



The Living Islam Festival

An Example of a British Muslim Community?

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Abstract

Every few years, since 2003, the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) has organised a four day festival to enable British Muslims to come together to socialise, worship, and learn. Around five thousand Muslims attend each year. The *Living Islam* festival provided an opportunity to study British Muslims in a unique setting. Community studies have explored different settings that enable the construction of communities. There has been a more recent move away from the traditional focus on the localised community, to an understanding that communities can be formed through shared interests and common attachments outside of a local context. *Living Islam* was a valuable research site for an exploration of the coming together of Muslims through their shared interests and attachments.

Participant observation was utilised to produce qualitative data that explored community construction and community relations at *Living Islam*. This study explores this theme through an examination of various aspects of the festival, including: the creation of a *halal* setting, prayer, and retail and charitable experiences. Through a focus on these topics, this work explores how a temporary festival setting can provide the impetus for the creation of a British Muslim community, whilst co-existing with other community constructions. The research highlights that there are unique sites that can act as catalysts for the construction of British Muslims communities. Moreover, this study gives an insight in to an under-researched area; the public residential Muslim festival in Britain.

Key Words: Islam in Britain, Participant Observation, Islamic Festival, Communities, British Muslim communities, Community of Interest.

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Introduction



Figure 1: *Living Islam* site map. Reproduced from the *Living Islam* Event Guide, 2011.

On the 28th-31st of July 2011 the *Living Islam* residential festival took place at the Lincolnshire Showground, attended by approximately five thousand Muslims. *Living Islam* is an initiative of the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) which takes place every few years (2003; 2005; 2008; 2011). The two hundred acre Showground provided a vast setting for the amalgamation of lectures, workshops, sporting activities, craft-making, prayer and entertainment that took place.

The ISB was established in 1990 to respond to the needs of Britain's growing Muslim population (Ahsan, 1994, p. 341). The aims of the ISB are as follows:

“...providing a vehicle to people committed to the faith to bring together their knowledge, skills and efforts for the benefit of one another and British society as a whole, through the promotion of Islam and Islamic values.” (ISB; Living Islam. *About Us*. Available at: <http://www.livingislam.org.uk/about-us.html> [Accessed 11 July 2011]).

“To organise, educate and enhance the development of British Muslim communities” (ISB. *The Organisation*. Available at: <http://www.isb.org.uk/pages06/organisation.asp> [Accessed 13 July 2011])

“To encourage positive contribution to British society and the promotion of social justice.” (ISB. *The Organisation*. Available at: <http://www.isb.org.uk/pages06/organisation.asp> [Accessed 13 July 2011]).

Gilliat-Ray (2010) notes that the ISB was formed by the collective experiences of activists who wanted to work across all the different schools of Islamic thought in Britain (p. 103).

Aware that too many separate and independent organisations are a source of division and disunity, the ISB aspires to bring Muslim groups and organisations together (Ahsan, 1994, p. 349). *Living Islam*, as one of the ISB’s key events, aspires to provide an arena for Muslims of different backgrounds to come together for their shared faith. However, I shall interrogate this claim later in this work: that is, whether *Living Islam* is really open to all Muslims.

Moreover, the background to the ISB has been contested. Whilst it has been suggested that there are links to the Jama’at-I Islami and Mawdudi (See Gilliat-Ray, 2010), Geaves (1996) suggests that at a formal level the Jama’at-I Islami does not officially exist in Britain, this questions whether the ISB is really embedded within the principles of the Jama’at-I Islami. This study does not aim to examine the Jama’at-I Islami in depth; however it has been highlighted here to show that there have been conflicting ideas about the origin of the ISB.

The aim of this research is to explore how notions of community formation and community relations were expressed at the festival. Through an exploration of theoretical literature on communities, which supplements the main participant observation study, the ways that

communities can form and co-exist are considered. The primary objective is to question whether *Living Islam* can be considered to be a community, and consequently whether it is an example of a British Muslim community. A further objective is to provide an insight into a space that is largely invisible in current literature; that of an Islamic residential festival in Britain.

Community studies have been developing considerably, with the focus shifting from the localised context, the 'territorial community', to an understanding that communities may be formed through shared interests (Allan and Crow, 1994). Allan and Crow observe that:

"The symbolic boundaries of community relate to membership categories in which geographical presence may be a necessary but is usually not a sufficient condition for an individual's inclusion." (xv).

Consequently, this provided the impetus to consider how *Living Islam* could become a community. The festival temporarily bound its attendees together geographically, but significantly it provided the setting for the creation of an 'interest community' (Wilmott, 1986).

The terminology relating to British Muslims can be problematic. The 'British Muslim community' label can be awkward for various reasons. Firstly, Muslims may associate themselves with alternative communities such as: Pakistani community or Asian community (see Jacobson 1998). Alternatively, Sardar suggests that many Muslims have a strong dislike for "ethnic" labels (1996, Cited in Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p. 116) which Gilliat-Ray (2010) asserts is associated with the racially inclusive ethos of Islam (p. 116). It is apparent that there are differing views about how Muslims categorise themselves. Whilst Jacobson has suggested that Muslims may align themselves with their ethnicity, Gilliat-Ray shows that the Muslim

label is the one to which Muslims most closely relate (2010, p. 116). Consequently, labelling communities can be difficult because it can be subjective to each individual.

