange(r)ness' to be a continuum which encompasses different degrees of familiarity, suggesting a linearity to the concept. El-Sayed et al. (2015) note how their participants felt their wudu practices might be perceived as 'weird' by colleagues and therefore minimized bodily functions to avoid the need for wudu. Clayton et al. (2022) also question the assumption of racial or religious-based discrimination and abuse as happening between people who are not familiar with each other. Drawing on hook's (1992, cited in Clayton et al., 2022) argument that racism (and by extension Islamophobia) is understood through domination rather than a lack of knowledge, Clayton et al. evidence the everyday encounters which produce 'hate relationships' between people known to each other (such as neighbours or colleagues). 'Low-level' but frequent acts of hostility enable the domination of certain spaces by deterring particular individuals through fear of intimidation or violence and create geographies through anxieties and constraints in relation to social identities.

Wudu

Wudu, or the set of ablution practices which Muslims perform to ensure their prayer is valid, has received little critical attention from geographers or the wider social sciences. Often, any attention is peripheral to the main focus of research. For example, in his paper exploring the appropriation of post-Christian spaces in rural Wales, Jones (2019) observes that the obligation to perform wudu contributes to pressures placed on facilities during peak times of prayer. El-Sayed et al. (2015) have noted the challenges in fitting the practice of wudu and prayer into daily schedules and the use of technologies to ease these tensions.

Muslims perform three forms of ablutions depending on their state of ritual impurity and the context. *Ghusl* refers to a complete ablution required due to a major ritual impurity (*janaba*) (Bowker, 2000; Katz, 2002). *Ghusl* is required after sex as well as before the burial of the body. Wudu is required in the case of more minor ritual impurity states encountered in everyday life (*hadath*). To be in a state of wudu is obligatory for prayer, but it is not necessary to re-perform wudu ablutions before each prayer if the body is still within a state of purity. The third form of ablution is *tayammum*. Where clean water is not available, and may be rubbed against the body as a substitute for wudu, illustrating the symbolic dimension of the practice as a purification ritual.

Wudu comprises a number of steps which pertain to removing impurities and preparing the self, both body and mind, for the act of prayer. These steps include both the acts which are obligatory and acts which are sunnah (preferable but will not invalidate the wudu if missed). According to *The Science of Fiqh*, which pertains to rulings of *Shariah* and the implementations and practicalities of these in daily life, to understand the correct way to perform wudu is a necessary part of a Muslim's act of worship. Indeed, the importance of wudu is emphasized within the Quran, in hadith and in teachings from the sunnah (Alim et al. 2020) and is considered the primary medium through which Muslims may obtain closeness to Allah.

Three areas of the body must be washed or wiped to complete the *fard* (legal) aspects of wudu: 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; the hands must also be washed, from the tips of

the fingers to the elbows, as well as the feet, again from the tips of the toes to the ankles; and finally, the head, which must be wiped with wet hands. Although fully wiping the head is preferred, wudu is considered complete if a quarter of the head is wiped. It is consequently only when these compulsory acts – the washing of the face, hands and feet and the wiping of the head – are completed that the *fard* aspects of wudu and thus the requirements for prayer are met. The act of wudu also comprises *sunnah* acts, including washing each part – hands, feet or face – three times, completing each part of wudu without break and wiping the neck or rinsing the mouth with water. Whilst these acts are considered preferable, they are not obligatory; as such, wudu is fulfilled even if only the *fard* acts can be completed.

Wudu is symbolic as well as functional and spiritual. It is a physical act to structure the world and the body's place within it through the categorizations of purity and impurity (Douglas, 2002). Combining geographies of the body with the values and beliefs informed by faith at an intimate scale generates self-discipline and duty as part of Muslim identity, reinforced through its purity and difference from an impure world. As an act focussed on the body which generates feelings of pride and disgust and makes Muslim identities visible to others (with the accompanying sense of community or potential risk), wudu is a particularly critical site of everyday Muslim experience.

