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IDENTIFYING ISLAMIC SPACES OF WORSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH- PAKISTANI MUSLIM LIFE WRITING

Georgia Stabler

Contemporary British-Pakistani Muslim life writing is a literary subgenre that has received considerable interest from major UK literature festivals, the publishing industry, and the media in recent years. These texts are often positioned as a response to major political events concerning British Muslim communities, or as narratives solely concerned with depicting aspects of British-Pakistani life that feature heavily in national debates, such as assimilation, arranged marriage, or the reconciliation of simultaneous 'Muslim', 'British', and 'Pakistani' identities. In addition, the life writing market in the West increasingly propagates narratives about Muslim women that Claire Chambers has categorised as 'misery memoirs' (2013: 81), and male autobiographies about Islamic militancy or fundamentalism. By focusing only on these narratives, the UK publishing industry fails to recognise the genre's diversity and instead presents a simplistic and partial view of British-Pakistani writers and the communities they discuss. This chapter moves away from a negative, homogenising discourse to explore a facet of British-Pakistani Muslim life writing that is often overlooked: the presence and function of private, public, and global Islamic spaces of worship. By drawing attention to the role of particular sites as contexts of negotiation where a range of Muslim identities are negotiated, celebrated, or resisted (including the home, the mosque, and the Ka'ba in Mecca), I analyse how different aspects of British-Pakistani Muslim identity are articulated and present an alternative avenue of investigation into the genre. Further, the foregrounding of 'space' avoids the tendency to overdetermine the homogeneity of Muslim subjectivities or interpret contemporary British-Pakistani Muslim life writing chiefly as a response to Islamic terrorism. The texts explored in this chapter offer insight into how Muslim spaces are connected, the ways in which they shape the British landscape, and also the role they play in the writers' construction of self, and their relationship with Islam. Finally, a discussion about intergenerational outlooks on Islamic spaces of worship, the impact of religious traditions in the home, and the significance of undertaking the time-honoured *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca will reveal how identities are construed in a constant interplay of one's orientation to the past and the future in these life writing texts.

Although this chapter is primarily concerned with writers of Pakistani heritage, a British Muslim writer of East African descent, Shelina Zahra Janmohamed, will be examined alongside

them in order to comment upon the homogenous presentation of Muslim life writing in the UK literary marketplace. Close textual analysis reveals significant parallels between the writers' treatment of formal, public religious sites (i.e. mosques) and informal, private spaces, such as the domestic kitchen. I compare moments of intersection in the texts between public and domestic religious spaces, for example, during the Islamic forty-day period of mourning and the Night of Power.¹ These episodes often inspire revelatory or profound reflections. Mecca emerges as the physical centre of Islam, and as a space that inspires transnational connections, reiterating the idea of the global *ummah*. These readings also support Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's theoretical approach to autobiographical writing, which highlights the interconnectedness of space and subjectivity. They suggest that we, 'as subjects are bodies inhabiting space; but more important, we are positioned subjects, in and [out] of place' (2010: 42). The focus on both the 'location' and the 'position' of a narrator has importantly reshaped thinking about life writing. These concepts, which are both inescapably spatial, are increasingly understood as the juncture from which self-articulation is formed in life writing texts. Thus, it is timely to observe this juncture in specific life writing texts by British-Pakistani Muslims and investigate the impact of different personal, social, and public places of Islamic worship on British Muslim subjectivity.

The more marketable memoirs by British-Pakistani writers are often texts about Muslims that have been categorised as 'misery memoirs' (Chambers 2013: 81). These popular narratives often describe the abuse, forced marriage, or kidnapping of passive, oppressed Muslim females. Running parallel to the so-called misery memoirs are the male autobiographies about Islamism wherein the individual documents a journey of indoctrination into radical Islam, and subsequent alienation from these movements. Notable examples include Ed Husain's *The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I Saw Inside and Why I Left* (2007) and Maajid Nawaz's *Radical: My Journey from Islamist Extremism to a Democratic Awakening* (2013). The dominance of these strands of British-Pakistani life writing serve to prop up a discourse in the West about Pakistani Muslim communities that is inherently negative (see Hirsi Ali 2006; Manji 2004). However, numerous contemporary life writing texts by British-Pakistani Muslim writers challenge this presentation. Notable memoirs published in the mid- to late 2000s include Sarfraz Manzoor's *Greetings from Bury Park* (2007), Zaiba Malik's *We are a Muslim, Please* (2011), and Yasmin Hai's *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter: Becoming British* (2008). These writers, who are also linked by their shared background in journalism, received considerable exposure during a time when postcolonial memoirs were gaining prestige and becoming well-known worldwide (Jelodar et al. 2013: 216). They were also born and experienced childhood in 1970s/1980s Britain, were young adults in the 1990s, and came of age when the so-called 'Salman Rushdie Affair', 7/7, and 9/11 made them increasingly conscious of their cultural and religious backgrounds. Although approached from different angles, these texts are generally perceived as being shaped by a shared thematic preoccupation with family, Britishness, culture, and attempts by the writer to reconcile their composite identities in a way which allows them to be both British and Asian.

