The Space of Displacement: Making Muslim South Asian Place in British Neighborhoods

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Globalization and postcolonialization have created new geographies of cultural “displacement” in global cities. This article examines the space of displacement created by Muslim South Asians in British cities. It argues that the cultural paradigm of global Islam is sufficiently mobile and adaptable to be reproduced in local space. The question of displacement opens up a discourse on local-global issues of identity and place-making. By examining the effect of transnational imaginings on everyday practices and social processes constructed within regimes of multiculturalism, this article examines the process of making Muslim South Asian places. Particular focus is on the social (re)production of urban, architectural and built forms in Bradford, Birmingham and London.

The study of cultures has traditionally focused on the intrinsic relation between people and their built environments as fixed in time and space. For most of the twentieth century it was on these grounds of relative fixity that the study of the “Islamic City” became culturally and geographically bound to the Arab Middle East. Framed primarily by Orientalist discourses of cultural difference, the “Islamic city” model was constructed as an ideal type of an essential Muslim identity, culture, and urban form. Such reductionist discourses have now come under scrutiny. But recent migration of large numbers of Muslims to British towns and cities has once again brought to the fore notions of cultural difference. The presence of Muslim South Asians in Britain is the result of the combined effects of globalization and postcolonialization, which have created new geographies of “displacement.” These geographies have produced a new British frontier in which the difference between the “Islamic city” and the “Western City” has become increasingly eroded. The cultural (re)production of Muslim South Asian place in the British frontier — in its urban, architectural, and built-form dimensions — is what this article aims to examine.

The contemporary condition of “displacement” has brought into sharp focus the need to redefine the relationship between people and their built environments. Indeed, the processes of reterritorialization involved and their complex links to cultural production...
have highlighted the dynamic nature of culture as lived experience able to adapt and change according to different conditions. In this study of Muslim South Asian settlement in Britain, the question of “displacement” opens up a discursive space on local-global issues of identity and place-making. In particular, it examines the multiple forms of Muslim South Asian representation that are being constructed globally through transnational networks, and locally in response to power structures and intercultural encounter. The case studies used here are taken from ongoing research and fieldwork concerning buildings, streetscapes, and spaces in parts of Bradford, Birmingham and London with substantial Muslim South Asian populations.

MUSLIM SOUTH ASIANS IN BRITAIN

Almost two million Muslims live in Britain, of whom more than half are of South Asian, primarily Pakistani, origin. The large majority originate from mainly rural areas of the Indian subcontinent — namely, Mirpur, Campbellbur (Chhachh), Sylhet, and certain villages in Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Gujurat and Lyllpur. These communities are products of postcolonialism, in the sense that Britain exploited historical links with India and Pakistan to recruit labor to fill the demand for industrial expansion. Beginning in the 1950s, these links brought workers to the Midlands manufacturing industries, West Yorkshire steel and Lancashire textile industries, as well as the Greater London area. Today these regions contain the largest settlements of South Asian communities.

The first significant settlement of South Asians was by mainly male workers, who had come to Britain for economic betterment but with intent to return. However, the hiatus between the passing of restrictions in immigration laws and their implementation in the mid-1960s saw a sharp rise in numbers of migrants choosing to remain in Britain. As a result, a substantial rise in the sponsorship of village kin and the settlement of migrant families followed. A third wave of migration took place in the 1970s, as Asians from Africa sought refuge in Britain from political unrest in Uganda, Kenya, and other countries.

Settlement first took place in spatially defined areas within the major industrial cities, which corresponded to late-Victorian and Edwardian (1875–1918) inner- and middle-ring neighborhoods. Generally, South Asians moved into areas once occupied by the middle class, and in some cases displaced other previously established migrant groups. The highly regular and well-differentiated layout of the industrial urban landscape, characterized by regular streets, long blocks, standardized plot sizes, and repetitive two-story terraces, formed a morphological frame governing urban change. These neighborhoods offered a number of advantages for the early settlers. First, much of the terraced housing stock was vacant, making access to it both cheap and uncontested — with the added advantage that the individual houses could absorb large numbers of male workers. Second, a High Street, or major commercial thoroughfare, generally connected these neighborhoods to the city center, making them readily accessible to the central business, commercial and industrial districts.

This article will focus on neighborhoods of three cities

**FIGURE 1.** Aerial view of Sparkhill, Birmingham, in 1950, showing highly regular and well-differentiated layout of the industrial urban landscape. Photo courtesy of Birmingham Central Library Archive Unit.
with significant Muslim South Asian populations: Bradford, Birmingham and London. Bradford, in West Yorkshire, has a Pakistani and Kashmiri population of some 73,900, as well as one of the largest Bengali communities in Britain (95 percent from the Sylhet district). South Asian settlement here is concentrated within 25 square miles of the center of the city, and more specifically along several major streets, including Lumb and Manningham Lanes. Birmingham, in the West Midlands, has approximately 80,000 South Asian Muslims, the largest single group being Pakistani, who constitute nearly 7 percent of Birmingham’s population. Geographically, the highest concentration of Muslims in Birmingham are in the southern middle-ring districts of Balsall Heath, Small Heath, Sparkbrook and Sparkhill, with major Muslim commercial areas located along Coventry, Stratford, and Ladypool Roads. In Greater London, areas dominated by South Asian Muslims include Southall, Alperton, Wembley, Kingsbury, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest. Major commercial areas have developed along Southall High Street, Brick Lane, and Ealing Road. The heterogeneity of the Muslim South Asian community is reflected in its members’ different histories, cultural traditions, social classes, and methods of insertion into Britain. Although united by belief, the overall community is divided along national, ethnic and sectarian lines. Thus, group solidarities are multivalent, constructed around one or more identities, such as Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, Sunni, Shi’a, Hanafi, Deobandi or Barevi. These internal divisions do not necessarily mean that the Muslim community lacks cohesion. Rather, it should be viewed as a political project formed around various solidarities and themes invoked at particular times. This political project has been explained by Seddon:

