RIZWAN MAWANI

BEYOND THE MOSQUE

DIVERSE SPACES OF MUSLIM WORSHIP

WORLD OF ISLAM

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Diverse Spaces of Muslim Worship

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Dedicated to the most resilient
person I know:
my mother

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things.

(Lit is such a Light) in houses, which Allah hath permitted to be raised to honour; for the celebration, in them, of His name: In them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, (again and again).

The Holy Qur'an 24:35–36

If light is in your heart, you will find your way home.

Jalal al-Din Rumi,
13th-century mystic and poet

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Introduction

Worship has long served communities of the faithful as a means of communication with the Divine. Whether in the form of liturgy, or devotional acts, for many it remains an indispensable facet of day-to-day life. However, in a world increasingly influenced by consumerism and individualism, the concept of worship – with its veneration of an impalpable deity – can often seem far removed from our lived realities. Similarly, while spaces of worship form integral parts of our landscapes, we seldom engage in the significance of their presence. More often than not they have become homogenized into structures synonymous with particular faiths; be it Christianity and the church, Judaism and the synagogue, or Islam and the mosque.

In spite of this, the diversity within faith communities themselves continues to challenge our preconceptions of how and where worship takes place. Just as the Coptic Christian community in Cairo have their own trajectories of piety, influenced in notable ways by their surroundings, so too do their co-religionists in Brazil who make up the world's largest Roman Catholic population. In both cases, their history

and experience of being Egyptian or Brazilian, speaking Arabic or Portuguese, or living in Mediterranean Africa or South America shape their very experience of being human, let alone Christian.

This is similarly reflected in the Hinduism of the West Indies (the leading religion amongst Indo-Caribbeans) and that of Bali, Indonesia. Further accentuating the diversity of each culture is the majoritarian context of one and the minoritarian context of the other. While one case consists of transplanted migrant communities that have found ways for their traditions to consciously speak through an adopted culture, the other exists as a community on an island surrounded by an archipelago of the largest Muslim population in the world. Given this evident diversity within religions, it is only to be expected that Islam – one of today's major world religions, with over 1.5 billion adherents – is no exception.

Muslims form a global community (*umma*) united by a common belief and value system as decreed by God. Essential to this system is the recognition of the Qur'an as God's final message to mankind revealed through His Prophet, Muhammad (ca. 571–632), via the archangel Gabriel. The vast differences in how Islam takes form arise because of the ways in which the Qur'anic text is interpreted by communities and cultures, each with their own trajectories of history, experience and understanding.

Just as there is no single interpretation of Islam, the spaces and rituals that accommodate

Muslim communities across the globe also have no set form. While the mosque has come to predominate over our architectural assumptions and is often considered as *the* place of worship for Muslims, a survey of where ritual takes place – as is done here on my journey through the Muslim world and its sites of piety – demonstrates that there are alternative venues in which Muslims pray. After more than 1,400 years of Muslim history and development, it should come as no surprise that not only do spaces of worship beyond the mosque exist, but they can be found in all corners of the Muslim world. Placing a particular emphasis on ritual practice and space, this book focuses on the variety of expressions of worship that Islam has evoked.

Today, and throughout history, Muslims are invoking established touchstones. Many are cleaving to their own traditions under the threat of homogenization and the attempt to create a 'global Muslim identity'. Others are choosing architectural symbols, such as the dome and minaret, not only in solidarity with other Muslims, but because it is perceived as the 'most Islamic' option, even though these elements may not be indigenous to their own environments. Stories of the first Muslim settlers in Europe and the Americas are often associated with the building of the first mosque or other communal spaces. The ideas of 'first spaces' are also preserved in the memories of migrant communities. Whatever region in the world they may be in, whether it be rural Indonesia or urban Paris, congregations and communities

continue to find ways to interpret what Islam means to them and to express those ideals in the forms of the structures they pray in.

These range from the *imambara*s and *husayniyya*s of Twelver, or Ithna'ashari, Shi'i Muslims (the largest community of Shi'i Muslims, who number in the hundreds of millions), to the *khanaqah*s, *zawiya*s and *tekke*s of more mystically minded Muslims who are usually categorized under the broader umbrella of Sufism. Muslim sites of worship also include the shrine, which not only memorializes sacred figures and relics across the Muslim world, but speaks to the intimate and personal relationships that many Muslims have with religious space. There are countless other spaces that have come, in time, to host the varieties of Muslim devotion and practice, demonstrating how multiple traditions of piety coexist amongst Muslims.

However, while examining spaces of worship serves as a useful avenue for understanding elements of Muslim practice, by no means does it tell us everything about Muslim identities, which cannot be simply reduced to religious convictions or beliefs. While religious beliefs are certainly important for many, we need to be aware that Muslims similarly relate to their regional cultures or their positions in society; for Islam has many voices – and equally as many faces.

Drawing upon first-hand accounts from my own journey to the Muslim world – and primary and secondary scholarship when necessary – this book offers an anthropological window into

Muslim piety in the early 21st century. In doing so, it is hoped that discussions concerning multiplicity in Muslim space and ritual, and Islam more widely, become more nuanced and more inclusive.