Secondly, there are significant diversities that exist within the British Muslim population (See Ansari, 2002), which consequently means that large scale generalisations cannot be made. However, this study explores how it is at times possible to speak of a singular British Muslim community. Gilliat-Ray (2010) has stressed that it can be meaningful to speak of Muslims in Britain as a distinctive social group, due to their generally shared set of core religious beliefs (p. xii). Thus, through core shared values Muslims are able to associate themselves with a broad British Muslim community. This study will consider references made to a wider Muslim community, outside of Living Islam, that suggests that there are both multiple Muslim communities and a singular broad British Muslim community, that are able to co-exist.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. Firstly, the literature review examines theoretical and ethnographical studies of communities, as well as briefly considering literature related to festivals. As literature on public residential Islamic festivals in Britain is virtually non-existent, there will be the consideration of literature on other types of festivals. This will allow for an understanding to be developed, that shows how a festival can be linked to notions of 'community'.

The focus will then be on the methodology of this study. The methodology will consider the importance of participant observation for this qualitative study, before assessing specific aspects of the research process. The ethics of the research will also be considered, and a reflexive approach will be embraced. The analytical techniques for this research will then be discussed.

Four chapters then follow which discuss various aspects of *Living Islam* that reflect community relations. Chapter one is an introduction to the relationship between *Living Islam* and 'community'. This chapter establishes an understanding of the setting and the attendees to situate the further three chapters.

The second chapter examines whether *Living Islam* could be considered to be a *halal* festival and the implications of this for Muslims. There is an exploration of *halal* food and the *hijab* to examine this theme, as well as a consideration of how some individuals sought an Islamization of the site.

Chapter three assesses the congregational Friday prayer, and the Outdoor Prayer Arena through a spatial analysis. The chapter explores how the Outdoor Prayer Arena could become 'symbolically full' due to the events that took place within it, and how this impacts on the attendees.

Finally, the fourth chapter considers the Bazaar and its effect on the community at *Living Islam* through a retail geographical analysis. There will be the examination of how buying and selling can be symbolic in developing community cohesion. Emphasis is also placed on charities to indicate how they might highlight alternative communities, and a link to wider society. From here the study shall be drawn to a close with a concluding assessment.

Literature Review

This study aims to produce an innovative ethnographic examination of the *Living Islam* festival, with a specific focus on community relations. Thus, as the key objective is to examine notions of 'community' at the festival, focus is primarily upon literature which discusses communities. Other studies have not focused specifically on publically accessible residential Islamic festivals, which is one reason why this current study is being carried out. However, this does mean that there is not the capacity to place strong emphasis on literature associated with such festivals. Literature that discusses other types of festivals is briefly highlighted to provide an insight which can be useful for this study on communities.

There is a great deal of literature that covers the general topic of 'British Muslim communities'. A portion of this literature is focussed on Muslim communities in different localities, including: Wales (Gilliat-Ray and Mellor, 2010), Bradford (Bolognani, 2007), Leicester (Vertovec, 1993) and Manchester (Werbner, 1979). There has also been a focus on statistical data establishing the socio-economic dimensions of Muslim communities in Britain. A number of scholars have analysed the 2001 Census to achieve this (Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Choudhury, 2005; Peach, 2005; Hussain, 2010). An alternative emphasis has considered Muslim communities in terms of how they have been perceived of as the 'rest' against the 'West' (Huntington 1998, p. 45), which in recent years has been exemplified by terrorist events. A section of recent literature on Muslim communities has consequently been crisis-driven and been undertaken by think tanks, which has at times emphasised Muslim integration within wider society in line with the politics of multiculturalism and the PREVENT agenda (Cox and Marks, 2003; Cattle, 2002). These different approaches to

Muslim communities highlight just some of the different ways that they have been represented in literature.

Additionally, literature identifies how Muslims are able to feel part of a community. Tarlo (2007) observes that Muslims can feel part of the Muslim community through the wearing of the *hijab*. Whilst, Esposito emphasises how there is the sense of a community when observing the Five Pillars of Islam (1994). McLoughlin (2009) noted that Muslim pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah is perhaps the most emblematic expression of a universal Muslim community (p. 133). Gale (2009) emphasises how urban planning can mediate processes of social boundary construction (p.113). These various studies emphasise the different ways in which Muslims can feel a part of British and global Muslim communities.

There is a significant amount of literature that deals with the theory behind community construction. It is worth noting here that there have been dramatic developments in community studies over the years. Crow's *Community Studies: Fifty Years of Theorization* divides this transformation into three phases. The first phase was embraced during the 1950's and 1960's where 'traditional' community studies dominated (See Rees 1950). Early community studies have been greatly criticised (Allan, 2002), with Mills (1959) arguing that: "the endless "community studies" of the sociologists often read like badly written novels" (p. 358 cited in Crow). Allan and Crowe (1994) suggest that:

"Theories of community have developed in important respects since the time when community studies were rightly criticised for their tendency to be descriptive and atheoretical." (1994 p. xv).

The change in focus of the studies that followed marked the shift from a romanticised and uncritical examination of community whereby community 'means all things to all people'

(Dalley, 1988, p. 48 cited in Allan and Crowe 1994). The 1970s thus saw the focus alter to an emphasis on theorising, with much less focus on empirical research (See Bierstedt, 1977). Following this period, in the 1980s and 1990s, focus was placed on a renewed concern to engage with empirical data (See Cooke, 1989; Dickens, 1988). This current work follows this later approach by embracing empirical social science research whilst also placing emphasis on the theoretical underpinnings of the notion of 'community'.

There have been other important developments in community literature. More recent studies of communities have moved away from previous works that considered a community to be a group of households situated in the same locality and linked to each other by functional interdependencies (Elias, 1974, Cited in Atkinson, 2007, p. 80). Allan and Crow (1994) show that although community is often linked to place, it is not the case that *all* communities are territorial communities. Wilmott (1986) asserts that community ties can be formed between people with common interests or common attachments, such as common ethnic origin, religion, occupation or leisure pursuits (p. 83). Willmott (1986) calls this type of formation an 'interest community'. Warner and Lunt (1941, Cited in Atkinson, 2007) similarly suggest that communities are collections of people sharing certain interests, sentiments and behaviour. Cockburn (2005) highlighted this idea in his study of a children's 'community of interest' that was facilitated around ICTs.