[For Muslims experiencing migration and new environments, religious identity, its preservation and promulgation, has always taken precedence over cultural or ethnic ones. This is because whilst Islam is universal it is not monolithic in its specific localised practice or cultural manifestations therefore, ethnic and cultural identities can be evolved, negotiated, re-defined, transformed, reinvented, adopted, absorbed, or integrated.]

This complex geography of identities is activated within particular conditions and circumstances and for particular purposes. As shown in a study by Werbner on Pakistani Muslims in Manchester, “the weaving” together of different types of identity — moral, political and aesthetic (the Muslim, the Pakistani, and the South Asian) — has created a powerful grass-roots basis for ethnic mobilisation. The question of how these multiple identities are constructed and represented in space forms the central theme of this article. THE FORMATION OF LOCAL MUSLIM CULTURE IN GLOBAL SPACES: TRANSNATIONAL IMAGININGS IN BRITAIN

Many critics have argued that globalization and colonization have contributed to the destruction of indigenous cultures. But this view assumes that culture is static, and disregards the often quite remarkable ways societies engage, adapt and resist dominant homogenizing forces. Recently, critical emphasis has shifted from concern for the economic and political imperatives of the unitary sway of global processes to an examination of the minutiae of time and place. Moreover, there is growing recognition that the spatialization of “displaced” cultures cannot be read through binary oppositions of the local and the global. Rather, they are now seen as mutually constituted — the local as a node in the global network, and the global as a network of local nodes.

This is particularly true of Islam, in which the relationship between the global and the local is dialectic. On the one hand, Islam is a divinely revealed religion and way of life with a belief in its universal validity — a global paradigm; yet on the other, it is organized in an assemblage of local structures. Such characteristics are due in part to the portability of the Qur’an, which makes Islam independent of local circumstance for its reproduction, and enables its historical movement across geographically diverse, multiethnic and multicultural terrains. Through this historical process, Islam has transformed other cultures; but it has also been transformed by interaction with them. According to Hodgson: “the very comprehensiveness of the vision of Islam as it unfolded has ensured that it can never be quite the same from one place to another or one time to another.” Indeed, in the case of Britain, the physical manifestation of Islam has been determined by an exchange between a global cultural paradigm and the infusion of new meanings produced within an existing urban tradition.

In recent decades an unprecedented intensity of transnational flows of people, knowledge, information, resources and ideas has increased the global reach of Islam. Esposito has described these new cultural flows between the West and the Muslim world as a “multilane superhighway with two-way traffic.” Indeed, improved mass communication and travel has created what Anderson has termed “imagined communities,” which coalesce around remembered or imagined homelands. And in a study of the social construction of imagined communities in British Muslim neighborhoods, Albrow et al. found that the Muslim sense of belonging to the wider Muslim community (ummah) is produced and transmitted through a transnational network of social and technological linkages that include religious ceremonies, telephone conversations, television and radio programs, newspaper accounts, videos, and music. They also found that everyday life in Muslim neighborhoods is infused with knowledge and meaning produced in these transnational networks and encountered in local neighborhoods on a daily basis.
These imaginings, however, also create real cultural geographies. For example, the transnational movement of ideologies and institutions has meant that an increasing number of Muslim institutes, think tanks, and political action groups have established themselves in global cities. As Esposito has pointed out, “today the cities and learning centres of the Muslim world are not only Cairo, Damascus, Islamabad, and Kuala Lumpur but also London, Manchester, Paris, Marseilles, Amsterdam, Antwerp, New York, Detroit and Los Angeles.” These trends indicate that space is being constituted through social relations and contingent solidarities that are both contained within one place and stretch beyond it, tying any particular locality into wider relations and processes. Indeed, dense networks of transnational Muslim solidarities have produced a much broader range of spaces, which transcend simple religious space to include philanthropic, socio-cultural, economic, and political functions. Cultural flows of images, symbols, and architectural idioms also contribute to the different forms of cultural bricolage, hybridity and creolization represented in space. The question of how transnational imaginings of Muslim South Asians are being represented and spatialized as part of the place-making process provides the focus of the remainder of this article.

MUSLIM SOUTH ASIAN PLACE

Recent discourses on globalization of culture have shifted theoretical emphases within the social sciences to a focus on human agency and subjectivity, redefining older notions of culture and its territorial rootedness. This shift conceives culture to be in a constant state of transformation, in which everyday practice, social processes, relationships, experiences and understandings are continually negotiated in new contexts. These are all part of what Bourdieu has termed “habitus,” or a system of dispositions. The term demonstrates the extent to which “place” may be seen as a “practice,” rather than a visual, geographic or topographic location — a process of transformation by which space is either “reclaimed” or “reinscribed” as a network of actions, practices and relationships. Such cultural practices are further shaped by operations of globalization (transnationalism) and relations of power in given historical conditions and particular locales.