Pakistani communities emerged in Britain in the period following the 1948 Nationalism Act, predominantly in industrial towns and inner-city areas with viable employment opportunities, and it was in these areas where settlers created new religious institutions as well as 'transnational cultural and social spaces for themselves' (Hopkins 2007: 3). Investment in these spaces (which include businesses and facilities that serve the needs of the dominant Muslim community) quickly led to certain British inner-city areas being re-envisioned primarily as places of Muslim settlement. One such area is Bradford in northern England, Malik's hometown. In the first chapter of her memoir, entitled 'The Found City', Malik maps out Bradford as a city connected by distinctly Pakistani Muslim places. She describes how cultural and religious infrastructure

was establishing itself in 1970s Britain and the ways in which the area, once principally defined through its industrial production and output of worsted wool (Malik labels it 'Worstedopolis' 2011: 37), was being rewritten by its newly settled Pakistani communities as 'Bradistan. A home from home for the Pakistanis' (2011: 37):

For the thirty thousand or so of us in the city, there was a process of 'settlement by tiptoe' – we took on some aspects of British life by working in its factories and sending our kids to its schools, but preserved Pakistani life through language, religion and culture. [...] We established our own mosques and madrasas; we ran our own businesses – goldsmiths, curry houses, fabric shops; we even set up our own entertainment in the form of Asian record shops and cinemas.

(Malik 2011: 36)

Malik's description corroborates Hanif Kureishi's articulation of Bradford² as a place with a significant Pakistani influence: 'If I ignored the dark Victorian buildings around me, I could imagine that everyone was back in their village in Pakistan' (1986: n.p.). Both Malik and Kureishi describe a perceived friction that exists in Bradford between spaces defined by England's industrial past and those being shaped dramatically by and for a growing Pakistani presence. Kureishi notes the businesses from a bygone era, such as 'drapers, ironmongers, fish and chip shops that still used newspaper wrappers', that evoke memories of his 'English grandfather and the Britain of my childhood: pigeon keeping, greyhound racing, roast beef eating and pianos in pubs' (1986: n.p.). This nostalgic image is juxtaposed with the burgeoning infrastructure that caters to Bradford's large Asian Muslim populations:

the Islamic Library and the Ambala Sweet Centre where you could buy spices: dhaniya, haldi, garam masala, and dhal and ladies' fingers. There were Asian video shops where you could buy tapes of the songs of Master Sajjad, Nayyara, Alamgir, Nazeen and M. Ali Shahaiky.

(Kureishi 1986: n.p.)

These texts acknowledge and reinforce the religious and ethnic identifications that have come to be associated with Bradford as it continues to be shaped by its Pakistani/South Asian communities. Both Malik and Kureishi recognise Bradford as a location of diaspora and settlement, they read the area as a shifting cultural space which has been heavily affected by a process of deindustrialisation and an increasingly significant Pakistani presence. The 'settlement by tiptoe' effect in Bradford in the 1970s and '80s allowed the area to be understood geopolitically as a space of negotiation and of erasure, whereby the remaining post-war 'English' businesses existed alongside, and were boosted by, an economy generated by large-scale immigration and settlement in the area.

Businesses founded by Muslim migrants were often driven by economic motives, rather than religious ones, with religious structures providing an important personal and collective resource 'once settled in Britain' (Gilliat-Ray 2010: 45). As Anshuman Mondal highlights, 'For many Muslims of the older generation, the observance of Islam was less about piety and more to do with participation in communal life' (2008: 4–5). The performance of rituals, attending the mosque, and fasting during Ramadan, whether sincerely undertaken or not, are aspects of Muslim existence which form a social life and a semblance of community for the older generation of Pakistani immigrants. This attitude is certainly true for Sarfraz Manzoor's father, Mohammed Manzoor, who arrived in Britain in 1963 from Karachi as an economic migrant 'consumed with a passion