Methods and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

The research for this paper began in late 2017 and evolved through several rounds of interviews and a UK-wide questionnaire before concluding in early 2022. The initial intentions were to learn more about Muslims' experiences of wudu outside of the home and mosque and how this shapes their social relations, identities and values as a Muslim. During this time – and shortly after funding was awarded from the British Academy – the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. The pandemic and much of its messaging focussed on issues of hygiene centred around the hands and face, thus intersecting with the practice of wudu, with the potential to change research participants' attitudes towards their ablutions. As such, it was important to confront this issue, and in the post-lockdown interviews, participants were asked early on about their experiences of wudu during the pandemic. This research thus 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 and a research assistant on the project. Participants were recruited via a purposeful sampling strategy through both the researchers' contacts and the questionnaire respondents. The interviews sample was composed of Muslim men and women aged 20–50 engaged in employment or education from across England and Wales. This profile was selected so 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) by the lead author and then mostly online following the pandemic's onset (in late 2021, as public health restrictions were beginning to be eased in the UK). This latter format was expected to be more challenging, both in terms of conducting the interviews and allowing participants feel comfortable discussing an intimate process. However, these online interviews were generally easier to organize because

Table 1. Age and sex.

		Sex			Total
		Male	Female	Other	
Age	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

participants did not have to travel, and, for the most part, they felt comfortable opening up and discussing the topic, which led to some rich insights, explored below. Notably, the interviews conducted with participants by the (non-Muslim) lead author elicited slightly more didactic responses than those by the co-author and research assistant, who had greater shared familiarity of the practice with participants and often drew out more discursive responses. In total, 26 interviews were conducted (11 face to face and 15 online), which were then transcribed and thematically analysed. All participants in this series of interviews have been anonymized and assigned pseudonyms, with the exception of one, who explicitly asked on the recording for their real name to be used, which 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 as well as one non-Muslim user of a public toilet that accommodated wudu facilities. Again, these occurred both face to face before the pandemic and then online after its onset, with an additional interview in an HEI conducted via email. All participants interviewed by the lead author and their respective organizations have been anonymized and assigned pseudonyms. Gender, age range and self-defined ethnicity are provided in parentheses for individuals quoted regarding their experiences.

An online survey targeting a wider demographic and promoted via selected Muslim community organizations' social media channels was also conducted in 2019 (pre-pandemic). This questionnaire mixed quantitative and qualitative, and open and closed, questions to provide a wider perspective on the experiences and challenges of wudu in public spaces. Of a total of 233 respondents, 45.5% identified as male, and 53.6% identified as female. Sample demographics are summarized in Table 1.

As noted above, Muslims in the UK are very diverse, comprising a set of communities with different origins, values and ways of doing things. As one of our interviewees noted, even being a Shia Muslim (rather than part of the larger Sunni branch of Islam) means she has a different way of praying and method of ablution, which is sometimes commented on by other non-Shia Muslims. This project, then, does not seek to reduce the performance of wudu to a single common experience encountered by all Muslims. Instead, it recognizes that as a practice, wudu carries a particular visible identifier mark of otherness

to non-Muslim individuals and organizations. It also attends to the challenges arising from practising wudu in spaces which are not always designed for this purpose, often in non-Muslim hegemonic contexts.

Awkward encounters and relations between bodies

Public toilets and restrooms are highly scrutinized and structured spaces, loaded with power inequalities between different user groups. Many people have very fixed ideas about what is and is not permissible in public toilets, and deviance from expected behaviour can lead to anxieties and suspicion. Yet, public facilities are also neglected from many analyses of time geography and public spaces. For many Muslims – including participants and respondents in this study – public toilets may be the only available facility for wudu outside of the home or mosque. Consequently, the washing of the hands and face and – often more shockingly for non-Muslims – feet in shared sinks can attract attention. In some instances reported in ‘news’ website *Daily Mail Online*, signs and posters have been placed in toilets advising of ‘UK bathroom etiquette’, on which images banning the washing of feet in sinks are presented (Arkell, 2014; Sutton, 2015). When the lead author visited Greater London University for an interview, similar signs were present on the doors of a number of toilets requesting users to refrain from wudu in these particular facilities, an authority constraint borrowing from Hagerstrand’s (1975) framework.

Feet in the sink, or a non-Muslim entering whilst they had their feet in the sink, was a regular occurrence noted by participants and respondents. Even when respondents and participants had no actual experience of this happening, it was still a cause of anxiety for many.

