

# Sociology of Everyday Life: The Masjid's Role in Muslims Lives - Applying Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology

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## Abstract

This paper utilizes Garfinkel's ethnomethodology to investigate the role of the 'Masjid' in the lives of Muslims, focusing on how religious practices, particularly the concept of 'Baraka', influence individual experiences within the Masjid. Employing both descriptive and analytical approaches, it explores the multifaceted meanings of Islamic rituals and their impact on daily life, highlighting the Masjid's significance beyond mere worship. By delving into the practical methods through which Muslims engage with religious spaces, this research reveals the intricate interplay between social order, cultural identity, and spiritual fulfilment. Ultimately, it emphasizes the importance of recognizing religious spaces in fostering community cohesion and individual well-being, advocating for further exploration of Muslim experience within the Masjid through an ethnomethodological lens.

**Keywords:** Masjid, Ethnomethodology, Religious Practices, Baraka, Muslims.

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## Introduction: Unveiling the Role of the Mosque ‘Masjid’ as a Domain for Islamic Practice

We inhabit diverse domains, some of which some we aim to integrate into our daily routines. Yet, various barriers, such as immersion and the challenge of rationalization, hinder this process. Understanding these domains necessitates profound reflection, moving beyond habit to deconstruct their complexities. This exploration aims to unveil the hidden aspects behind the curtain, offering insight to ordinary practitioners.

While Religion is commonly perceived as a realm of worship and spiritual practice, it has evolved into a habitual practice for many individuals. Through this habit, they perceive an intangible significance in their lives and establish a connection to the supernatural realm (Besecke, 2005; Johnstone, 2016). For them, religion offers a pathway to continue their altruistic endeavours and imbue their lives with meaning and purpose. However, discussing religious matters often entails navigating sensitive topics, as individuals attempt to transcend their cognitive limitations to grasp the elusive forces at play within these domains. The transformation of these unseen forces into daily or weekly rituals across various religions raises controversy regarding individuals’ reliance on invisible powers. These mysteries, though implicit, hint at the existence of a transcendent power that influences human affairs.

This paper will examine the mosque ‘Masjid’, as a pivotal domain for practicing the Islamic faith, encompassing various worship rituals performed by Muslims throughout the day. These rituals extend beyond formal mosque gatherings and include supplications integrated into daily activities such as meals, restroom use, or casual conversations, all seeking blessings from God ‘Allah’.

This paper will explore both descriptive and analytical dimensions. Descriptively, it will examine the religious practices of Muslims and their impact on individuals’ lives. Additionally, it will acknowledge the potential for other religions to share

similar quests for meaning, despite differences in practice. Analytically, ethnomethodology will be employed to understand these religious practices, particularly the concept of blessing ('Baraka') among Muslims. The mosque will serve as a focal point for this analysis, representing a domain for religious practice and prayer.

Therefore, the paper endeavours to address the central inquiry: How do Muslims who frequent the Masjid interpret their experience there? This inquiry encompasses an examination of the practices, rituals, and social interactions within the Masjid, elucidating its significance as a meaningful space in their lives. Furthermore, it explores the role of 'Baraka' or spiritual blessings believed to emanate from Allah, manifesting through prayer, Quranic recitation, and virtuous deeds. The objective is not offering a definitive answer but rather to analytically engage with these multifaceted questions, recognizing that religious practices are deeply ingrained and continuously evolving phenomena.

### **The Significance of the Mosque in Islamic Practice: Exploring Spiritual, Societal, and Global Dynamics**

The application of ethnomethodology aims to uncover the underlying essence of the domain and the religious practice observed by Muslims (Trace, 2016). Before delving into this exploration, it's crucial for readers to grasp the significance of the mosque as both a domain and practice in Islam, as well as the profound connection Muslims have with it. Khan (2008) illuminates the profound depth of meaning associated with the mosque for Muslims, likening it to a sacred abode where believers establish a spiritual connection with Allah. This connection is rooted in the fundamental Islamic principle of monotheism, encapsulated in the declaration that 'there is no god but God', which initiates the call to prayer performed five times daily. Thus, the mosque holds immense significance for Muslims, serving as the

sacred space where they engage in daily prayers and seek spiritual communion with the Divine. The significance of the mosque extends beyond mere identification as a Muslim; it embodies the practice of religious identity. Its importance lies not in its physical structure, but in the spiritual practices it facilitates. This distinction underscores why the mosque is essential to Muslims. It is not merely a building but a sanctuary where believers engage in profound acts of worship and spiritual connection. The Quran, the holy book of Islam, mentions the mosque, or ‘Masjid’, 27 times, using both singular and plural forms, highlighting its profound importance and multifaceted significance for Muslims (Abdel-Hady, 2010).

The term ‘Masjid’ symbolizes the spiritual devotion that draws Muslims closer to their God. However, the contemporary concept of the Masjid and its religious practices do not necessarily conflict with the forces of globalization. In Indian society, for instance, the Masjid has become intertwined with politics and identity, reflecting a complex interplay of religious and societal dynamics (Bacchetta, 2000; Chopra, 2008; Kirmani, 2016). Consequently, sacred places like the Masjid can become focal points of contention among various groups, a phenomenon evident in many societies today.