for self-improvement' (2007: 26). Finding Britain to be a hostile environment for a newly settled Pakistani immigrant, Mohammed 'drew his strength from his community' (2007: 7). However, as industry declined, many Muslim communities suffered from mass redundancies, deprivation, and discrimination. In an early episode of his memoir, Manzoor describes how the loss of his father's job impacted the whole family both emotionally and economically. Throughout his unemployment Mohammed made himself useful, assisting other Pakistani immigrants secure mortgages by negotiating with bank managers on their behalf, or by assisting with passport and visa problems (2007: 37–38). Alongside its primary religious function, the mosque provided a space where members of the community could share advice and information and provide administrative assistance. For Mohammed, the mosque became a place of empowerment for marginalised working-class communities where he could meet with a network of Pakistani Muslims who became an indispensable resource in times of economic hardship.

The mosque is an increasingly significant feature in Mohammed Manzoor's later years. Never having previously shown much interest in exploring religion, being preoccupied with his 'relentless quest to achieve and know and gain and become' (2007: 47) in his adoptive country, he explores his faith in later life. Manzoor notes that while he had been going to see Oasis at the Hacienda in Manchester during his years as a student there, his father had developed a more profound understanding of his faith:

When I rang home from my Manchester home to speak to the family my mother would tell me that he was at the mosque. When I asked why, she would explain that he had said that he found it soothing and inspiring to discuss religion with the imams. (2007: 43)

Manzoor suggests that perhaps 'his faith was encouraging him to try fresh ways of reaching out to me' (2007: 43). That Manzoor's memoir only makes reference to Islamic spaces of worship to describe how they impacted on his father's life and his relationship with him suggests that these spaces played only a peripheral part in his own life. By associating these spaces with his father, Manzoor also contextualises how early examples of British mosques served first-generation migrants by providing them with a space in their new locality where they could meet, socialise, and develop a sense of community.

Unlike Mohammed Manzoor, Malik's devout father had always insisted that 'God came first' (2011: 37). As such, he 'spent more time at the mosque than he did at home'. His regular place of worship was 'an old Victorian building that had once been a church' (2011: 37–38). As the mosque is largely an unrestricted archetype, in theory it can take any architectural form and express almost any visual language. The mosque is made significant by the socio-spatial constructions and practices that define it as an Islamic space of worship, not by its physical form. It is hardly significant, then, that Malik recalls her father's preferred mosque as being a repurposed Christian site with a decidedly traditional British architectural style. The adaptability of the mosque structure allows for the '(re)inscription of "old" space with "new" cultural (Islamic) meanings' (McLoughlin 2006: 1045). In her memoir *Love in a Headscarf* (2009), Janmohamed similarly describes mosques in her local area as being a mixture of purpose-built facilities, small converted houses, and old buildings of worship 'that had been closed down or in disrepair and then rescued and revived as a place of worship, but this time as a mosque' (42). The fusion of traditions, histories, and religions in repurposed spaces of worship represents the changeability of place and the emphasis of religious observance over physical surrounding. This is further underscored in Malik's text when she notes if the call to prayer came when her father was elsewhere in the city, 'he would often nip into one of the other 'God's Homes', as he called

them' (2011: 38–39). 'God's homes' around Bradford in the late 1970s were mostly converted terrace structures, 'stripped, so that the furniture you would expect to see in a normal residential abode – sofa, bed, table, etc. – had all been removed, but other than that there were few other changes' (2011: 39). Malik's and Janmohamed's descriptions of early converted mosques in Britain suggest that recently settled, concentrated Muslim populations were reconstructing localities to suit a new social function in keeping with a new community identity. This hints at a more sophisticated conceptualisation of the notion of locality or place itself, whereby place as a bounded piece of territory is challenged. As Linda McDowell suggests, geographers 'now argue that places are contested, fluid and uncertain' (1994: 4). This is certainly applied to public spaces of worship in Malik's and Janmohamed's texts, where mosques are encountered in a range of structures, demonstrating that it is socio-spatial practices which define places and result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion.