They’re going to be using these sinks as well for whatever, hand washing or whatever, putting their make-up on, you know, we don’t want to be putting our feet into that because that’s not nice for them either is it? (Ambreen, F, 35–49, British Pakistani)

[. . .] it’s going to be shocking for the person walking in. Why has this guy got his foot in the sink? [. . .] Most Welsh people have never seen this before, even if it’s a White guy doing it, they would be like what the hell? (David, M, 25–34, White British)

The centrality of this step of wudu, washing the feet, leaves individuals with the need to become visible by not acting in accordance with expected bathroom behaviour or drawing on a dispensation to avoid this part. Like others from the interviews and survey, Hussein (M, 35–49, British Pakistani) would also attempt to disguise his ablutions:

I used to be intimidated about it to start with, so you know, when you’re going to, for example, doing wudu in a service station, for example, although you’re washing yourself up, but you’re pretending that you’re not doing wudu, if you know what I mean.

Echoing Hussein from a different perspective was Barry (M, 35–49, White British), the only non-Muslim visitor to wudu facilities interviewed in this project. Barry used nearby toilets at his workplace which also featured wudu facilities and reported his sense of alienation with unfamiliar equipment, which meant he tended to speed up his time in the bathroom because he ‘felt instantly out of place’. Organisations with finite spatial resources often face competition for the available space amongst different user groups. The space and infrastructural requirements for wudu can pose significant challenges for assigning resources to user groups. Wudu facilities require not only space but also plumbing

infrastructure and must be within reasonable proximity of the allocated prayer space(s). If the community is large enough, there may also be some requirement for gender segregation. The need for gender segregation was identified by several chaplains as important to ensure the comfort for women in particular.

Recent trends for gender-neutral toilets represent an emerging tension between groups with divergent cultural values regarding gender. When the lead author asked one university chaplain about this issue, he suggested there was no real tension; however, another laughed and stated that gender fluidity or neutrality is ‘never going to be an issue with Muslims’ and that ‘we’ [Muslims] are happy for such ‘Western’ and ‘secular’ concepts to ‘remain Western’. He further reasoned that if there were non-binary, trans or gender-fluid Muslims students effected, the number was so small that it was not an issue. In the survey element of this project, only one out of 233 respondents identified as neither male nor female, underlining the assumption of the general Muslim population identifying overwhelmingly as cisgender. The chaplain at this institution as well as other university chaplains interviewed, constructed the university as a secular institution. No chaplains reported any tension or conflict between users (and at South University, the chaplain reported that a trans woman had been welcomed by the cisgendered female users). However, whilst the values of this secular institution were acknowledged, the practical implications of accommodating non-binary, trans or gender-fluid individuals were not followed through due to the assumed relatively small numbers of such users of Muslim wudu and prayer facilities.

The allocation of resources and funding for wudu facilities can be perceived as an unfair distribution of resources by competing groups (Parker, 2009). Several chaplains noted that non-Muslim faith societies and communities had voiced opposition to the creation and use of such facilities. In one case, at Southern Airport, the perceived messiness of the facilities became a flashpoint in a conflict occurred between the chaplains of different faith groups:

Bilal (chaplain, Southern Airport): [. . .] so Muslims used to come and pray Friday prayers there and there'd be an overflow, an overspill, so it would come almost close to the door [of the chaplaincy]. What the [Christian] chaplaincy did was they would lock the washroom so that Muslims didn't use it for Friday prayers.

Edward: Right.

Bilal: And so I questioned them and say, ‘Why are you locking them? Why would you lock it?’ ‘Oh, because they leave it a mess’. I said, ‘We'll clean it’. I said, ‘I'll clean it. I'll take a mop . . . I'll buy a mop and I'll clean [it]’. Wasn't good enough, not accepted.

The apparent messiness of the washroom was appropriated by the Christian chaplain as a reason to intervene and potentially restrict Muslim users from the facilities. Bilal further framed this within a generally unhappy co-existence of the various faith groups at the airport. Several chaplains also noted that prayer and multi-faith facilities had become targets of vandalism and misuse, leading to the installation of security features and locks. Pete, the representative of Wudu Plumbing, a manufacturer of bespoke wudu ablution products, reported his products being defiled after installation:

The environment can be quite aggressive. And I've certainly had instances where the units have been put in a public space and they have been abused by non-Muslims because they

reject, they resent [...] having one of those [wudu units] in a common area. And so they drop excrement in them, and they wee in them, and they break them up, and so I've had taps broken and stuff. (Pete, Wudu Plumbing)

Wudu, and the facilities used for wudu, are a visible marker of a Muslim identity amongst non-Muslim populations (Dannin, 1996). The incident at Southern Airport and the one described by Pete above demonstrate a contestation and perceived claiming of space, further evidenced in the university chaplains reporting that the provision of such facilities, even if basic, can result in arguments of preferential treatment by other faith groups and communities. Often, this is resisted by demonstrating the active characteristics of Muslims in comparison to other groups.