Islam’s remarkable flexibility and adaptability to new cultures and customs has already been remarked upon. Indeed, the survival of Islam as a cultural tradition in Britain owes much to its ability to remain a living practice, or habitus, that does not contradict everyday life in the larger British context. As a lived practice, Muslim South Asians distinguish between ibadat (rituals of worship) and mu’amalat (social affairs). Ibadat is identifiable by adherence to a number of practices and beliefs canonized in texts, and most evident in the “five pillars of Islam”: affirmation of one God, prayer, almsgiving, fasting during Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Of these, the rituals of prayer (often exercised communally on Friday) and almsgiving have physical implications such as in the establishment of mosques and related institutions. The implications of other religious beliefs, such as the special preparation of meat products (halal) may also be visible in commercial areas. However, mu’amalat allows Muslims freedom of action to deal with the everyday demands of individual and community life so long as the choices made do not contradict a prescribed principle. Such freedom enables Muslims to appropriate the norms of other cultural traditions while preserving the social identity of the Muslim community. In contexts of displacement, these principles, practices, and social processes may adapt and take on new meanings, pointing to the continuing redefinition and reappropriation of Islam as a living tradition.

According to King, these cultural practices and social processes “do not occur in a spatial vacuum, nor on an environmental tabula rasa. Cultures are constituted in space and under specific economic and social conditions; they are physically and spatially as well as socially constructed.” And, as Wolff has pointed out: “cultures are constructed in relation to one another, produced, represented and perceived through the ideologies and narratives of situated discourse.” Hence, the ways in which culture is constituted are a matter of representation — a politics of identity, where the “positioning” or “performativity” of social collectives or individual difference emerge out of contexts which are inherently contested. This suggests that the idea of a monolithic Muslim identity is not tenable, and that Muslim identity should instead be understood as a complex formation, contingent on the “positioning” of various social solidarities and their spatial particularities within systems of power — which may or may not be inflected by finer divisions within Muslim communities.

The engagement of Muslim South Asians with British multiculturalism has brought an inherent contestation of identity. Modeled on Britain’s colonial experience, the ideology of multiculturalism has attempted to both recognize the presence of postcolonial cultures and subsume this plurality within the framework of a national identity. Premised on fixed notions of “cultural difference” and “otherness,” such imperial constructs have given rise to spatially segregated and racialized geographies of disadvantage in British cities. But the spaces of British cities have also become sites of intercultural encounter that destabilize these imperial arrangements, specifically with regard to the process of constituting political Muslim South Asian identities in resistance to homogenizing tendencies. According to Ashcroft: “the most sustained, far-reaching and effective interpretation of resistance has been ‘resistance to absorption,’ the appropriation and transformation of dominant technologies for the purpose of re-inscribing and representing postcolonial cultural identity.” Indeed, the various ways Muslim South Asians have adapted and transformed existing built forms in Britain, as well as created new cultural forms within British cities (and within defined regimes of multiculturalism), offers a fascinating example of “resistance.” In what follows, a number of examples of the Muslim South Asian habitus and representation in Bradford, Birmingham and London will be examined from two perspectives: the practices of ibadat, and the social-based formations of mu’amalat.
**BIRADARI AND NEIGHBORHOOD FORMATION**

Muslim South Asian settlers, predominantly male workers, began to arrive in Britain in the late 1950s. These pioneers tended to live together, renting rooms in lodges until they were able to purchase properties in areas that were relatively affordable. Racialized housing policies limited choices in the housing market to certain areas within the vacated Victorian and Edwardian suburbs. Many have argued that a combination of racial politics, discriminatory practices, and labor exploitation were used in Britain to maintain the spatial segregation of the “other.” However, it was around these established urban nuclei that South Asian landlords also first began to establish a strong transnational network through biradari — extended kinship and village ties. According to this practice, they sponsored fellow villagers and lodged them in their homes, shaping a process of chain migration that continues to influence patterns of settlement within specific geographies in British industrial cities. This form of spatialized biradari-based social organization has had its benefits: it has created an environment of social welfare and cohesion in an antagonistic environment, and it has fostered the perpetuation of traditional norms, values, and beliefs among the newcomers.

With the arrival of families from the mid-1960s, the village-kin group, as a residential unit, began to expand into nuclear households of owner-occupied properties in close proximity to one another. Peach has shown that through social processes of intermarriage and proximity, the persistence and stability of the Muslim South Asian cultural group has been able to accommodate differences. By the 1980s, however, a combination of natural increase and a new wave of migration marked a sharp rise in the number of Muslim South Asians in Britain. This period also saw a movement to the outer suburbs. Nevertheless, the close social ties with local and transnational South Asian biradari have persisted. Indeed, close proximity to Asian shops, the mosque, good schools, and transport has consistently been a primary factor in the stability of Muslim social groups in particular areas of British cities. Thus, within these social geographies and urban morphologies, new relationships have been spatialized from the most personal and intimate — the family group — outward to associations based on religion, commerce, education and politics.