We will begin by looking at three very different approaches to the *masjid*, or mosque. From the earliest historical experiences of Muslims before the establishment of formal institutions, when sites and rituals were still in a state of flux in the Arabian Peninsula and elsewhere, we will explore the emergence of ritual and space. Understanding the *masjid* as the pre-eminent, yet not unique, space used by the earliest Muslims, from its modest beginnings as an adjunct to the house of the Prophet Muhammad to its most elaborate manifestations today, will follow. As we broaden the Muslim religious landscape by considering spaces beyond the *masjid*, diverse sites of piety such as the *husayniyya, jamatkhana, khanaqah,* and *zawiya* come into view. By discovering how Muslim communities – Sunni, Shi'i, mystical or those that identify in other ways – express their piety in different spaces through shared rituals, we can develop a map of the many divergencies, and commonalities, among spaces and ritual practice in the Muslim world. Is there something we can label as representative of 'Islam' from the perspective of space and ritual practice? Or can we consider a multiplicity of Islamic practices that speak to regional cultures, gender, geography and climate?

Chapter 1

Mosques and their Architectures

Before exploring devotional spaces around the Muslim world – the foundation for this book – I had subscribed to the vague notion that the vast majority of *masjid*s, or mosques, follow a set form. This idea was further reinforced by books on Islamic architecture that tend to feature a certain style of classical building. While there are those mosques that have used artistic licence, stretching one feature, amplifying another or symbolically representing a motif in a particular way, these seemed to be simply variations of a general architectural rule: mosques have domes and minarets. These features not only identify the mosque to those seeking one, but provide a means by which Muslims announce themselves to the broader world. It was not until I began to travel, explore and pray within countless *masjid*s around the world, that I realized how much local culture, politics, and interpretations of history influence the shaping of a mosque and its architecture.

Mosques and their Environment

While the primary function of a mosque is to welcome the faithful for religious practice, the mosque can also encompass a space or complex

Figure 1. Badshahi Mosque, Lahore, Pakistan
Situated in the capital city of Pakistan's Punjab province, the Badshahi Mosque was built under Mughal rule in 1671. Following the Sikh Empire's capture of Lahore in 1799, the mosque became a military garrison. It continued to function as such during the British Raj until the mid-19th century when the Badshahi Mosque Authority was established to restore the site as a place of worship.

where other structures serve the community in different ways. For example, it is not uncommon to find schools, soup kitchens or even shops within a *masjid*'s complex, encapsulating the larger ethical universe which Islam espouses. While schools provide education, a sentiment echoed in the well-known tradition of the Prophet: 'Seek knowledge, even as far as China', soup kitchens can offer basic necessities for the impoverished. Thus, the mosque is not just an architectural structure, but rather a multidimensional space that can

Figure 2. Great Mosque of Tuban, East Java , Indonesia

This grandiose mosque is located in East Java, an Indonesian province known for its volcanic peaks. With six minarets and three large domes, the mosque boasts a spectacular array of eye-catching colours that proclaim its presence in the scenic town of Tuban.

function in various ways – be they religious, political, or social.

Each mosque can be read as an articulation of a community's identity, whether minority or majority, and is a product of the dialogue between the local and the global. In fact, the architectures of Muslim communities overall are the result of a set of factors ranging from technological know-how, geographic locality, landscape and materials, and economics, to interpretations of the faith. It is at this interface that a mosque takes shape.

In every culture that has embraced Islam on a significant scale, one of three aesthetics emerged victorious with reference to religious architecture. In some cases, the architectural sensibilities of the dominant culture – not necessarily Arab – proudly impressed themselves upon the new soil. This is the case with the Uighur Muslims of China and their Central Asian heritage that influences the form of the mosque. In other circumstances, a style which paid homage to the traditions before Islam's arrival triumphed. In this case, the building of an existing dominant religious space might be adopted and slightly altered to reflect the realities of worship, such being the case with the Chinese Hui whose religious architecture is rooted in a Confucian-inspired culture. In the third scenario, a hybrid design developed, incorporating elements of both cultures and worldviews. This is true, for example, of Ottoman Turkey, which incorporated Byzantine and Arabo-Persian elements into its religious architecture.

Taking three examples from my travels, it will become clear just how much the mosque is influenced by the environment and culture in which it is situated, as it is by the conversations from which it emerges. We will see the legacy of a master architect and his patronage by the Ottomans, which paved a new path for Muslim architecture, thousands of miles away from the 'heartland' of Islam; how Hui and Uighur Muslims in China assert their identities through the incorporation of different influences in their mosques; and the ways in which architecture can bring communities together, as in the grand mud structures of Mali's Sub-Saharan plains.

Sinan and Ottoman Mosques

In modern-day Turkey lies the legacy of the master engineer and architect known as Mimar Sinan, 'Sinan the Architect', who lived during the rule of one of the largest empires in world history, the Ottoman Empire (1299–1924). Born of Armenian and Greek ancestry around 1489, the celebrated son of a stonemason belonged to an Orthodox Christian family at the edge of the empire, which, at its height, controlled lands stretching from Central and Eastern Europe to North Africa and parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Sinan converted to Islam upon his conscription to Ottoman service in the capital, Constantinople (Istanbul). At the age of 50, he was appointed royal architect – a position he would keep for the remaining 48 years of his life – where he was notably responsible for defining the scope of