Just over one-third (36%) of both male and female survey respondents alike reported some discussion or encounter with others whilst performing wudu in public. The comments attached to this question ranged from the curiosity of non-Muslims to odd looks to concerns over the water spillage to aggressive and sometimes outwardly racist remarks. One respondent reported having had a beer can thrown at her. Whilst some outright acts of aggression and violence occurred, such as this latter incident, for the most part hostility was reported to be curtailed to awkward looks and body language or 'micro-aggressions' (Bibi, 2020; also; Najib & Hopkins, 2019). Given the Islamophobic climate of the last two decades in the UK and beyond, it is unsurprising that significant anxiety was evident throughout the interviews and survey. Wudu as a practice could also lead to some participants feeling somewhat over-visible and vulnerable to external commentary. One participant also noted that as a Shia, her practice in both wudu and prayer differed from the Sunni, which had also led to comments being made regarding the 'correct' method, led to additional anxiety:

I'm Shia and we do our wudu slightly [...] oh what if someone who's not Shia walks in and sees me doing wudu and perceives me to be doing wudu wrong or asks why I'm doing wudu like that and not in the way that other Muslims do wudu? And so it's that added anxiety that even if they're Muslim and they walk in oh what if they think I'm doing it wrong and what if they ask me why I'm doing it in this way? (Sophie, F, 25–34, Indian)

For Sophie, wudu could lead to not only her 'objectification' (Metcalfe, 1996) as a Muslim but also her becoming an object of scrutiny as a Shia to non-Shia Muslims.

An additional perspective noted by several participants was the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on neutralizing some of the debate around facial coverings and the complimentary values of hygiene and Muslim ablution practice. Very suddenly in 2020, it became the norm rather than the exception to cover part of the face, somewhat in line with many Muslim women who wear facial coverings.

I wear the niqab, so I didn't have to wear a mask, that didn't change for me. In fact, there was improvement socially for me, in that respect. (Kira, F, 35–49, White Other)

Moreover, regular reminders by public service announcements to wash the hands complemented the requirements to be physically and ritually clean for Muslim prayer. This latter instruction was noted by several as a point of pride that Muslim teaching already advocated for hygiene practices, whilst for Farah (F, 25–34, British Asian), this meant she could discretely avoid shaking the hands of and touching men, lessening the need for wudu due to contact with the opposite gender. Kassim (M, 25–49, Arab Other) also noted

that touching a woman's hand could invalidate his wudu, which made his job as a store assistant sometime difficult.

This section has outlined how wudu can shape encounters and relationships, as well as how these relationships – between Muslim and non-Muslim individuals, as well as between competing social and community groups and within Muslim communities themselves – impact upon and influence the time geographies of many of the participants and respondents in the research. In these cases, the concerns – often justified in terms of the wider Islamophobic context – of the wudu practice identifying or marking participants and respondents as Muslim can act to alter their time geographies in ways which are unreadable and irreducible to time – space paths. The causation factors for these influences belong to Hagerstrand's World 3, whereby cultural constructions, rules and expectations (Ellegård, 2019) help to determine space – time behaviours as individuals attempt to avoid being marked or objectified (Metcalf, 1996) as Muslim in non-Muslim spaces. Ryan (2011; see also Najib & Hopkins, 2019) further notes that Muslim women actively seek to resist stigma in the everyday through the presentation of an 'acceptable normality' in public spaces. It is also notable how contemporary political discourses and global events such as the pandemic act to change the discourse. The pandemic has brought enhanced visibility to hygiene practices for everyone, which has the potential to not only lessen the distinctiveness of wudu in a non-Muslim context but also strengthen the significance of wudu to participants.

Challenges to performing wudu and the impact of COVID-19

Given the nature of wudu and lack of public washroom facilities, the individual becomes dependent on 'coupling' (Ellegård, 2019; Hagerstrand, 1975) to be able to access the necessary facilities. Unsurprisingly, many participants and respondents thus reported the need for planning their daily activities and journeys to accommodate ablutions and prayer. The need to be in a state of wudu, the varying and frequent prayer cycle throughout the day, could provoke a tension with the demands and responsibilities of employment in particular. The changing timetable of prayer across seasons could add challenges as the prayer cycle becomes more compact at certain times of the year.