Further literature suggests that individuals can belong to multiple communities at the same time (See Wenger, 1998; Cnaan and Milofsky, 2007). Cnaan and Milofsky (2007) suggest that: "Individuals are simultaneously connected to multiple communities..." (p. 180). Cnaan and Milofsky assert that the importance of the various communities to which individuals belong varies and can change as individual needs change. (p. 180).

There is a portion of community literature focused on what it means for an individual to be a part of a community. Baumann stresses that community is about feeling safe (2001, p.1). Baumann(2001) states that on the street all sorts of dangers are around, individuals have to be alert when they go out, watch whom they are talking to and who talks to them, be on the look-out every minute (2001, p. 1). Whilst in a community individuals can relax, they are safe, there are no dangers looming in dark corners (pp. 1;2). A further work which deals with community as a safe 'haven' is Peck (1998) who asserts that: "Once a group has achieved community, the single most common thing members express is: "I feel safe here"" (p. 67). Similarly, Block (2009) stresses that community is about membership and belonging: "...the experience of being at home in the broadest sense of the phrase." (p. v).

However, a section of literature disputes this romanticised notion of communities. A body of literature observes that 'community' is the ideal but that it does not actually exist. Allan and Crow (1994, p. xi) assert that community is a word that continues to resonate through everyday lives, a totem of how one would like their lives to be, as opposed to the less than perfect reality. Baumann (2001) similarly states that community actually stands for the kind of world which is not available, but which people would dearly wish to inhabit (p. 3).

Anderson's (1983) work, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of Nationalism*, although focussed upon national identity, does highlight community as imagined rather than focussing on social interaction.

Arising from work such as Cohen's *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985) is the idea that community is symbolically constructed. Cohen is a key part of a portion of literature which places emphasis on the symbolic aspects of community; "a system of values, norms and moral codes which provide a sense of identity to its members" (p. 9).

Cohen considers at length the notion of a 'boundary' which he believes marks the beginning and end of a community, which gives members their identity, although these boundaries can be fluid and subjective (p. 12). Scherer (1972) also considers the subjectivity of boundaries, by suggesting that they are:

"...generally confused and blurred distinctions located through a social fog of complex inter-relations and shifting patterns." (p.50).

Thus, although boundaries can mark communities from others, their capacity to be subjective means that they can become vague. However, Jacobson (1998) suggests that:

"...the religious boundaries are, likewise, layered and shifting: sub-groups within the younger generation of Muslims exhibit differing degrees of religious commitment..." (p. 17).

Consequently, although boundaries can be complex, they can divulge important information about a group.

This study aims to provide an insight into a space that is largely invisible in current literature, that of an Islamic residential festival in Britain. Hence, a lack of literature on British Islamic residential festivals means that such literature cannot be considered here. However, included here instead is literature that relates to alternative festivals, to develop the link between festivals and communities. For specific information about *Living Islam* their website was consulted (www.livingislam.org.uk). The Spring Harvest Festival website was also explored, which is a similar residential festival for Christians (www.springharvest.org). The Spring Harvest Festival also emphasised community relations: "The Big Top celebration is a time for thousands of us to join together every night for worship..." (Memralife Group. *Memralife Group*. Available at: <http://www.springharvest.org/memralife-group>. [Accessed

1 August 2011]) Thus, different religious faiths are able to produce their own 'created community'.

The Notting Hill Carnival is useful for an understanding of the community dimensions to festivals. In his discussion of the Notting Hill Carnival Cohen (1985) describes it as 'boundary-marking rituals' (p.53), and suggests that festivals say something about the relation of a group to others and an individual's relationship to their group (p. 54). Cohen describes how individuals, such as mask-makers or musicians, found a sense of ethnic identity for themselves through their activity in the Carnival. He suggests that where previously, as young immigrants, they had felt rootless and unable to identify either with their society of origin or of settlement, they now found psycho-social orientation within the boundaries marked by Carnival. Each was able to define the community for himself using the shared symbolic forms proffered by the Carnival (p. 54). Cohen provides important literature which shows how a festival can play a significant role in an individual's relation to others.

Clarke and Jepson's (2008) case study of a community festival in Derby suggests that a festival can act as a catalyst for the development of community values (p. 7). Similarly, Dunston (1994) saw that festivals provided a forum for a shared purpose, cultural values or traditions. Farber (1983, Cited in Getz, 1991) observed that much could be learned about a community's symbolic and social life from festivals. Thus, festivals can be important arenas for community interaction and integration. This current study takes these ideas further, to examine how a festival can actually create a community, rather than merely bringing individuals together during such an event.

Methodology

Qualitative Research

The method of participant observation that was chosen for this study, and will be detailed below, is a qualitative research approach. There is a great deal of literature which goes into depth about qualitative research (See Mason, 2002; Punch, 2005; May, 2001; Silverman, 1997; Holiday, 2002). Mason observes:

“Through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings that they generate.” (Mason, 2002, p. 1).

This study aims to explore community formation and relations at *Living Islam*, and consequently this warrants an in-depth and detailed study that goes beyond what quantitative data can deduce. It is essential for this research to utilise an approach that is exploratory, fluid and open-ended so that the research generates the data produced, rather than applying an approach that uses *a priori* design strategies, such as quantitative research (Mason, 2002, p. 24).

Participant Observation

Participant observation is often used in conjunction with a variety of other research methods, as part of a broader ethnographic study (Mason, 2002, p. 84). However, due to the time limits of this small-scale project, participant observation was used as the sole data generation method (Mason, 2002, p. 84). Consequently, the study refers to the method

used as participant observation, rather than ethnography, as Mason (2002) shows that ethnography is a broad term that can cover the use of multiple methods. As this study focuses on participant observation as the primary method, rather than in combination with methods such as interviewing, the umbrella term of ethnography was dismissed from this research.