However, a mosque can also be perceived as a 'very concrete and material sign of domination and power' (Allievi 2003: 344), even more so when it is purpose-built. The bricks and mortar make a 'visual claim on public space' (Eade 1996: 220) and where mosques are permitted to broadcast the call to prayer, often only for the midday and afternoon prayer, there is a further 'acoustic' claim on the non-material spaces of a locality (Gilliat-Ray 2010: 197). The perceived sensory intrusion of purpose-built mosques did little to quell the rising hostility towards immigration and the Muslim community in the 1970s. It was during this time, Malik notes, that the National Front held regular rallies in Bradford, and the Yorkshire campaign against Immigration (2011: 37) (which won around 20 per cent of the vote in some wards in the 1970 general election). Mosque-related conflicts can therefore be read as symptomatic of a national identity crisis that purportedly revealed a tendency within the ethnic majority to interpret the (re)creation of Muslim sociocultural space and a Muslim presence in Britain as an ever-expanding (Islamic) threat. For Kevin Dunn (2001), mosque conflicts are interwoven with dichotomising socio-spatial constructions of identity, belonging, and 'community', resting upon narrow articulations of self-Other binaries. However, the interpretation of repurposed religious sites found in British Muslim memoirs presents a different view of these spaces. That Muslim communities have 'rescued' and 'revived' disused and abandoned existing British buildings, as writers like Janmohamed imply, suggests that they are not only providing for Muslim communities, but helping to improve locations in Britain as a whole.

A second obstruction to mosque development during this time came from within Muslim communities. Malik describes the divisions that were forming during the 1970s between groups with different national, denominational, and geographical affiliations following a period of relative cooperation:

As 'the community' became more settled in Ingerland, it also became more fragmented, with divisions based on nationality – Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian; geography – Mirpuri, Gujarati, Pathan, Punjabi; and denomination – Sunnis, Shias, Deobandis, Barelwis. So deep-rooted were the differences between these factions that they couldn't even agree on the most fundamental things, such as should we class ourselves as Muslims or as Moslems or Mohammedans or Mosalmans, never mind reaching consensus on where to build the next place of worship.

(2011: 40)

This is read as a point of contention for Malik, as she highlights that, according to Islam, the global Muslim population forms a collective community united in faith: 'So much for the

Ummah. So much for “the community”. So much for “God’s home”. Left to the Muslims in Bradford, God would be permanently homeless’ (2011: 40). Malik sets up her narrative by detailing the evolution of Bradford from an industrial northern English town to a Muslim-majority area and contextualises the development and disputes involved in that transition before and during her childhood. Later on in the narrative, Malik turns her attention to describing personal encounters and responses to the religious sites that have featured in her life, and how these spaces have affected her relationship with her faith.

Although the mosque is recognised as a significant Islamic space of worship in Malik’s text, it is also depicted as a distinctly public place, associated with communal prayer, formality, and for Malik it is a space more befitting male use. Malik’s father’s enthusiasm for visiting the mosque comes not only from his religiosity, but also because ‘the mosque was a place where the Uncles could relax and talk openly without the Aunties snooping. It was hallowed ground for more than the obvious reason’ (2011: 41). However, Malik notes that there was a lack of provision at her local mosque for women in terms of prayer and pastoral care (2011: 43). The writer’s foremost recollection of the women’s section of the mosque is of strong, unpleasant smells and cold conditions:

The mosque stank of sweaty women and their sandals; the madrasa stank of sweaty teenagers and their pumps. Nobody could afford heating in those places, so the odour froze in the air. Imagine the stench in a Bedouin tent in the middle of the night after twenty nomads have trekked thirty miles across the Sahara in the glaring heat and then devoured a feast of lamb mansaf and gone to sleep. It smelt like that.

(2011: 42)

Malik makes repeated reference to the unpleasant ‘odour’ of footwear throughout the text, consistently associating it with communal Islamic spaces such as the mosque or the *madrasa*. The writer also places considerable distance between herself and formal Islamic spaces by comparing the smells in her local mosque in Britain to a Bedouin tent in the Sahara, a context completely alien to her own lived experience. This passage is juxtaposed with a description of her preferred space of worship, her childhood home. More specifically, the kitchen, which is the focal setting for several significant religious experiences in the text:

our kitchen was warmer and it smelt nicer.[...] Umejee spent hours cooking, making masala from scratch [...] patting out chapattis on the smoking *thava*. The spicy aroma of Mum’s cooking comforted me. The smell of holy buildings made me retch.