**THE HOUSE**

At the micro-morphological scale of the family household, the common housing type in Victorian and Edwardian neighborhoods is the terrace rowhouse, whose basic plan consists of two floors, with two rooms on each (on average, 3.5 x 3m. in size). For variation and enlargement, there may be a cellar and an attic, and a back extension, or “lean-to,” for the kitchen-cum-scullery. Muslim South Asian family households tend to be larger than average, usually including grandparents or other extended-family members. In South Asia, the average rural house facilitated the relationship between the activities of family members through spatial boundaries. During the process of displacement, the spatial practices used in such rural houses were to a large degree transferred and reinscribed into the spaces of the terrace house. In South Asia, the most pervasive spatial practice was that of purdah, generally interpreted as a restriction against women meeting men other than their husbands and immediate male kin. The degree to which purdah was observed varied considerably according to region, wealth, and family traditions, being more strictly observed in some South Asian regions than others. Nevertheless, its principles continued to affect all household layouts in Britain in important ways.

In a detailed ethnographical study of Pakistani families in Oxford, Shaw compared the activities and layouts of the rural South Asian house with that of the English house. In her study, she showed that the former was designed to safeguard purdah by dividing the house into three areas: a baithak (male-dominated guestroom), a courtyard, and a main family room. When examining the way Pakistanis were adapting to the English house, she then found that the front room had assumed the role of baithak. When male guests were present, women could remain out of view in other parts of the house, or they could cover their heads with dupattas. Shaw described the gendered temporality of the front room as it changed from a family room to a predominantly male domain during these visits. As in South Asia, the front room typically also served as a place to display indicators of status and wealth. According to Shaw:

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**FIGURE 3.** Typical two-bedroom English terrace house showing South Asian-influenced layout (upper floor plan is on the right).
A typical front room is furnished with bright fitted carpets, wall paper in a bold design, easy chairs or a sofa-set covered with vinyl or other shiny upholstery and decorated with hand embroidered cushions. . . . Hanging around the walls are several framed pictures depicting the name or sayings of the Prophet Mohammed embroidered in silver or gold sequins against a background of dark black cloth, sometimes the work of the daughter of the household. There are other pictures depicting pilgrims at the Ka’aba, the major shrine at Mecca.

By contrast, the back room in a terrace house assumes the function of the rural South Asian courtyard. This is where children play and eat, and where women sew, iron, entertain female visitors, watch television, and supervise children reading the Qur’an. In the Victorian and Edwardian terraces, many South Asian families have built kitchen extensions to make sufficient space in this back area.

During a field visit in Birmingham, I was invited into a Muslim Indian home. The head of the household was a twice-displaced migrant from Tanzania, who had moved to Britain thirty years ago. A visual articulation of Muslim identity was immediately apparent on entry to the house. Both the front and back rooms were dominated by Qur’anic verses displayed in many forms on the walls and shelves. And there were prints, ornamental plates, religious words on art objects, an Islamic calendar, photographs of holy relics, and even a clock that chimed “Allah Akbar” (“God is Great”) (FIG. 4). These items were meaningful insomuch as they conveyed visual representations of the religious imagination. This imagination was also present in the home through programs on cable TV, and my host was keen to show me the Islamic news and cultural channels his family watched. He believed these channels allowed him to know what was happening in the Muslim world, despite the distance. “We also feel we have a strong kinship, religion-wise, with other Muslims,” he told me.

The rooms of the house were also used for performing prayers, one of the principles of ibadat (religious ritual). Muslim ritual requires no special “sacred space,” and can be practiced anywhere which is neat and clean. In fact, according to religious texts, praying in the house will bring it life and goodness. But in accordance with prescribed ritual, prayer must be directed toward Mecca, or the qibla, and my host laid down a prayer rug to show me the orientation of prayer — which had no relation to the alignment of the walls. The practice of prayer thus embodied a connection that transcended the physical boundaries of the room, both spatially and in the religious imagination. And, in general, it was clear that the various methods of representing Muslim identity — whether spatial as in the practices of purdah or prayer, or visual and audible in the case of holy texts and television images — constitute the spaces of the Muslim South Asian home in ways that go beyond the materiality of space.

The physical constraints of terrace housing have, no doubt, transformed social practices such as purdah in Britain. But the terrace house has also been modified to make space for the larger-than-average Muslim South Asian household. In some cases, as in that of the Muslim Indian family above, one of the two bedrooms may be partitioned to preserve gender segregation among children. In other cases, the only solution to cramped conditions may be to extend to the rear and upward. The original extensions to Victorian terrace rowhouses were commonly simple one-story lean-tos. However, in Muslim South Asian neighborhoods larger, two-story extensions are now common, as well as attic and cellar conversions (FIG. 5). Generally, since back yards have been built upon, in such settings social interaction must take place in the street (with purdah being observed through the use of the head scarf) — a pattern similar to that in the late Victorian city.
THE MOSQUE

Historically, the mosque has been the most important building in Muslim communities, providing a sense of identity and place both as a landmark and a space for congregation. In different urban contexts different types of mosques have emerged, from monumental landmark buildings to smaller neighborhood structures. Most are completely integrated into the townscape, and many have been associated with other community functions such as schools or orphanages, as well as with the provision of drinking water in public fountains. In Britain, the mosque has taken on a similar role as a place of worship; but more importantly, it has also served as a focus for community and social welfare.

The development of the British mosque, both as a form of social organization and physical form, traces its origins to the time when the first single male Muslim settlers converted terrace houses for small heterogeneous congregations. However, the partition of the Indian subcontinent and the later arrival of families led to the establishment and differentiation of mosques along kin, ethnic, national and sectarian lines. Then, gradually, as congregations increased in size, space was also appropriated in redundant industrial-era buildings and imbued with new cultural and functional meanings. In the 1980s, a shift in multicultural policies to a more pluralistic model of welfare provision allowed Muslim communities to purpose-build places of worship, asserting a distinctly imported “Islamic” identity. However, institutional practices and policies governing religious expression have also produced a complex and uneven urban political geography in Britain, resulting in many sites of contestation and negotiation of cultural identity.