Participant observation refers to methods of generating data which require researchers to immerse themselves in field settings so that they can experience and observe first-hand a range of dimensions of that setting (Mason, 2002, p.84). This research takes an epistemological approach; the understanding that knowledge of the social world can be generated by observing or participating in it (Mason, 2002, p. 85). Dewalt and Dewalt (2001) comment that participant observation involves taking part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture (p. 1). Consequently, this approach allowed for the immersion into the *Living Islam* festival to gain a significant insight into the event.

There are significant advantages to participant observation which will be discussed below that suggested that it was the most appropriate research method for this study compared with other methods. Firstly, it provides a 'way in' to the community that is relatively unobtrusive (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 16). In this study, participant observation allowed for the submersion into the setting amongst thousands of Muslims without having a significant impact on them. Although, my presence didn't go unnoticed as attendees wished me As-

Salaamu Alaikum, my presence was not actively affecting the research site and the experiences of those present.

Furthermore, another significant advantage of the approach is that it enables a researcher to be an 'insider' to the setting (Jorgensen, 1989. p. 55; Mason, 2002. p. 85). Undertaking an approach that involves interviewing would possibly not allow such a significant insight into the field. May suggests that in an interview setting:

"Accounts may be inaccurate for one reason or another...while accounts may be a general reflection of a person's experiences, there might be circumstances or events which surrounded this of which the person is not aware...the only way the researcher can examine these is to be there at the time." (2001, p. 144).

Thus, being a participant observer allows a researcher to witness for themselves what happens in a research setting, rather than being told information second-hand. However, perhaps problematically this means that the researcher becomes the instrument of data collection (Punch, 2006, p. 52). Mason (2002) shows that:

"...however 'objective' you try to be in your records, you are continually making judgements about what to write down...what you have observed, heard and experienced, what you think it means."(p. 77).

Consequently, it was important for this study that there was the understanding that there could not be a completely objective stance. However, this work provides comprehensive examples of observations; and is grounded in theoretical and ethnographical literature to justify the evaluations that are generated.

A further advantage of participant observation is that it enables a researcher to spend a great deal of time in the setting (See May, 2001, p. 153). Through this approach the researcher is able to both actively observe and participate to get a real sense of the festival.

Within this study, time in the field allowed for the understanding and appreciation of differing representations of community interaction, which will be explored through this study. If only one day had been observed, the data produced may have been very limited. Thus, time became a significant factor in the production of rich data, as well as allowing for an in-depth understanding of the 'sense' of the event.

However, there are limits to using participant observation as the only research method. If there hadn't been time restraints on this small-scale project a multiple methods approach would have been carried out (See Mason, 2002; May 2001, p. 96; Henn *et al*, 2006, pp. 18-22). Unstructured interviews with attendees and organisers alongside participant observation would have been utilised. Mason (2002) suggests that multiple methods allow the researcher to analyse in greater depth and breadth which can enhance the quality of the data (p. 33). Thus, future studies may wish to utilise further methods, such as interviewing, to expand the present study. However, participant observation gave a significant insight in to the setting, and was the most appropriate method to use independently for this small scale study.

A disadvantage to participant observation is that the data reflects what a researcher is able to observe and of course there are certain areas and times when a researcher may not be present. In this research, although an omnipresent approach would have been useful, without the aid of a research team, it was impractical. To overcome this problem an initial day of general observations was conducted, of the attendees and setting for instance, to show the areas that the research would focus on. Thus, although I could not be in all places at all times, I was able to establish areas of interest and make sure I was present there.

Research Ethics

Before entering the field, the University guidance on conducting research was consulted, including: *University Health and Safety in Fieldwork Policy and Guidance*, *University Lone Working Policy* and *the Research Ethics Guidebook*.

Ethical concerns that arose surrounded the following questions: Is there the need for ethical approval and does informed consent need to be gained from the participants? Firstly, with regard to ethical approval literature on the topic was consulted (Mason, 2002; Punch, 2005; May, 2001). After consulting this ethical guidance, it was concluded that it was not necessary to gain ethical consent for this study of the festival. I discussed the situation with a supervisor and consulted literature on public events (Adler and Clark, 2010; Davies, 1990). It was concluded that because the festival was a public event, ethical approval was not needed. Consequently, this enabled me to attend as a member of the public as the event was open to all. However, to ensure that the organisers knew of my presence and my research, and so that I did not appear to be conducting covert research, one of my supervisors discussed my study with them by acting as 'gatekeeper' and I gained the 'all clear'. (See Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Gray, 1999 for covert observation).

However, it is often argued, suggests Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) that people must consent to being researched (p. 210). Thus, the next dilemma was whether informed consent was needed from those at the festival. However, after consulting literature on the topic (Henn *et al*, 2006, p. 76; Adler and Clark, 2010, p. 309; Davies, 1999, p. 57) it was decided that it was impractical to gain consent from those attending the festival due to there being five thousand attendees, as well as it being unnecessary as the focus was not on individuals or conducting interviews.

To ensure my own well-being as I was a lone worker I read the guidelines on lone-working that I have suggested previously, as well as other literature on the topic (Hughes and Ferrett, 2011; Stranks,2010), and consequently I implemented my own safety measures. I ensured that I told someone when I was arriving at and leaving the site, as well as having my mobile phone in my handbag so that I could contact a designated person if an emergency arose.

Going into the Field

The field research took place over the four days of the *Living Islam* festival from the 28th to the 31st of July 2011. Participant observation began the moment of entering the Lincolnshire showground and continued until the site was left on the Sunday. Even when physically leaving the site for the evenings, (I was staying in a hotel) I was still actively absorbing information taxi drivers told me about the event and observing the collective activities of other guests who were attending the event and also staying at the hotel .