Among these conflicts are gender roles, with some men asserting that Masjids are exclusively for them, relegating women to specific times for mosque attendance (Reda, 2004; Woodlock, 2010). However, the significance of the mosque, as a sacred space for Muslims or analogous places in other religions, extends beyond mere religious observance to encompass a quest for meaning and guidance in life (Thiessen & McAlpine, 2013). While mosques are not the sole means of understanding life, they often serve as a refuge for individuals grappling with doubt, uncertainty, or despair offering a connection to a higher power that brings solace (Mughal, 2015). In many Islamic countries, mosques function not only as places of worship but also as hubs for economic and educational activities, reflecting their

multifaceted role in society (Stringer, 2005). This trend is not exclusive to Muslim places of worship but is also observed in Christian contexts (Johnstone, 2016). Thus, mosques and religious practices within them play an integral role in societal functioning, regardless of individuals beliefs, providing a religious backdrop that enhances social cohesion and individual well-being.

Reflecting on the role of religious practice in modern societies prompts me, as both a writer and a participant in society, to question its necessity in our daily lives. Has the association of spiritual practice with religion distorted its true meaning, or do individuals manipulate it for personal gain, thereby undermining societal cohesion? These questions linger as I navigate the complexities of this topic. Furthermore, the act of gathering for religious practices may signify more than just a connection with the divine; it can also serve as a means for individuals to explore their identities, understand their cultures, and foster solidarity within their communities.

### **Unveiling the Dynamics of Religious Practice: An Ethnomethodological Exploration of Blessing ('Baraka') in Islamic Rituals**

When trying to implement ethnomethodology, in an attempt to comprehend religious practices, we may enter dark tunnels to deal with this methodology, such as the extent to which a methodology relates to symbolic interactionism (Zimmerman & Wieder, 2017). In this aspect, light will be shed on trying to understand the religious practices of Muslims in a domain of worship. The discussion of ethnomethodology here is closely associated with Garfinkel, who implemented and exercised this lens as an attempt to find out 'what more' (Garfinkel, 1996). I argue that the word 'more' does not necessarily mean what the social practice may hide, rather it may be understood as an attempt to bring the practice that follows it. For instance, when an individual practices a particular religion, they may aspire to obtain what is positive in life and thus find a logical aspect for being alive. Moreover, their practice could be understood as following the collective behaviour of society (Aguirre et al., 1998;

Granovetter, 1978; Muukkonen, 2008; Park, 1927). Thus, it becomes imitative behaviour, nothing more. Therefore, the lens through which Garfinkel sees the social practices of individuals may not necessarily mean reaching a specific goal, but some believe that looking at practices from this lens may constitute 'orderliness' (Burns, 2012; Button, 1991; A. Rawls, 2003). Nevertheless, this term may vary between societies or groups, and an attempt can be made to understand it according to the context in which it is contained.

Furthermore, the lens of ethnomethodology is an attempt to understand something from its foundations, in the sense of something that has become an ordinary activity (Garfinkel, 1990). This viewpoint is an attempt to comprehend the practices of individuals in the form that has become a part of our daily practices (Coulon, 1995). Religious or ritual practices, specifically among Muslims, could play an essential role in shaping their thoughts and making sense of their lives.

Ethnomethodology offers a valuable framework for examining Islamic religious practices, both explicitly and implicitly, for several compelling reasons. Firstly, Islamic religious practices are imbued with dynamic meanings, reflecting the diverse interpretations and understandings among Muslims. Secondly, the messages conveyed through Islamic religious practices can vary significantly across different individuals and communities, contributing to the complexity of their study. Lastly, these practices are often oriented towards reaching metaphysical power, highlighting their spiritual dimension and significance. Importantly, these reasons are not unique to Islam but can be applied to various religious practices in our contemporary world. By incorporating them into the discussion, I aim to establish connections between ethnomethodology and Islamic religious practices while recognizing their broader relevance across religious contexts.

The first reason underscores the presence of dynamic meanings within Islamic religious practices, which vary across different schools of thought within the religion.

Each school has its distinct approach to religious practice, leading to differences in interpretation and implementation. For instance, considerations such as praying at home during heavy rain highlight the nuanced variations in practice among different Islamic traditions. The second reason introduces an element of ambiguity, reflecting the challenge of articulating the outcomes or intentions associated with these practices, making it difficult to express them clearly. The third reason delves into the individual's pursuit of comprehending and connecting with metaphysical power, particularly in the context of reaching out to their God. This endeavour is often fraught with challenges and complexities, as individuals navigate their beliefs and practices. Together, these reasons align with an ethnomethodological perspective, emphasizing the intricate dynamics inherent in Islamic religious practices. I aim to further elucidate this perspective through the exploration of the concept of blessing, known as 'Baraka'.

Religious practices vary across different faiths, yet they all share a common thread in evoking a sense of spirituality among their practitioners. Therefore, rather than focusing solely on the mere existence of these practices, it is more crucial to understand the underlying reasons for their existence. Moreover, it is worth contemplating how these practices have endured through time, even in the face of declining adherence to certain religious in contemporary society.