In Islam, Friday communal prayer is held in higher esteem than prayer in the home. In its simplest form, the mosque consists of a sanctuary in which the qibla is directed toward Mecca. Historically, specific forms of “sacred architecture” have been inherent in Islam as a symbolic expression of the faith. However, it was also common, as Islam spread, for Muslims to adapt other sacred locales as sites for communal prayer. This propensity for spatial appropriation and adaptation reveals a certain fluid quality to the Muslim conception of sacred space. Indeed, it points to a certain independence of religious practice from physical form. This quality has provided an effective adaptation mechanism in new cultural contexts, enabling the appropriation of diverse building types for religious practice.

Such adaptability is demonstrated in the case of one of Bradford’s first mosques, established by the Bengali Twaquila Islamic Society in 1968. Ethnic tensions during the 1960s had fragmented an initially cohesive Muslim community in the city, dividing it among a number of smaller community mosques. These were set up by Deobandi Pathan and Punjabis from Chhachh, Deobandi Gujaratis from Surat, Bareli Jama’iyat Tabligh ul-Islam, and the Bengalis — factions that represented the different Muslim South Asian identities emerging within Bradford’s cultural landscape. In response to a growing congregation and a need to provide Islamic teaching to children, the Bengali Twaquila Islamic Society purchased two adjacent terrace houses on Cornwall Road and converted them into a house mosque. Barton has described how the layout of the houses was adapted:

The houses are Victorian, with two rooms on the ground floor, two on the first, an attic and a cellar. The wall dividing the two dwellings has been retained, but the partitions within each house have been removed, thus creating two large rooms, with connecting doors, on the ground and first floors of the mosque. The front door of one house is the entrance . . . . The ground floor rooms are used for children’s classes and for prayers when there is an overflow from the rooms above . . . . The first-floor rooms are used daily for prayers . . . . The walls are bare apart from one or two calendars, the timetable for daily prayers . . . . In the corner of the inner room stands a purely symbolic carpeted minbar [pulpit], of three steps, which is also the only indication of the qibla, the direction faced in prayer . . . . The cellar has been converted into a kitchen and place for performing wudu, the ablutions, before the prayers. There is a toilet outside, at the back of the building. The attics, comprising two bed-sitting rooms, and a small kitchen, are used as accommodation for the imam [leader in prayer] or others.

These modifications of space stemmed foremost from the need to create a single large space for the congregation, but meanings were also inscribed into the space by changing its use and inserting traditional symbolic elements such as the pulpit and prayer niche. By modifying the traditional layout of the terrace house, Muslims were able to differentiate a space for themselves and their needs. But the conversion did not remain uncontested; indeed, strong opposition surfaced from neighbors and local authorities, resulting in the issuance of enforcement notices on grounds that the changes constituted a “material change of use” as set out in Town and Country Planning legislation, as well as a “loss of amenity” to neighbors.

In general at that time, the antagonistic nature of interethenic relations had a direct influence on the outward expression of all appropriated buildings — residential or otherwise. Modifications were restrained to interiors, with no extravagant indications of use. Neither were religious symbols or motifs applied to buildings, except the odd banner or sign designed primarily to signify a place of worship to the faith community. Overall, the objective was to ensure each building was “undercommunicating” its function and blending in with its surroundings.

By the late 1970s, however, the constraints Muslim communities faced in catering to their religious needs were recognized by a number of city councils in Britain. In a welcome change of policy, several decided to permit house-
mosque conversions.\textsuperscript{63} By that time, growing congregations were also creating increasing pressure for extensions to such structures. And in some cases, planning authorities permitted extensions to be made to the rear of the properties, despite the substantial increase in densification.

More recently, the growing stature of mosque communities has prompted some to consider building new structures. And the shift in multicultural policy in the 1980s was also accompanied by a new assertiveness in the representation of Muslim identity. Purpose-built mosques are now designed to incorporate “Islamic” symbols such as domes, minarets and arches, and some house-mosques have undergone facade remodelings, as in the case of the Wimbledon Mosque (\textbf{fig. 6}). Many house-mosques today serve only as small-scale neighborhood mosques providing Qur’anic classes for children and adult training courses.\textsuperscript{64}

The acute spatial constraints of the house-mosque also prompted some Muslim congregations to seek to convert more commodious buildings. In particular, a decline in industry and manufacturing in the face of modernization, coupled with increasing secularization of British society, had left many picturesque churches in working-class communities available for appropriation. Other building types, such as warehouses, schools, community halls, and even cinemas and clubs, were sometimes also suitable for conversion. For example, the Presbyterian Church of St. Andrew’s (c.1920) on Ealing Road, London, was adapted for use as a mosque, with adjacent facilities for ablution and a welfare center (\textbf{fig. 7}). The original design of the church combined a domed bell tower with a gabled hall. Visually, the dome already connoted an “Orientalist” image, but a display of sacred texts above the main entrance and the addition of an arched portal further signified the building’s new use. Internally, the main space did not conform with the basic requirement that prayers be conducted facing Mecca (the \textit{qibla} orientation). Thus, worshippers were forced to form prayer lines at an oblique angle to the walls (\textbf{fig. 8}). Throughout history, realignment of the \textit{qibla} has been a common method of accommodating worship within the constraints of existing building traditions.