All areas of the festival were observed (within reason, I did not venture into the male sleeping area as I felt that my gender restricted my access there). There were continual observations throughout the weekend, but specific observations took place as follows: on Thursday: the site, attendees, the welcome addresses and evening entertainment were observed. On Friday: the talks, *jummah* and other prayers, the food court, coffee shop and the Bazaar were studied. On Saturday: there was the study of the talks, Food Court, Bazaar, Beauty Salon and sporting activities.

Observations were recorded by taking detailed notes. The process of taking notes during participant observation is not always straight forward (Emerson *et al*, 2001; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 176; 177). I was very conscious of 'standing out' and thus decided to note down pointers that could be expanded on a little later. I often had to find a secluded area of grass or sit in a cubicle in the female bathroom to make notes discreetly. Similarly, Gilliat-Ray (2010b): "... used the walk along the corridors as an opportunity to make mental fieldnotes..." (p. 422) as she was unable to take notes at the time. On returning to the hotel room in the evenings notes were expanded on and a fieldwork diary written. To supplement notes, literature was gathered from the site, such as: leaflets, flyers and the event guide.

Reflexivity

A field diary was written for reflection on the research process as reflexivity is a very important part of fieldwork. Davies (1999) observes that:

"In doing research...there is an implicit assumption that we are investigating something 'outside' ourselves...on the other hand, we cannot research something with which we have no contact, from which we are completely isolated" (p. 3)

It was thus crucial to consider the impact that the field had on me. Coffey (1999) observes that fieldwork is: "personal, emotional and identity work." (p.1). Before, during, and after attendance at the festival, I was emotionally drawn to the site. Before, I had concerns over my dress: was it appropriate? Would I stand out? Should I wear a headscarf? Whilst at the festival I was at times overwhelmed by being surrounded by five thousand people I did not know. I had never been to a festival of this scale before, let alone attended anything like this alone. When I left the field I reflected on my attendance and was overwhelmed by the

feeling that I had experienced something very special. I did not expect that attending would alter my own views on religion, which it did considerably. Having been brought up as a Christian I had previously been comfortable with my faith, however, on reflection, after observing the integration of thousands of Muslims at *Living Islam* through worship, learning and socialising, I began to consider my own Christian faith.

I was conscious that my role changed over the course of my time at *Living Islam*. Babbie (2007) suggests that observers can play any of several roles (p. 289). Similarly, Jorgensen (1989) asserts that the participant role may be conceptualised on a continuum from a complete outsider to a complete insider. Between these extremes, the researcher is an outsider or insider to a greater or lesser degree (p. 56). I began the research journey as a silent observer, slipping into the background and observing and writing notes on what was going around me. However, this changed as I began to be noticed at *Living Islam*. Some attendees wished me *As-Salaamu Alaikum* which made me aware that I was not an invisible observer. Moreover, I developed relations in the field which transformed my status.

Although being a silent observer allowed me to be aware of my surroundings at all times, there were limits to this. One of these was that I stood out as I was alone, and consequently it was less easy to access all areas by myself. Going for a coffee proved problematic when tables were taken up by groups of people and it was not easy to find somewhere to sit and observe. By day two an acquaintance had arrived at the festival and it marked a transition in my presence at the festival. I could then become a member of one of those groups in the coffee shop. I was now able to sit with a group of ten people; participating but actively being able to observe my surroundings. My status thus changed from silent observer to more of a participant role. Similarly, Bolognani (2007) describes her change in status when she

observed West Yorkshire Pakistanis (p. 285). Her status as an outsider was stripped away as she built rapport with her respondents. In an alternative way my status as a mere observer shifted as I became part of a group.

Before embarking on an in-depth ethnographic assessment of *Living Islam* there had to be a consideration of the implications of my biographical status on access. Questions thus arose regarding the successful (or unsuccessful) access of a white female British Christian. Many researchers have discussed methodological issues with accessing British Muslim communities as an 'outsider' (Bolognani, 2007; Jacobson, 1998; Gilliat-Ray, 2005; Alexander, 2000). I was less concerned with my 'physical access' as it was a public event and I could easily register online and just turn up on site. However, my concerns were with the perceptions of others towards my presence. Gilliat-Ray (2010b) states that:

"My physical entry...was only one dimension of 'getting in'...my body and its demeanour, the surface inscriptions of dress and other visible physical characteristics...to some extent determined other dimensions of my entry into the field..." (p. 420).

Consequently, I decided to assess my features to evaluate what could be done to ensure that I was able to gain entry into the field.

I thought thoroughly about whether or not to cover my head with a headscarf but settled on wearing a scarf around my neck which I could, if I felt it necessary, raise over my head (See Gilliat-Ray, 2010 b. p. 420). My decision not to wear a headscarf revolved around consultations with a Muslim friend. She felt that by wearing one people might assume I was a Muslim, an impression I did not want to convey. I did however focus my attentions on

ensuring that I was wearing modest clothing so that I was respectful of others in the field setting, and so that I could 'fit in' more easily.

After much deliberation, I chose to stay in a hotel rather than camp on site. Of course there were negatives to leaving the field site, such as not being there in to the late evening and not observing what happens at night time. However, I felt that the positives outweighed the negatives of leaving the field setting. The most significant positive was that I was able to have a good night's sleep, essential for observing to the best of my ability. I was informed that the girls were so cold in the female marquee that they couldn't sleep at all (Fieldnotes). The hotel also gave me the space and time to write up notes. By staying on site for the duration of the festival my productivity would have been significantly limited. Other researchers have also left the field (See Bolognani, 2007). Although Bolognani left the field setting for different reasons, her doing so highlighted that there are circumstances when leaving the research setting is practical.