When facilities are provided, as is the case for many universities and some employers, they are often located some distance from the main campus or office, and space for prayer may require booking, adding further labour to the task (see also El-Sayed et al., 2015). For instance, many university campuses are so large that a return journey can necessitate a significant proportion of the individual's break allowance from work or study. This would be identified as a capability constraint of the individual to be able to fit both wudu and prayer into their time allowance, necessitating a prioritization of one task over the other (Ellegård, 2019; Hagerstrand, 1975).

Additionally, concerns arose over the privacy of using shared toilets as well as the cleanliness of the facilities themselves. As in El-Sayed et al.'s (2015) study, many participants and respondents reported that to overcome the capability constraints and lack of privacy or cleanliness, they attempted to maintain their wudu status throughout the day – particularly when at work. This could involve attempting to refrain from going to the toilet or passing wind. These issues are illustrated by Kira:

If you don't get a break, or you don't have the right facilities, then it can be very challenging to find a way to do that [wudu]. So, what I used to do was I used to do my wudu in the

morning, and I would not use the toilet all day, [...] I wouldn't even eat, and I would work all day and I would come home absolutely exhausted [...] (Kira, F, 35–49, White Other)

This could lead to some discomfort and a self-imposed restriction on diet and the intake of beverages. Whilst this could be inconvenient for most people, age and gender could also be a factor in whether this is even possible:

I could go a good nine to ten hours keeping my wudu, that's not a difficulty for me, but it's only if I was to have quite a heavy meal or lunch it is quite a tough situation to be in, but obviously as you get older and you are not as young, then you see that faculty of you keeping your wudu for a very long time does go down by 10, 20 percent. (Hamoudi, M, 35–49, British Asian)

[...] when you're at my age and you've had three kids and it's like you're constantly on the toilet for toilet breaks so I think it's quite tragic for women [...] I do have to go to the toilet all the time even if it's for a quick wee or something like that, not necessarily a long visit to the toilet but then I have to do my wudu again [...] (Ambreen, F, 35–49, British Pakistani)

Ambreen's openness about her need for frequent toilet visits and the consequences for this on maintaining her wudu status resonates with the critique of geographies orientated around the masculine body and its perceived transcendence of biological demands and processes (Longhurst, 2001; Rose, 1993). It should be noted that male participants also reported refraining from the toilet and restricting their intake of food and drink for the same reasons, also resulting in discomfort. Gender also factored into the use of make-up and clothing, as there is a need to access the wrists and head which may be covered for modesty thereby making shared gender facilities more difficult to use.

Water often spills on to the floor, and many public facilities lack an available mop to clean it up, leaving wet and potentially unsafe floors in the process. This also left some of the participants feeling partially embarrassed. Within the survey responses, a sense of anxiety of being seen by other people who did not understand wudu was very strong. Words such as 'embarrassment', 'awkward', 'uncomfortable', 'strange' and 'weird' were used regularly to describe the experience of encountering others (or being worried about encountering others). Some respondents noted a need to explain themselves or answer questions from curious bystanders. Others would wait for the facilities to clear before commencing wudu. For many, there was concern of not just encountering strangers but also meeting non-Muslims they know, such as colleagues, in the middle of wudu.

I used to hold my wee in all day because I was like I don't want to go to the office because I'm very anxious I didn't want to go into the office and someone who's not Muslim see me put my foot in the sink and think 'what is she doing' and 'this is so bizarre' [...] because you want to fit in and you don't want to seem like the weirdo like, you know, who kept cleaning themselves. (Kiran, F, 25–34, British Pakistani)

'Strange(r)ness' (Koefoed & Simonsen, 2012) occurs in Kiran's and other accounts between people who are known to each other, yet a perceived divergence from expected behaviour in the space of the public toilet risks disrupting this familiarity. Kiran's quote also resonates with a characteristic identified by Najib and Hopkins (2019) of fitting in with cultural hegemonic expectations at the expense of the individual's identity and values. In considering the production of a seemingly transient and mundane space through a lens of identity, workplace bathrooms take on characteristics which are, in accordance with

Kiran's understanding of (Western) social norms, incongruous with Muslim spiritual practices. In turn, this produces a sense of self-awareness, a regulation of the body and bodily habits. Drawing on Foucault, Bender-Baird (2016) notes that bathrooms are replete with disciplinary power as spaces which are allocated for specific, proscribed functions and as spaces which encourage the surveillance of such approved behaviours. As such, Kiran and others perceive themselves to be doing something other than the normal in the practice of wudu, as inferred from the behaviour (and occasional intervention) of others. Whilst this paper has highlighted the rich literature in Muslim public and private spaces, other transient, mundane spaces where encounters are fleeting but nonetheless significant are equally important. '[T]hese minute spaces and elusive encounters are of critical relevance since they accommodate the diverse daily needs of ordinary people' (Kuppinger, 2014, p. 631) and further highlight the careful negotiation of spiritual and religious practices in urban spaces deemed secular and impractical.