Of all these trends, the conversion of listed industrial buildings has created the greatest contention. Indeed, the adaptation of historical buildings has given rise to the politicalization of heritage as a means of constructing and redefining “Britishness” and national identity.\textsuperscript{65} In this regard, Muslims have often faced difficulties in Britain in regard to conservation laws that reinforce notions of “otherness.” One example involves the conversion of an eighteenth-century Georgian building on Brick Lane, London, to a mosque. The building had been bought in the 1970s by a group of Bangladeshi businessmen of the Bareli tradition. Although the mosque committee did little to change the exterior, substantial internal modifications were made to accommodate an additional six hundred worshippers. Eade has described the revival of nationalist sentiment by conservationist opposition in response to these changes, despite the fact that
internal modifications did not require planning permission. For many non-Muslims, the mosque conversion challenged the physical expression of a local English heritage exclusive of cultural differences.

Another good example of listed-building conversion can be found in Birmingham, where the Green Lane Mosque was established in a rundown Victorian public library and swimming bath. The building is a beautiful example of Birmingham’s terracotta vernacular, and the clock tower serves as a powerful landmark, playing a similar role to the minaret (fig. 9). The only outward indication of its new use is a sign over the entrance displaying Qur’anic scripts. But the building was adapted in 1980 with the help of grants from Birmingham City Council, demonstrating how in the space of a decade, attitudes had begun to change toward religious communities. Today, the building serves as a community center, with a library, offices, prayer hall, school, and car park.

By contrast to these early efforts, the shift in multicultural discourses in the 1980s and the subsequent assertion of a Muslim South Asian identity has radically transformed Britain’s cultural landscape. After years of struggle to find government support for purpose-built mosques, a number of city councils and planning departments have begun to show interest in Muslim community schemes. The result is an unprecedented increase in mosques with architectural styles drawn from a transnational flow of cultural symbols and images. The stylistic selection of these features by various Muslim South Asian groups reflect either a specific architectural sensibility drawn from the homeland, or a more general repertoire of “classical Islamic” motifs based on fictive Orientalist imagery. Indeed, the dome, the arch, and the minaret are today being deployed as shorthands for the Muslim presence, reinforcing a vocabulary understood in the West as representing Islam, and thus representing a specific identity. This outward symbolism has been reinforced by the distinctive orientation of these new mosques toward the qibla, which invariably involves a skewing of the building footprint in relation to nearby structures (fig. 10).

Britain’s first purpose-built mosque was actually built in Woking in 1889 at a time when “exoticized” fads in architecture were being imported to the metropole. Known as the Shah Jehan Mosque, its design was also representative of an increasing infatuation with the mystique of the Orient. Established as a place of worship for students of the Orient in the nearby college, it marked the first signification of a Muslim presence in Britain. Its simple geometric form is styled in Indo-Saracenic fashion, with a central arched portal and two smaller flanking doorways (fig. 11). The use of color, surface textures, and elements of decoration provide a sense of rich detail. And its four green chhatri (cupolas on white-columned turrets) representing miniature minarets, its parapet lined with distinct motifs, and a large green central dome give a further distinct identity.

Following World War II, however, the importation of Oriental exoticism was replaced by the importation of transnational culture by postcolonial peoples themselves. As part of this movement, the East London mosque was established by Bangladeshis of the Deobandi tradition in 1965.
A contribution from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia covered more than half the £2,000,000 total cost of building the new center. According to Eade, the mosque established social relations with Muslim youth groups such as the Muslim Youth Organization, and international missionary organizations such as the Da’wat ul-Islam and Tablighi Jama’at. These solidarities gave the mosque a range of cosmopolitan connections that had a profound influence on its architectural style (Fig. 12). Indeed, its minaret resembles that of the holy Ka’aba in Mecca, and such other features as its dome, pointed arches and windows, and high portal may also be attributed to Middle Eastern architectural antecedents.

Despite the use of vernacular brick on its facades, these distinctive “Islamic” features also make claims on the public space. And its claims are not just visual, but audible, since the broadcast of azan (or call to prayers) has sparked controversy over “noise pollution.” However, such controversies have clearly been motivated by cultural exclusivism; among other things, they have highlighted challenges to other symbols, such as the ringing of church bells, as constructed representations of indigenous culture.

By the 1990s, Muslims had made substantial inroads into the political arena, and had managed to establish better negotiating positions for their communities. This led to, among other things, new trends in mosque design. One interesting example is the Dar ul Uloom Islamia Mosque in Small Heath, Birmingham, which was established by a Pakistani Barelvi group to provide space for worship, education, youth training, a day center for the elderly, and an employment advisory center. Gale has shown that from its inception, the city council took a leadership role in co-opting this scheme. Indeed, the city council decided to accord the building prominence and visibility, locating it at the corner of a major roundabout on the Small Heath bypass (Fig. 13). In a further gesture of good will, the city council subsidized two-thirds of the cost of this site, in return for an understanding that the Muslim community would replace the 35 rundown council houses there with a landmark structure.