Data Analysis

According to Van Manen (1990):

“Theme analysis” refers to the processes of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (p. 78).

Thematic analysis was conducted on the Fieldnotes to observe the specific themes and categories that appeared. To discover these themes, the most prominent of which were later developed into the chapters within this work, a process of coding was undertaken.

Punch (2005) observes that: “For the analysis directed at discovering regularities in the data,

coding is central.” (p. 199). Thus, the Fieldnotes were analysed by giving each section a corresponding code. For instance, for the chapter that considers whether *Living Islam* is an Islamic festival, there were a variety of codes, for instance: the *hijab*, food, communal eating, Islamization of space, power relationships and gender. The coded work could then be organised into categories that form this work, such as: *halal*, prayer and the Bazaar. It was the most common and most community focussed themes that were examined further for this work

Although ‘Community’ was to be the analytical device before entering the field, it was not until the research had been carried out, that specific areas of interest became apparent.

Due to the open-ended nature of the research, particular areas of focus were not considered until during the field research. It was whilst at the festival that more specific ideas about interest communities and the construction of a British Muslim community were considered. It was the analysis of the Fieldnotes that then revealed the full extent of community relations at *Living Islam*.

Discussion

A significant amount was observed at the *Living Islam* festival. As noted in the methodology section, there were observations of: the general site, attendees, Bazaar, Food Court and coffee shop, talks, prayers, entertainment and Beauty Salon. However, due to the limits of space, events of the most interest to a study of communities have been selected to discuss here.

Chapter One: An introduction to *Living Islam*

The Creation of a Community- it's Code of Conduct and 'Insider' Language

The Code of Conduct that was set out within the *Living Islam* Event Guide, which was handed to everyone on arrival, was striking. It initially seemed that this Code of Conduct was in place for the smooth running of the festival. However, it became apparent that it provided a guide for how the attendees should treat one another and the setting, which revealed much more than was initially anticipated. Two examples from the Code of Conduct are presented here to examine this. When discussing cleanliness, the Event Guide states:

“Please keep in mind the Islamic principles of cleanliness. Ensure you leave the showers, toilets and eating area in a state you would wish to find them” (p. 5).

A further example of the guidelines that the Code of Conduct provided for the attendees was related to sleeping areas. It is asked that attendees:

“Please do not make noise at night...please do not disturb your neighbours...” (p. 5).

These guidelines provided a way that Muslims should express care and respect for each other. Through this mutual care and respect it began to become apparent that there could be the construction of a community. The Code of Conduct was subsequently the catalyst which began my exploration of *Living Islam* as a 'created community'. I suggest that at *Living Islam* there was the creation of a community that came together for shared interests, and in a smaller way because place bound them together. Wilmott (1986) asserts that community ties can be formed between people with common interests or common attachments, such as common ethnic origin, religion, occupation or leisure pursuits (p. 83). Willmott (1986) calls this type of formation an 'interest community'. Thus, primarily, *Living Islam* provided the site for the construction of an interest community. Wilmott (1986) suggests that place community and interest community are not mutually exclusive:

"They can overlap in the sense that although interest communities are often geographically dispersed, they can also exist even in quite small areas." (p. 83)

Thus, 'place' was a secondary source of binding the attendees. The term '*Living Islam* community' was coined to express the extent to which those present came together as a community; a British Muslim community.

Although the aim here is not to conduct a discourse analysis, the use of the term 'neighbours' is highlighted. The use of 'neighbours', adds to a sense of community. By insinuating that attendees were neighbours it transformed them from mere independent festival goers, to having a relationship with one another. Allan and Crow (1994) suggest that community ties can be formed between people with common interests or common attachments (p. 1). At *Living Islam*, community ties were formed through the representation of those present as neighbours who had shared values. This temporary interest community

could thus become an example of a British Muslim community because it brought Muslims together for shared values. It has been suggested earlier in this work that Muslims may align themselves to other identity markers, such as their ethnicity. However, because they were present at an Islamic festival, 'Muslim' is likely to be one marker of their identities and thus they were embraced into the temporary Muslim community.

There were further times when the specific use of language alluded to a sense of community. Reference is made here to the wider 'British Muslim community' which transcends *Living Islam*. Of course, the diversity of the Muslim community means that it cannot simply be reduced to a singular form, however beneath these diversities the core shared values of Muslims allowed for the creation of an Islamic community (See Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p. xii).

The frequent use of 'Brothers and Sisters', during the festival, emphasised the importance of a British Muslim community. During daily talks and the evening entertainment the facilitator would often acknowledge those present as: 'my brothers and sisters' (Fieldnotes). These comments acknowledged their shared values and interests in the Islamic faith and drew them into a British Muslim community.

Moreover, I was frequently referred to as 'sister' by those working at the festival. By being referred to as 'sister' I too was being drawn in to a community. This emphasised that my presence at the festival allowed me to become a part of this created community. Of course I lacked the shared understandings of the attendees because I did not share their faith, however by being physically present I was accepted into the created *Living Islam* community. Thus, as well as being an interest community, *Living Islam* had also become a 'community of attachment' where I was also being included. Wilmott (1986) describes how

this type of community refers to people's spirit of community. Wilmott (1986) believes that it is possible for different types of community to overlap, and I observed that this had taken place at *Living Islam*. These differing representations of communities allowed me to be included within the festival setting.

As-Salaamu Alaikum, Peace be upon you, was another phrase that was repeated often at the festival. By acknowledging each other with *As-Salaamu Alaikum* and the responding phrase *Wa-Alaikum As-Salaam*, and on you be peace, individuals were Islamicizing their language which created a sense of community. Thus, language was an important way in which Muslims could associate themselves with each other.