Within the survey, 206 of the 233 respondents reported having experienced some sort of difficulty in performing wudu in public spaces. All but one of these respondents added an open text answer to this question detailing the challenges, further reinforcing this as a widespread and significant experience. Most of these responses detailed practical issues, particularly the difficulty of raising the feet into the sink to access water, awkward body language and looks from other people sharing the facilities, and the state of hygiene of the facilities. This latter issue concerned both the state that respondents found the facilities in and the issues of spilling water on the floor. Both survey respondents and participants noted the presence of toilet facilities, including urinals and urine on the floors of toilets, as a concern for the validity of wudu, as well as it being uninviting to stand barefoot when needed.

Significantly, amongst the women's responses, two main concerns emerged. The first involved the requirement of removing the headscarf and rolling up the sleeves to wash and the lack of privacy afforded in public spaces, particularly in mixed facilities or those attended to by male cleaners. Further comments also addressed the use of women's toilets by people identifying as transgender, reflecting wider public debates at the time of the research:

[...] now with gender equality etc. one has to be extra careful as transgender [wo]men can use the same facilities – it has happened to me – and I and others I have spoken to feel our rights as women are being trampled on. (Female, 65–74 years, White Other)

These concerns were echoed by Yorkshire University's chaplain, who noted that incoming gender-neutral provisions would reduce opportunities for women in particular to perform wudu. Indeed, Greed (2019) observes that the recent promotion of gender-neutral facilities has been interpreted as a cost-cutting measure. Furthermore, the implications for those who, for cultural or religious reasons, cannot share mixed-sex provisions continue a historical pattern of restricting the mobility of women in particular. The highly gendered – and regulated – nature of public toilets continues to provide a challenge in accommodating the rights of both trans persons and those who find security in single-sex spaces (Cofield & Doan, 2021; Doan, 2010), with this ongoing tension extended into the context of wudu.

With the issues noted above, the need to plan for wudu in everyday life became apparent, as well as how everyday spaces could be appropriated for not just wudu but

also prayer. The use of restaurants for ablutions was noted, and one participant reported he often found pubs – not a space often associated with Muslims due to the provision of alcohol – quite hospitable to wudu. Pubs were convenient due to their frequency in UK cities and extensive opening hours, which ensure an availability of water and bathroom facilities. An instance of an individual often considered marginalized from these spaces creatively making use of its facilities recalls de Certeau's (1988, p. xvii) observation of 'the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong'. However, this 'coupling' of the individual to available resources also reveals a potential gendered dimension (amongst other factors) within the sample; others may not feel comfortable entering a pub to perform wudu. Participants also employed a range of spaces used for prayer, including side streets and shop changing rooms which provided privacy. Car parks were utilized, and many reported the use of a bottle to fulfil the need for clean water.

Dispensations were also employed by participants, including the use of waterproof socks and permeable make-up, although some also considered this somewhat invalid. Accepting that whilst they may be helpful or convenient, saving time, labour and potential anxiety of looking 'very weird' (Hussein, M, 35–49, British Pakistani), these dispensations or 'hacks' (as Kiran termed them) were reported by many in this research, including Hamoudi (M, 35–49, British Arab), who used waterproof socks to avoid the potential awkwardness of colleagues noted above:

[...] it's just that having your foot in the sink while you are doing wudu and the next person walking in is a bit of a culture clash. So that's why I use my wudu socks, so whenever I do need to do wudu in the workplace, what I would do is, I would quickly do the wudu normally and then all I would need to do would be wipe my socks then I'm off.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic also changed the relationship between many participants and their wudu or prayer obligations and was experienced differently in public and private. One consequence was the lockdown closure of many of the publicly accessible facilities – not only mosques but also restaurants and shops – which had been available for wudu. More positively received was the sudden and sustained shift to working from home for many workers, which brought more flexible approaches to working patterns, as well as more convenience:

I don't have to worry about, like, having to take off my hijab to do wudu, pinning it up and all of that kind of stuff because I don't have to dress for work, so it's just easier to do wudu. (Nasrin, F, 25–34, British Bangladeshi)

I am working from home, so that means [being in] wudu the majority of the time because whenever salah comes I can just do wudu, pray and just carry on with work. If it was a normal situation, taking away the pandemic, then the role would be roughly the same but for me I would have to do more planning [outside the home] (Hamoudi, M, 35–49, British Asian)

Working from home meant not only that participants had access to their only bathrooms – ensuring privacy and cleanliness – but also that wudu could be performed when needed without the scrutiny of colleagues and the time cost in entering these facilities at work (Hopkins, 2011; Parker, 2009).

And also, because you are constantly going to the bathroom, you are like, 'Oh my God, my colleagues must be thinking, 'Is something wrong with her? Did she have something dodgy to eat last night?' Along with the fact that you spend a bit longer in the bathroom, it is not just

an easy two minutes get in and come back out again, you are there for a good five or ten minutes. (Noura, F, 25–34, ethnicity not stated)

Work time – when employees are expected to be publicly available – had shifted into private space, leading to the acceptance of flexibility between work and other activities for many, as they were shielded from the gazes of colleagues and managers, which enabled greater ease and convenience in when and where wudu was performed.

Many of the challenges outlined above fall into categories of constraint outlined by Hagerstrand; however, issues of cleanliness and a sense of unwelcomeness or hostility are powerful forms of constraint upon the individual, limiting their abilities to perform wudu whilst still performing prayer. Despite the difficulties, challenges and anxieties witnessed throughout this research, respondents and participants alike have shown great resilience and fortitude in their motivation to complete these goals in their time geographies.

Conclusion

For the participants and respondents in this research, wudu is an essential daily act to be carried out each day and at the heart of spiritual practice, as it validates prayer and demonstrates respect in their faith. Like prayer, which in Islam is distinctive from other religions due to its often physically active form, wudu is a moment of vulnerability for Muslims, not only because it makes public processes which are often seen as private but because it makes Muslims and their faith visible against a hegemonic non-Muslim and often secular background. Unlike prayer, its purpose is not necessarily familiar amongst non-Muslims, as evidenced by multiple participants and respondents feeling a need to explain what they were doing to curious and sometimes intimidating bystanders. In this sense, the continuum of ‘strange(r)ness’ articulated by Koefoed and Simonsen (2012) might be more applicable as a topography in which certain aspects of the individual are familiar to others, whilst others (such as wudu) are revealed only in particular set-aside spaces where boundaries and relations between the body are negotiated. In this way, the visibility of someone performing wudu modifies social relations between both others they know and do not know with associated concerns over how they may be perceived.

Wudu is also a site beyond boundaries of the home, mosque or official prayer space. Individuals demonstrate creative practice in utilizing the available facilities, as well as bodily discipline when appropriate facilities are not available to maintain their wudu. In the process, individuals affirm Muslim identities in secular, and sometimes hostile, contexts. Furthermore, exploring religious practices of wudu in the everyday also highlights the need to attend to socio-cultural boundaries and their attendant debates. As evidenced, this tension is sometimes foregrounded between community groups competing for resources and status in seeking the installation of wudu facilities within an organizational structure, which is refracted into complaints of overcrowding, messiness and disruption.

This paper has also explored the extent to which gender and gender identity become negotiated and contended, as organizations, chaplains and individuals explore the accommodation of trans or non-binary identifying persons within the context of public bathrooms, a transient space which has been subject to much debate and politicization.

Furthermore, the paper also explored how structures of employment and study can contribute to potentially awkward encounters with colleagues or strangers, providing challenges to the needs of Muslims to complete wudu and prayer. Yet, the tactical appropriations of public spaces – using store changing rooms or pubs for wudu, dispensations and working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic – demonstrates the juxtaposition of wudu and prayer with secular discourses of time and space. The practices of wudu can challenge and contest non-Muslim spaces, inserting Muslim experiences and values and creating a Muslim geography, albeit one often hidden in plain view. Whilst these accounts confirm that Muslims persevere with personal wudu and prayer cycles despite issues of proximity, availability, security and privacy, these challenges inflect their geographies and experiences.

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