According to Gale, opposition by neighboring residents had little effect on the planning for, or design of, this structure. However, the mosque’s stylistic expression is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, the building has all the usual “Islamic” architectural imagery, even if it is difficult to trace their referents. But these reductionist, albeit imagined signifiers, are combined with local forms and materials to create a stylistic hybridity. In particular, the fusion of brickwork and slate roofing with an eclectic array of windows, domes, and a minaret represents what Gale and Naylor have called “stylistic domestication” — an aesthetic form that is not reducible to any particular tradition.

Historically, the urban relationship between the mosque and the community has been one of physical as well as spiritual proximity. In an attempt to re-create this close interactive relationship, one Muslim group in London, the Dawoodi Bohras, fought for a plot of land large enough to accommo-
date their community and mosque. The Dawoodi Bohras are a small close-knit community belonging to a Shi’ite sect whose heartland lies in Gujarat. Initially, they carried out their religious and cultural activities in a converted Jewish Youth Club in Boston Manor, which they named Mohammedi Park. However, the Bohra presence triggered a series of racist protests against noise and parking during religious celebrations. And in a bid to resolve the dispute, the local authority offered to buy the site in Boston Manor in exchange for a more “appropriate” location. Eventually, the Bohras chose a derelict industrial site in Northolt, where they proposed to build a center for religious, educational and social functions, as well as number of houses. Despite further opposition, the scheme was finally completed in the late 1990s and renamed Mohammedi Park (fig. 14).

Situated in a quiet industrial zone, the complex is gated to distinguish its boundaries. Two rows of terrace houses for families and members of the community line the edges of the site, constructed in a vernacular style, each with a small back yard. But the internal space of the block is arranged around a large central square which provides the setting for the mosque-cum-community center. The mosque building takes a more avant-garde design, exploring aspects of modern technology, materials, and abstraction as a means of reinterpreting various aesthetic themes. Overall, the mosque still communicates its function through reinterpretations of “Islamic” imagery and symbolism, but it also employs subtle abstraction to arrive at an innovative expression. The completion of this project was based on a vigorous fundraising campaign among Bohras across Britain. It is through such group initiatives that the spaces of industrial zones are being regenerated and transformed into places for a particular Muslim community.

THE HIGH STREET

A common morphological feature of all British towns and cities is the High Street, a major commercial thoroughfare connecting outlying neighborhoods to the city center. For the first Muslim South Asians settlers, the High Street was an important arena for preserving social ties, and for meeting and economic exchange. Indeed, the first South Asian-owned businesses on such streets were cafes — small shops run by members of the biradari that served traditional cuisine. The early Muslim settlers were also concerned about being able to conform to dietary laws governing the preparation of meat, and this soon led to the development of grocer-cum-butcher shops selling halal products. Gradually, the major thoroughfares bisecting Muslim South Asian neighborhoods saw the displacement of traditional British High Street shops with South Asian-owned businesses, a process Loukaitou-Sideris has termed “ethnic gentrification.” Dahya has studied the initial stages of Manningham Lane’s “ethnic gentrification” in Bradford:

In 1959 the only Pakistani-owned economic concerns were 2 grocery/butchery businesses and 3 cafes. By 1966, the number of Pakistani concerns had grown to 133, which included 51 grocers/butchers and 16 cafes. In 1970, there were over 260 immigrant-owned and -operated businesses, all of which were located in the areas of immigrant settlement. The number of food businesses, which includes 11 wholesale premises, 1 canning factory, 112 grocery and butchery businesses, 25 cafes, 15 private clubs, and 2 confectioners and bakers.

For the most part, these small businesses were run by family and kinship networks that catered to all aspects of Muslim and South Asian everyday life. Indeed, the transformation of the High Street created a vital and exciting focus of commercial and cultural life, representing both a Muslim and South Asian identity. Generally speaking, the services that emerged were of three types: local enterprises catering to specifically Muslim or South Asian traditions; businesses that served the wider South Asian population; and businesses that helped South Asians interact with mainstream British society. The creation of a Muslim South Asian commercial habitus — a distinctive service industry based on a distinctive clientele — has gradually transformed the character of these streets.

Typical is the transformation of Coventry Road in Birmingham. An archival photograph taken before large-scale migration in 1968, reveals the ordered relationship between the shop and street, and between private and public domains (fig. 15). The shopfronts also exhibit repetitive conventional features and motifs reflecting the uniformity of the Victorian era. When compared to a recent photograph, the shops on Coventry Road display a different sense of place and identity (fig. 16). Indeed, major South Asian High Streets tend to be teeming with people buying and selling their goods in the public space, and where elaborate window displays and tem-
porary stalls compete with semi-permanent shopfront extensions (Fig. 17). Signs and notices are in Urdu, Hindi and Gujarati, while colorful displays of saris and fabric shops, jewelers, and “bhaija houses” jostle with grocers selling tropical vegetables and exotic spices, bakeries, and shops selling Asian sweets. Meanwhile, interspersed among the accountants, income-tax consultants, importers and exporters, immigration and advisory bureaus, driving schools, insurance firms, real estate and travel agencies, are South Asian community organizations which act as community mediators.

For the most part, the buildings in such areas still proclaim their Victorian and Edwardian origins, but the ambience of the street is distinctly different from non-Asian areas, both visually and audibly. This suggests that the changing character of these commercial areas is the result of spatial and functional, rather than morphological, transformation. The existence of various shops for Muslims, and South Asians more generally, maintain the identity of these groups and meet the community’s daily needs. But in the process of transformation, Muslim South Asians have established a secondary economic base in the city, successfully converting rundown buildings into marketable property, and so contributing to the overall urban regeneration of these areas.