(2011: 42)

The synonymous use of ‘odour’ and ‘aroma’ to describe the mosque and the kitchen respectively subtly indicates a sensorial connection between these settings and underscores them both as significant Islamic spaces of worship for Malik. However, Malik compares the mosque to a foreign land, while she personally identifies with the kitchen, which evokes a sense of closeness with a combination of pleasant smells, her mother’s presence, home cooking, warmth, familiarity, and comfort. Accordingly, Malik chose to ‘learn the rules I needed to know about being a good Muslim at home. From Dad and Umejee and the Koran’ (2011: 54). The link between aspects of embodiment and ‘place’ is well established in Malik’s memoir, evidenced by the recurrent association between her mother’s presence and the kitchen, and the unpleasant smell that doubly evokes in her mind the local mosque and the Sahara. In this sense, Malik’s narrative may be understood in relation to a growing body of materialist-feminist scholarship in the field of

‘critical geography’ – Notable examples include Gillian Rose’s *Feminism and Geography* (1993), Doreen Massey’s *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), and Linda McDowell’s *Gender, Identity and Place* (1999) – which exemplifies the ways in which women’s subjectivities are partly determined by their insertion within a variety of socio-spatial locations.

These interconnected contexts range from global diasporas, through national spaces, cities and neighbourhoods, domestic dwellings, and the body. The body in particular is a site of auto-biographical utterance in many life writing texts, it is the focal point through which places are experienced and connected, and where key concepts which construct subjectivity come together. For Malik, this idea is most realised in relation to the domestic context. Throughout *We are a Muslim, Please*, the kitchen table is central to the scene of narration, emphasised through repetition as the nucleus of Malik’s positive religious experiences throughout her childhood. She receives her informal schooling in Islam sat ‘at the kitchen table with Dad [...] listen[ing] to him as he told us about the amazing miracles the Prophet Mohammed had performed’ (2011: 52). It is at the kitchen table that Islam first becomes intelligible, accessible, and inspiring to Malik.

Significant events in the Islamic calendar also take place against the backdrop of the kitchen, including the Night of Power, which Malik describes as ‘the holiest time in the Islamic calendar’ (2011: 102). During this annual event, Malik’s father placed copies of the Qur’an in the centre of the kitchen table and he and his children sat around ‘in the same positions as at mealtimes’ to read and pray from dusk until dawn (2011: 103). It is also during one such episode when Malik experiences a closeness to her faith that reaches transcendent levels. As an adult, this episode is reflected upon in a way which links concepts of memory and embodiment to Malik’s Muslim identity, which is primarily how the narrator constructs her broader subjectivity in this life writing text. Malik notes that she often lies awake ‘between three and four a.m.’, a ‘neither-here-nor-there time’:

I wonder if that tingly ethereal feeling I now get in the hour between three and four a.m. when I’m wide awake, of some other presence in the room, some supernatural being, has something to do with the sensation I used to get as a child when I stayed up during The Night of Power and when, for one miraculous night only, I could hear and feel the flutter of Angels’ wings [...] hovering above us in our kitchen.

(2011: 103)

Malik’s insomnia and deep, physical connection to her formative experiences, which are rooted to the specific micro-space of the domestic kitchen, can be understood as part of an important marker of the autobiography genre that Kathleen A. Boardman and Gioia Woods also identify. They assert that autobiographical texts often express a ‘preoccupation with place, along with a focus on identity issues directly related to place: rootedness, anxiety, nostalgia, restlessness’ (2004: 4). In Malik’s text, this becomes even more pertinent in the wake of the domestic acts of terror which attempt to threaten and contradict the narrator’s understanding of her religious identity. The influence of the kitchen as a space of worship is reaffirmed in the final passage when she returns to this space like a refuge in uncertain times:

[T]here were no suicide bombers, no inflammatory clerics, no jihadis, no *kuffirs*, no war on terror, no extremists or fundamentalists, no radicalism or fanaticism, no Islamism, no Islamophobia. Then there was just my father and his four children sat at the kitchen table quietly reading the Koran.

(2011: 276)

Although Malik's text highlights an individual connection to her faith, she contextualises this as being part of a cohesive British–Pakistani Muslim community, strengthened by regular visits to the local mosque for communal worship. It is a sense of collective religious duty that compels the *apney lokhi* (Malik 2011: 41) or *apney log* (Hai 2008: 35), both of which translate to describe 'the community', to offer their support and presence in the event of a bereavement in the Muslim community. This idea is explored in both Malik's and Hai's narratives following a death in the family when members of the community gather at the deceased's home for the observance of a forty-day mourning period. Although approached from different religious perspectives, in both texts the private home is repurposed to function as a markedly public space designed primarily for Islamic worship. In Hai's narrative, the forty days of mourning alter the context of the home as a space once associated with her atheist upbringing and imbues it with new, religious meaning, whereas Malik describes the event as an uncomfortable intersection between two prominent, yet hitherto separate, spaces that are integral to her identity as a practising Muslim.

