...you must remember that you will always have two principal obligations. The first and paramount of these is your religious obligation to Islam and to your Imam. Your second obligation is a secular one. You must always be loyal to the country of your adoption and to whatever Government is responsible for your security and well-being.

Speachess 1963–4: 35

The Nizari Ismaili Muslims are a global religious community made up of diverse ethnic and national groups. A minority Shia community, the Ismailis reside in over twenty-five countries and regions, including India, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Central Asia, China, East Africa, Australia, Europe and North America (Nanji 1986; Daftary 1998). Those of Gujarati ancestry were converted to the faith in the thirteenth century and whilst many still live in the state of Gujarat, others migrated to larger Indian cities, such as Bombay (present-day Mumbai) and Poona (present-day Pune) in 1876, whilst others travelled further afield to East Africa. In the 1960s, Ismailis of Gujarati ancestry from India and East Africa began migrating to Britain, Europe, North America and Australia, either for permanent settlement or as students.1 Many East African Ismailis2 migrated to Britain, not out of choice, but due to expulsion from Uganda in 1972. Having left their original home of Gujarat in the late-nineteenth century the Ismailis were to begin a new process of acculturation,

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1 Early Ismaili migrants to Europe and North America were predominantly of Gujarati ancestry but the demography has changed with time and in recent years there has been an increase in Ismaili migrants from Central Asia and Syria, but in the UK they are still a minority.

2 From this point on the term Ismaili will be used to refer to Nizari Ismailis of Gujarati ancestry.
which also included the establishment of community institutions, such as the *jamatkhana* (house of congregation), in their new places of residence. This chapter will illustrate how the physical structure of the Ismaili Centre, London,\(^3\) acts as a visible representation of the religious and national identities of the Ismailis. It will also examine the manner in which the congregational worship rituals carried out within, further serve to bind the community in terms of their ethno-religious identity. Places of worship serve to mirror the ethos of a community and this chapter will examine the pivotal role of the Ismaili Centre, London, in particular. As scholarly studies on *jamatkhana* architecture are scarce, this chapter will draw on studies on mosque architecture in Europe and North America to shed light on how the architecture of mosques, and in turn, the Ismaili Centre, London, can serve as expressions of a community’s identities. Before beginning the discussion it is imperative to note the difference between a *jamatkhana* and a mosque. The Nizar Ismaili *jamatkhana* consists of a prayer hall, which, during times of congregational prayer, is only accessible to adherents. A mosque, on the other hand, is usually open to all Muslims, even though there may be unwritten rules regarding access.\(^4\) It is not the intention of the authors to equate the two types of buildings in any way; rather to examine the ways in which the ethos behind mosque architecture in the diaspora, in general, differ from or are similar to the principles of architecture employed in the Ismaili Centre, London. The chapter will begin by analyzing how the architecture of a mosque in the diaspora is an expression of religious as well as national identities. The discussion will then focus on the Ismaili context and the Ismaili Centre, London specifically, to demonstrate how the building itself, the liturgical rituals conducted within the prayer hall, and the public spaces within the Centre come together to represent the ethno-religious and national identities of the Ismailis.

**Architectural Expressions of Identities**

Certain symbols, over time, have come to represent a specific religion, such as, the cross, the Star of David and the crescent. The buildings in which adherents of a particular faith group congregate almost always exhibit the symbols

\(^3\) Whilst the focus of this chapter is on the Nizari Ismailis of Gujarati ancestry, it should be noted that Nizari Ismaili *jamatkhanas*, including the Ismaili Centre, London, are utilized by all Nizari Ismailis, regardless of their ethnic background.

\(^4\) Aspects of the construction of the building as well as, day-to-day functioning and financial support may be affiliated with one specific Muslim group.