On one occasion when *As-Salaamu Alaikum* was said to me, the tone of voice and the facial expressions used suggested that I was being evaluated (Fieldnotes). Whereas my acquaintances were greeted with a pleasant tone accompanying *As-Salaamu Alaikum*, my acknowledgement was spoken in more of an inquisitive way. I observed that my appearance may have impacted on how people perceived me, and that perhaps it was apparent that I was not a Muslim. This highlighted how such a phrase can include (or exclude) a person, bringing them into the community or push them away.

There were thus conflicting ideas about how I was being both included and excluded.

Although I was being referred to as 'sister', which included me in the community; I was not being positively addressed with *As-Salaamu Alaikum*. Thus, although at times I felt that I too was a part of the community, at other times I felt that I was easily excluded through others use of language. Reflecting on the difference it is difficult to understand why I would be called a sister but not acknowledged with *As-Salaamu Alaikum*. The difference in how I was acknowledged was possibly associated with power relationships. I was mainly called sister

by those that were working at the site. Perhaps I was called sister because my attendance at the festival might have suggested that I was a Muslim. However, it is also possible that if they were unsure they addressed me in this way anyway to make me feel included. However, those who were wary of acknowledging me with *As-Salaamu Alaikum* were attendees of the festival and maybe felt like I did not belong at the festival because I appeared to be a non-Muslim. This suggested that not only were power relationships in play, but that the *Living Islam* setting primarily provided an area for the creation of a British Muslim community through shared interests, whilst also allowing for a 'community of attachment', in which I was included. This 'community of attachment' bound attendees together because of a 'spirit of community' (See Wilmott, 1986). Thus, the festival created a community setting that was not wholly linked through religion, but also the link was drawn through just 'being there'.

The Community Members

The attendees are termed the community members here to represent how they became part of a community. It was apparent that the attendees were from a more middle-class background. This conclusion was reached because due to the costs involved with attending the festival; the ticket price (between £62 and £75 depending on booking time), travelling and food costs, it would most probably have excluded Muslims from a lower economic background. Although the ISB aims to bring Muslims together (See ISB website: ISB. *The Organisation*. Available at: <http://www.isb.org.uk/pages06/organisation.asp>. Accessed: 13 July 2011), it perhaps has not achieved this aspiration as *Living Islam* has been more accessible to the middle class.

Moreover, there was quite a lot of gender interaction (Fieldnotes), which could be seen to be unusual. There were divided sleeping areas for men and women, unless part of a family, and the Prayer Arena was separated by a mass of land. However, other than this, there was quite informal gender interaction. Men and women intermingled at the festival, actively talking to each other. On the third day in the Big Top the host said that everyone should give the person sitting to their left a massage (Fieldnotes). This showed that gender interaction was not being actively discouraged.

Those present at the festival came from a variety of backgrounds. There were various different ethnicities, ranging from Pakistanis, Bengalis, Arab to African (Fieldnotes). The place of residence of the attendees varied too from: Scotland, Manchester, Bradford, Birmingham, Wales, and Ireland to abroad (Fieldnotes). These differences marked the diversities of the attendees.

The Community Setting



Figure 2: The camping facilities. Image from Living Islam Website (www.livingislam.org.uk), 2005.

Lincolnshire Showground provided the setting for the festival. There were particular features of this large site which added to the sense of a community. Tents had been set up in close proximity to others. No tent was on its own patch of grass even when there was an available area of land. Having the tents placed closely together seemed to suggest a neighbourhood setting. Moreover, shared sleeping accommodation for females, and likewise for males, showed the communal nature of *Living Islam*. I was informed that the women's marquee was sociable, and that those who slept there had made friends. This friendship extended outside of the sleeping area, with the women meeting up throughout the day (Fieldnotes).

There had been the utilisation of permanent, and make-shift, buildings on the site. Permanent buildings were those which housed the Bazaar, Indoor Prayer Hall and the men's sleeping area. However, the Food Court, Big Top, and lecture Marquees were all temporary

constructs. Furthermore, land had been designated to be the Sports field, for horse riding and the Outdoor Prayer Arena. Through using temporary marquees to supplement the permanent buildings, all areas of the Showground were utilised to create a kind of village. There was a real sense of a neighbourhood setting that was created with the implementation of food areas, cafes and sleeping areas.

The Hub of the Community – the Coffee Shop

The coffee shop provided an area for socialising as well as having a more functional purpose, which allowed it to become a central area of the community. Within the Coffee Shop groups of women were gossiping, men were waiting for their families, and youths were convening to talk about their day. The coffee shop provided an area where, like the local pub for non-Muslims, locals could gather together. There were live musical performances which encouraged many to attend the coffee shop and gather together. Considering the functional purpose of the coffee shop, there were sockets for laptops and mobile phones to be charged. This area became very functional for communication with the 'outside world'. Redfield (1971) saw that the unity of community relied on blocking the channels of communication with the rest of the world. *Living Islam* seemed to be an idealised community, which will be discussed further later in this work (See Baumann, 2001; Allan and Crow, 1994), however access to phones and computers revealed glimpses of the 'outside world'. Without wishing to romanticise community life, it did appear to be an ideal community setting. Access to the 'outside world' however, provided an insight into reality and showed that 'community' can be an idealistic notion.

Lasting Relationships

The festival allowed relationships to develop that could out-live the festival period. Thus, although there was a created community at *Living Islam*, community relations also extended beyond the festival. The Event Guide stressed that:

“... we fully hope to inspire you, motivate you and rejuvenate you while you have come away for this event, but with the aim that it helps bring out passion for Islam in your everyday life...” (p. 4).

This emphasised that *Living Islam* was meant to last much longer than four days.