In Hai's memoir, *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter: Becoming British*, the family home becomes the centre of an unfamiliar and disorientating Muslim ritual during the forty days of mourning following the death of Hai's father. The late Mr Hai's individuality as a communist freethinker and an atheist is disregarded: 'as far as anyone in the *mahalla* was concerned, my father had been born a Muslim and he would also die a Muslim' (2008: 190). Despite their different backgrounds, in both Hai's and Malik's memoirs the home undergoes a similar cosmetic transformation during the mourning period to suit its new primary function as a temporary religious space. All domestic furniture is pushed aside and covered in 'clean but dull' (Malik 2011: 157) white or beige sheets, and the floor cleared for the guests to sit and read from the Qur'an. In Malik's religious household, the only objects left uncovered following her uncle's death were ones 'that bore God's name – the plaques inscribed with verses from the Koran, the calendar photographs of Mecca and Medina and the huge wall hanging of Kaba' (2011: 157). In both narratives, the home is visually altered and stripped back in a way that more closely resembles a typical and more permanent Islamic space of worship. Accordingly, the guests *respond* to the home in its altered state as a formal religious space. As is expected at a mosque, guests remove their shoes before entering the home, are separated by sex for prayer, and mourners are adorned with religious headwear.

These customs during the forty days of mourning are significant in both Malik's and Hai's text as they qualify the home as a formal space of worship during a religiously significant time. Hai notices that 'without prompting', the guests 'immediately took their shoes off' (2008: 187) in the hallway. At first, this automatic and unspoken conduct is unsettling for Hai, who begins to 'feel like a stranger in my home' (2008: 190). However, over the course of the ritual, the 'Islamic spirit of the occasion' (2008: 190) is embraced and the guests' treatment of her home as a place for worship is welcomed as Hai begins to comprehend the profound meanings behind the customs, noting that 'being around the *mahalla* was opening up a whole new world' (2008: 194). Once the forty-day period of mourning comes to an end, the religious function is removed from the space and the home reverts back to being foremost a domestic environment:

I came downstairs one morning and saw that the white sheets on the floor had gone and our furniture was back in place. It was as if nothing happened. I stood in the middle of the room, allowing the silence to envelope me.

(2008: 195)

Although cosmetically the space is the same as it was before Mr Hai's death, the religious function of the room during the forty days of mourning is not completely erased. Hai is

surprised to see her mother praying in the corner of the room even though 'the room was back to normal' (2008: 195). In Hai's narrative, the event of her father's death is a turning point whereby religion is invited into the home during the ritual period of mourning and the space is permanently altered by this contact. Although Hai never becomes a practising Muslim, she ultimately finds that Islam can play a role in her life without compromising her Britishness. Following the mourning period, Hai self-defines as a cultural Muslim which ultimately connects her to a family past, the present, and provides the 'missing piece in [her] jigsaw identity' (2008: 199).

For Malik, the home during forty days of mourning for her late uncle provides the context where the two significant Islamic spaces in her life meet. The 'dozens of pairs of shoes' (2011: 187) in the entrance of her home create a 'discernible spectrum of smells' that conjure up a physical response that is interchangeable with the one observed in her earlier memories of visiting the mosque: 'Standing near the front door [...] the stench of sweaty footwear made you want to retch' (2011: 159). The smell, made up of many 'sandals, trainers, lace-ups and slip-ons', although unpleasant, recapitulates Malik's presentation of the mosque as being a public place, characterised by communal worship and formality. As the separate smells of discarded footwear and Malik's mother's cooking meet in her hallway, the two scents, and the contexts they have come to represent, are brought into conflict with one another:

Down the hall, the aroma of curry battled with the stink of footwear. Neither smell won, but they formed an even more sickening union. You had to get to the far end of the corridor near the kitchen before there was any nasal salvation – just the fragrance of tender lamb masala.

(2011: 159)

Although the blend of these smells is repellent, that neither smell 'won' or was able to overpower the other can be read as an affirmation of the equality between these contexts.

The focus of this chapter so far has been on how mosques and domestic spaces in Britain have been presented as significant sites of Islamic worship and as spaces in which subjectivities become decoded in several British-Pakistani Muslim memoirs. In the texts, these spaces make up part of the writers' local context where they are able to comprehend what being a British Muslim means to them personally. The next section turns its attention to the presentation of the Ka'ba in Mecca. Mecca is the birthplace of Islam, the destination of the *hajj*, and the focal point towards which all Muslims orient themselves in prayer. As Muslims from all over the world perform the *hajj* annually, religious affiliations coexist and overlay national ones, and the Muslim *ummah* offers an alternative affiliative space and means of communal identification and transnational connection. The memoirs discussed so far all make reference to the *hajj* but it is not personally experienced, or articulated as a globalised religious space. Janmohamed details her pilgrimage to Mecca in her memoir *Love in a Headscarf*, describing it as a 'physical as well as a spiritual journey' on which all participating Muslims 'found themselves also having to be physically part of the world's most global and diverse community' (2009: 245).

