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## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN CANADA

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SAADMAN AHMED is currently pursuing his Master's in Architecture at the University of Waterloo (School of Architecture). Since immigrating from Bangladesh to Toronto, over ten years ago, he has been very passionate about art and culture, which eventually led him to pursue architecture as a career. He had the opportunity to travel and work in several different countries, and to be exposed to diverse styles of architecture and people from many different cultures. Having lived as both a Bengali-Muslim and a Canadian-Muslim, he started to understand the depth of his own religion from a unique perspective and its influence on architecture, and therefore, he dedicated himself to study and explore the Islamic world in Canada as part of his master's research.

### A PROBLEM OF FORM AND FUNCTION

A new mosque would not only lead to traffic and noise issues but it would also lead to “rape, villainy, and destruction of Canadian values”—these were the types of claims which Mayor Bonnie Crombie of Mississauga had to fight against at a 2015 City Council meeting for a new mosque proposal.<sup>1</sup> Several mosques in recent times have also encountered bruising opposition from the public, where cultural and political resistance are often disguised as potential increase in traffic volume and parking requirements.<sup>2</sup> Since the early twentieth century, the mosque has been one of the most visible markers of Islam in the West. As a distinct and historic structure, the mosque is central to Muslim religious and cultural life in Canada and occupies a critical place in the practice and propagation of Islam. It has long served the Muslims as an important religious institution, a place for worship, solace, and religious instruction. Canadian mosques have also become places where Muslims can gather and engage in non-religious services and activities such as daycare, job networking, gym, and Friday school for youth. However, considering that many of these mosques exist within hostile environments, along with the economic and sociocultural struggles of the Muslim diaspora, the mosque is becoming a difficult platform for Muslims to represent their culture and religion both architecturally and socially.

Purpose-built mosques with their overtly traditional Islamic architecture



FIG. 1. AL RASHID MOSQUE, EDMONTON, 1938. | COURTESY OF AL RASHID MOSQUE, [HTTPS://ALRASHIDMOSQUE.CA/OUR-STORY/], ACCESSED MARCH 31, 2020.