In many British cities, the recent construction of a “Disneyfied” South Asian identity has also become a major aspect of efforts to create tourist enclaves. Thus, in seeking to produce a “city image” in the global marketplace, local authorities may market “cultural differentiation.” But in connecting to many of these neighborhoods, ties stress consumption rather than production.

For example, Birmingham’s Ladypool Road is today being promoted as the heart of the “Balti Triangle” — an exotic landscape of difference. On the city council’s tourist website, the “Balti Triangle” boasts fifty “Balti houses” offering a distinct Pakistani and Kashmiri cuisine, as well as shops selling everything “exotic” from colorful saris to Balti cooking pots. As part of this effort, substantial funding has also been allocated to the enhancement and “theming” of the streetscape to promote the area’s South Asian image. Part of this place-making strategy has been to commission PRASADA (Practice, Research and Advancement in South Asian Art and Architecture) at De Montfort University, Leicester, to design the street furniture — lamps, benches, rubbish bins, bollards, etc. — to reproduce an essentialized “South Asian” aesthetic.

The result of this work has been a project based on the “repackaging of difference,” structured by commercial interest and the need to present an attractive South Asian ambience. In the process of representing these areas as “exotic landscapes” of attraction, the council has wittingly opened these neighborhoods to a larger audience.82

OTHER SPACES

Several other spaces of Muslim South Asian habitus deserve brief mention to demonstrate the multiple and contingent forms of Muslim South Asian solidarities and their spatial occupation in British cities.

In the previous examples of mosques, it was shown how they often performed community as well as educational functions. In Birmingham, the Clifton Road Mosque follows this precedent. It occupies a large site in Sparkhill, with a complex consisting of a large hall for prayers and cultural activities, a small freestanding prayer hall conforming to the qibla direction, and a large school. The Sayeda Zainab School offers private education to Muslim students and youth training, alongside Arabic and Qur’anic classes. Although the school building is constructed in vernacular brickwork, its arched lintels frame standard windows, making subtle reference to the building’s “Islamic” identity (Fig. 18).

Besides private Muslim schools, there are also a small number of grant-maintained “Islamic” schools, such as the Islamia School in London, which follows the British curriculum and is subject to government inspection.
Political and religious movements also create educational and political spaces. Most of these solidarities have strong transnational links that serve a number of purposes: to help secure global sources of funding for community institutions; to exercise a degree of political control over various groups; and to exchange information with other Islamic theological and educational institutions. The Tablighi Jama’at of the Deobandi tradition has a Center in Dewsbury known as Dar ul Ulum (House of Knowledge). Another of its educational centers is located in Bury, Lancashire. This organization serves as a center for Islamic learning and missionary activity. The U.K. Islamic Mission has a more prominent political role. Its followers belong to a group called the Jama’at al-Islami, which has its own college and research center, the Islamic Foundation, in Leicester. Administrative offices for many of these movements tend to be dispersed nationwide. For example, the philanthropic institution Islamic Relief has its headquarters in Birmingham. Islamic Relief plays a prominent role in the provision of clothes, food and medicine to Muslims in need worldwide, and occupies a large warehouse in an industrial zone close to the city center.

Finally, it is also important to consider the rituals and practices of burial which occur among the Muslim South-Asian population in Britain. According to religious texts, Muslims should be buried as soon as possible after death. A series of rites, such as the cleansing and preparation of the body and ritual prayer, must take place before burial. Thus, funerary services create a religious space either within the mosque or specialized offices.

Space is also created in cemeteries. In the case of Birmingham, the city council has allocated space in Handsworth Cemetery where Muslims may lease land for graves. Prayers are usually undertaken close to the grave. The religious texts also indicate that the body should face Mecca, thus the graves have a distinct orientation that distinguishes them from their non-Muslim counterparts. The use of Qur’anic scriptures on the tombstones also indicates Muslim identity.

This article has argued that Islam, as a global cultural paradigm, is sufficiently mobile to adapt to contemporary conditions of “displacement” experienced by Muslim South Asians in Britain. Islam has been able to culturally reproduce itself through the construction of new social relations and everyday practices. Indeed, Muslim South Asians have reterritorialized substantial spaces within British neighborhoods — homes, mosques, the High Street, and other spaces.

As part of the place-making process, these new forms of spatialized social relations and practices have been translated into a distinctly Muslim identity constructed in inherently contested contexts. This does not mean that Muslim identity is monolithic. Rather, identity has taken on multiple forms contingent on finer divisions within the Muslim community, local conditions, and regimes of power. Indeed, in Britain, Muslim identity has partly been constructed as a means of resisting the ideological framework of multiculturalism, which attempts to homogenize cultural difference.

In their representation of Muslim identity, South Asians have drawn inspiration from transnational imaginings in which cultural flows of “Islamic” idiom and symbolism have been reemployed as markers of Muslim presence. And the places they have created are the result of the ongoing dialogue between the cultural norms of the Muslim community and British built form. In whichever ways places have been made, Muslims have ensured that, as a community, their needs are being met. This extensive degree of self-sufficiency has been a way of re-creating a place for themselves, on their own terms.

In this new place, by their own actions and decisions, Muslims are setting new precedents, as they project an agency of their own design, reshaping parts of the city into novel and heterogeneous communities.
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