Janmohamed's pilgrimage to Mecca may usefully be discussed in relation to a geopolitical theorisation of identity construction, which is in essence a 'spatial practice', to reiterate Michel de Certeau's central point in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). This involves mapping, routes and routing, borders and border crossings. Susan Stanford Friedman has elaborated on this idea by analysing what she calls 'relational spatialization' (1998: 151) which incorporates the opposing dimensions of the homonym routes/roots.³ Friedman's position can be summarised as follows:

Routes are pathways between here and there, two points of rootedness. Identity often requires some form of displacement – literal or figurative – to come to consciousness. Leaving home brings into being the idea of ‘home,’ the perception of its identity as distinct from elsewhere. Rootlessness [...] acquires its meaning only in relation to its opposite, rootedness.

(1998: 151)

Moreover, routes imply travel, physical and psychical displacements in space, which in turn incorporate the crossing of borders and contact with difference. Janmohamed’s articulation of the pilgrimage to Mecca as a devout Muslim demonstrates Friedman’s argument that geopolitical identity can be understood through ‘recognising the symbiosis between roots and routes and the multicultural encounters they engender’ (1998: 152). Being at the ‘location for the birth of Islam’ (Janmohamed 2009: 244) in order to perform the *hajj* signals a return to an ancestral, spiritual home for Janmohamed. Mecca represents an imagined collective rootedness for the global Muslim population whose members are themselves positioned all across the world but aspire to physically make the journey at least once in their life. Janmohamed’s pilgrimage addresses the meanings of location and itinerary in the production of cultural and geopolitical identities. Her position as ‘a British East-African Asian Muslim girl in the bubbling ethnic mix of North London in the context of 1980s Anglo-Saxon monoculture’ (2009: 34) complicates and disrupts the fixity and implied singularity of ‘roots’ as an identifier. Janmohamed’s physical roots are in North London, her ancestral roots are in East Africa, and, like all Muslims, her spiritual roots are in Mecca; her route is between these equally important coordinates.

The vast mosque that houses the Ka’ba is internationally known as the ‘House of God’, which in itself indicates its status as the ultimate transnational Muslim space. However, Janmohamed deliberately notes that ‘since God has no physical location, it is more a concept for Muslims to focus on than an actual abode for the Divine’ (2009: 244). Mecca itself is not sanctified in the text, but performing *hajj* is regarded as an act of Islamic worship. The Ka’ba, then, is encountered simultaneously as a sacred and an unconsecrated space in the narrative. The focus is drawn once more towards the social practices that define place, the ritual itself whereby ‘wave upon wave of thousands of thousands of men and women dressed in white [are] slowly walking around the black cube’ seven times (2009: 244). The synchronised movement of the crowd is further likened to a body of water in order to signify unity, Janmohamed describes how ‘the circulating movement of the ocean of humanity evoked emotions from the very depth of my being’ (2009: 244), and how she watched the crowds ‘swirling past’ and ‘flowing into each other’ (2009: 245–246). This unification is further emphasised by the dress code: those performing the *hajj* are required to dress in simple white clothing which is intended to erase any ‘inequalities of the physical and material world’ so that ‘Everyone was just a soul’ (2009: 246). The scene depicts the *hajj* as an embodiment of the universality of Islam against a background of cultural diversity. This space functions primarily to bring Muslims together at the site of their faith’s genesis and facilitates the ‘immediate and proximate’ interconnections (2009: 245) between believers and their counterparts from all over the world.

The *hajj* ritually and symbolically connects Muslims to a powerful ‘chain of (placed) memory’ (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 4). Janmohamed considers how the underlying meanings of the long-established rituals may be connected to a collective memory that also applies to a contemporary context:

Circulating round the Kaba established that the Divine was the focus of being a Muslim [...]. The universe was a repetition of cycles, each one following its set orbit

and finding its place in the Divine order. The two parts balanced each other perfectly and I realised that both the sublime and the mundane fitted together.