The essence of this paper lies in the application of ethnomethodology to comprehend these religious practices and their routinization among individuals (ten Have, 2016). Whether we are specialists or devout believers, it is essential to understand the significance of these practices (Lynch, 2022). However, the depth of understanding may vary across disciplines, as delving too deeply into the intricacies of religious may risk diminishing their aesthetic appeal.

While Garfinkel's perspective on ethnomethodology offers valuable insights, it is not imperative to uncover every hidden aspect of religious practice. Not everything that

individuals practice may carry a clear and evident meaning for the future, despite Garfinkel’s significant attempts to unravel the underlying meanings and societal norms associated with these practices.

Ethnopedology provides a lens through which to understand the complexities of religious practices, but it is not necessary to decipher every hidden layer to appreciate their significance. As Garfinkel succinctly states, ethnomethodology involves investigations the rational properties of practical actions within the organized artful practices of everyday life (Garfinkel, 1967).

While it may initially appear intricate, Garfinkel’s perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding individuals’ everyday practices by exploring their associations with specific places or activities. Through this lens, the concept of blessing, known as ‘Baraka,’ can be effectively examined. Within the context of Islamic sacredness, ‘Baraka’ embodies a dynamic concept that varies across religious practices (Ahmed, 2016).

Interestingly, ‘Baraka’ can also perceived as a metaphysical practice utilized by Muslims to exert influence (Elefson, 2008), rather than solely as a social construct. Viewing this concept through Garfinkel’s notion of taken-for-granted assumptions prompts reflection on how the practice of blessing serves as a form of social interaction. It sheds light on how Muslims construct and uphold their cultural identity and social order through this ritual.

Understanding the concept of blessing, or ‘Baraka,’ as taken-for-granted within the Islamic context poses certain complexities. While it may be ingrained and unquestioned within the circle of Islam, it may not hold the same significance for those outside this sphere, even among Muslims themselves. This notion of taken-for-grantedness extends beyond mere practicality; it delves into the quest for meaning



and social order until it becomes inherent to the individual's perception (A. W. Rawls, 2008).

When considering how taken-for-grantedness applies to the concept of blessing, it becomes apparent that blessing carries inherent ambiguity, yet it is palpable to those who seek it, often on a psychological level. The continuous enjoyment of blessing contributes to its taken-for-granted nature. However, simplifying this concept for those who do not grasp it fully proves challenging, given the ambiguity inherent in religious practices and the intangible nature of invisible power (Garfinkel et al., 2015).

Despite its taken-for-granted status, practicing blessing is not necessarily smooth or straightforward; it often involves embodied practices that are not overtly visible (Garfinkel, 2002). Furthermore, the concept of 'Baraka' embodies a complex practice that signifies Muslims' attachment to their religion and their continuity within it. Failure to comprehend or experience the true essence of this religious feeling may lead individuals to question or abandon their faith.

In a similar vein, Geertz (1971) conducted a comparative study of the concept of blessing among Muslims in Morocco and Indonesia, ultimately concluding that blessing defies systematic interpretation and is more akin to a doctrine. Accordingly, 'Baraka' among Muslims is perceived as something bestowed upon them by their God, felt implicitly and uniquely by each individual (Edmonds, 2019).

Within this framework, the practice of blessing as a taken-for-granted act does not necessarily mean necessarily manifest overtly; rather, the presence of its practitioners serves as evidence of its realism. Consequently, blessing transitions from a doctrinal or theological concept to a societal practice, where the pursuit of blessing through religious observance becomes a daily or weekly ritual aimed at enriching one's life.

The forms and manifestations of blessing, or ‘Baraka,’ vary among Muslims. While some view it as the continuity of life’s pleasures, others perceive it as financial prosperity of familial stability and solidarity. Thus, the challenge lies not in the acquisition of blessing but in elucidating how it is perceived and experienced by Muslims.

### **Concluding Remarks: Exploring Muslim Experiences in the Masjid through an Ethnomethodological Lens**

In conclusion, this paper has delved into the experiences of Muslims attending the Masjid and how they interpret these experiences through an ethnomethodological lens. The religious activities of Muslims contribute significantly to shaping the Masjid as a meaningful space for them. Central to this understanding is the concept of ‘Baraka,’ or spiritual blessings, which reinforces communal worship and the belief in the presence of Allah within the Masjid, alongside its embodies complexities.

Ethnomethodology proves indispensable in analyzing the practical methods employed by Muslims to establish and uphold social order (Chomsky, 2015; Colson, 2002; Cooley, 1902). This paper has endeavoured to illustrate how this approach applies to their experiences within the Masjid. Moreover, it underscores the importance of acknowledging the role of religious spaces, such as the Masjid, in nurturing community cohesion and individuals’ well-being.

Looking ahead, further research is warranted to delve deeper into the experiences of Muslims within the Masjid from an ethnomethodological perspective. Such studies promise to offer valuable insights into the intricacies of social order within religious contexts and shed light on how individuals construct meaning within these domains.

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