(2009: 247)

Janmohamed's own interpretation of the *haji* is in keeping with her understanding of Islam and how she identifies as a British Muslim. Through the *haji* ritual she reaches an understanding that 'looking for food and shelter were just as much part of worship as prayer' (2009: 247), and so the mundane and the spiritual aspects of her life as a London career woman and a practising Muslim exist symbiotically and uncomplicatedly as pinnacles of spiritual devotion. Further, the visit to the physical centre of Islam from Britain ultimately functions to underpin Janmohamed's notion that faith is omnipresent and therefore unbound to any physical space:

For many Muslims from less affluent backgrounds it would be a dream come true to be here. For those of us who had grown up in comfort in the West but outside our Muslim heartland, it created a new view of Islam, one that was holistic, ever present and in the majority.

(2009: 247)

In the texts, performing the *haji* and experiencing Mecca is presented as an aspiration (Mohammed Manzoor), a realised dream (Janmohamed), an annual event (Malik's father), and, for some, it doesn't feature at all (Manzoor, Hai). The sacred space of Mecca has an omnipresence in the texts, whether it is represented physically through a visit, visually displayed in the home (photographs in Malik's parents' house), or gesturally, in instances when worshippers orient themselves towards Mecca in prayer. In each of the texts, the writer's relationship with their faith and how they identify as a Muslim is unpicked and made clearer.

This chapter has sought to understand the role that spaces of Islamic worship play in writers' lives, how they are connected, and how this impacts on writers' construction of self in their life writing texts. Through its signposting of personal and intergenerational encounters with Islamic spaces in four texts, this chapter has also uncovered how identities are construed in a constant interplay between past and present. For example, the development of Pakistani-run businesses and mosques in the 1970s and '80s helped to establish communal identity and social cohesion amongst newly settled immigrant populations and also created an infrastructure in deindustrialised British towns. As established in Manzoor's and Malik's narratives, the mosques especially functioned as a sanctuary for their parents' generation, a space for socialising, business, and prayer. This generation carried with them the religious rituals and tradition of community gatherings at both the mosque and in the domestic home in times of bereavement. Altering the domestic space to benefit religious ritual and adopting certain behaviours in line with Islamic tradition helped Malik and Hai to cope with their grief and understand what place these long-established religious traditions had in their own lives as a practising British Muslim and as a cultural Muslim respectively. Hai in particular describes the forty days of mourning as a transformative episode which ultimately connects her to a past, a present, and provides the 'missing piece in [her] jigsaw identity' (2008: 199). Janmohamed confirms her Muslim identity during her pilgrimage to Mecca, which ritually and symbolically connects all Muslims and takes them to the perennial heart of Islam. Encounters with these spaces are significant in the texts for a number of reasons, but the most significant element is how these spaces are used and understood. The different ways in which the writers respond to these spaces, and the social practices, rituals, prayer, and religious observance that take place within them, and how these responses

evolve during the narratives is telling of how the construction of identity is never complete, fluid rather than static.

The marketing material and exposure of Muslim life writing largely excludes the influence of religious spaces and their role in the construction of autobiographical subjectivity in their discussions of the texts in favour of foregrounding the main narrative thrust or responses to acts of terrorism. There is a prevalence of oversimplification and polarisation in popular discourse which highlights the importance of interrogating homogenous representations of British Muslim texts. The presentation of and interaction with the home, the mosque, and Mecca as private, public, and global Islamic spaces encountered in the texts reveal an aspect of each writer's idiosyncratic relationship with Islam, and complicates the idea of a homogenous British-Pakistani Muslim experience. Through a discussion of places of Islamic worship in specific life writing texts, this chapter supports Janmohamed's assertion that 'each of us [Muslims] occupied so many spaces and identities and that made us multiversal not identical' (2009: 246).

Notes

- 1 In several key texts discussed, a death in a Muslim family or community is followed by forty days of mourning. During this time the community gathers at the home of the deceased, recites the Qur'an, and prays together. The Night of Power commemorates the night when the Qur'an was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, it is often considered the holiest night of the year for Muslims.
- 2 The magazine *Granta* published Hanif Kureishi's article 'Bradford' (1986) as part of a special edition that showcased life writing by authors of Pakistani descent.
- 3 Friedman is not the only academic to engage with the idea of roots/routes in critical theory. For example, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* challenged black nationalism's fixation with roots and exclusive ownership of cultural production, suggesting instead that black diasporic identity is the result of 'a process of movement and mediation [...] more appropriately approached via the homonym routes' (1993: 19). Stuart Hall (1996) and Clifford James (1997) have also discussed the homonyms in relation to diasporic identity and travel respectively.

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