Furthermore, the host of the welcome talk to *Living Islam* stressed that the festival would mark the: “...beginning of the rest of your life.” (Fieldnotes)

It became apparent that the festival was meant to be a catalyst in improving the lives of the attendees. Moreover, the swapping of phone numbers by attendees suggested that although they had only met for a few days, they were keen to meet up again outside of the festival setting (Fieldnotes). Community relations had been formed that were to continue in to the future. Thus, the festival not only provided an arena for the creation of a temporary community, but moreover it allowed for these relations to continue beyond the festival. Consequently, the temporary British Muslim community could transcend the festival setting and continue as a dispersed community who had the shared experiences of *Living Islam* 2011.

Chapter Two: 'A halal festival?'

Baumann (2001) observes that on the street all sorts of dangers arise. Whilst he suggests that in a community individuals are able to relax, feel safe, and furthermore there are no dangers looming in dark corners (pp. 1;2). This chapter examines whether the *Living Islam* festival provided a setting for Muslims to engage in *halal*, permitted, practices that made them feel like they could feel safe and relax within this festival arena. Consequently there is an exploration of whether *Living Islam* enabled attendees to be a part of a community that gave a sense of belonging due to shared practices. The predominant focus will be on food and the *hijab*, headscarf, to examine this issue.

Halal Food



Figure 3: *Halal* food. Photo from the Living Islam Website(www.livingislam.org.uk), *Living Islam*, 2005.

In Jacobson's work (1998), where she assesses the problem of understanding the conditions of the survival and revival of tradition in modern society, she gives an insight into core Muslim perceptions of *halal* food. Jacobson (1998) found that the large majority of those she asked would only eat *halal* meat (p. 103). Jacobson's (1998) study identified that *halal* food was of importance to many Muslims. The scriptural prohibition against eating the meat of animals which have not been slaughtered in the name of Allah is clear:

"Eat not of that over which Allah's name has not been pronounced, for this would be sinful conduct indeed" (6: 121 and 5:3).

The importance of *halal* practices at *Living Islam* is reflected in the complete absence of alcohol from the site and the selling of only *halal* food. Thus, *halal* food, as opposed to that which is *haram*, forbidden, can be seen to be very important to Muslims, and consequently an important aspect of *Living Islam*.

In a previous study conducted by myself into the challenges that face young British Muslims, a respondent stressed the difficulties in accessing *halal* food in their local area:

"It is hard you know to eat *halal* food...Some places just don't have that much on offer...I don't live near a *halal* butcher and only the big supermarkets sell *halal* meat..." (Interviewee: Rohan. Essay Title: 'Based upon interview research, critically evaluate some of the challenges facing British Muslim youth in Britain.')

It is not the aim here to over-stress the inability to access *halal* food outside of such a festival as in some areas there will be places that stock such products (See Gilliat-Ray, 2010b, p. 255). Gilliat-Ray suggests that selected stores of mainstream supermarkets now carry 'ethnic' and *halal* merchandise (Gilliat-Ray, 2010b. p.255). However, the respondent shows that access to *halal* food can be a problem. Significantly, *Living Islam* provides an area

where Muslims can access a whole variety of *halal* products in one easily accessible Food Court. Within the Food Court there were a large variety of different foods to choose from: Curries, kebabs, wraps, hot-dogs, burgers, Turkish and Mediterranean foods (Fieldnotes). All of these were *halal* and thus Muslims had a considerable assortment to select from. One of the attendees stated:

“Here we can access *halal* food all under one roof...my friends and I all chose different foods and then came to sit here together...” (Fieldnotes).

This respondent emphasises that the festival enabled Muslims to make a choice in their food consumption whilst also ensuring them that the food was safe because it was '*halal*'. Block (2009) stresses that being a part of a community is about belonging (p. v). The easy access to *halal* food was one way in which the attendees were able to feel like they belonged within *Living Islam*. If they were to attend a non-Muslim festival they may find it exceptionally difficult to enjoy a range of different foods. Resultantly, this partially enabled the festival to provide an environment that could be termed 'safe' (See Baumann, 2001).

There was the construction of a '*halal* boundary' at Living Islam. In Cohen's (1985) *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, he presents the idea of 'boundaries' which mark communities from one another (1985, p. 12). According to Cohen (1985) there are a multitude of boundaries, which range from the physical, to the racial or linguistic (1985, p. 12). Cohen (1985) observes that boundaries are symbolic and they consequently encapsulate the identity of a community (1985, p. 12). A boundary was created at *Living Islam* that symbolically distinguished the attendees from those outside the Lincoln Showground. Lincoln does not have a significant Muslim population and thus the consumption of *halal* food at the Showground distinguished the attendees from those

outside of the setting. (Islamic Association of Lincoln. *About the Islamic Association of Lincoln*. Available at: <http://www.lincolnmosque.com/about.php>. Accessed: 29 August 2011). Through the eating of *halal* food a physical boundary was created which could be marked by the physical boundaries of the entrance of the Showground. Thus, the attendees were bound to each other through the shared values placed on *halal* food which enjoined them together into a community. This community can be considered to be an example of a British Muslim community due to the shared practices of the members. Moreover, the existence of a boundary enabled them to be separated from others, thus marking them as a community.

Hijab



Figure 4: Women wearing the *hijab*. Photo from the *Living Islam* Website (www.livingislam.org.uk), *Living Islam* 2008.

Hopkins and Patel (2006, in Gilliat-Ray, 2010b, p. 47) report that increasing numbers of British Muslim women are reasserting their Islamic identity by adopting the *hijab*. The *hijab* was an important marker of female Muslim identity at the festival. I did not see it, as is sometimes reported, as a means of oppressing women and making them invisible (Fieldnotes. See Tarlo 2007, p. 144; Werbner, 2007, p. 164). Instead, the *hijab* was a way of giving women visibility by allowing them to embrace their gender. The women at the festival were not distinctively subordinate to the men, instead they were respected and appreciated. The host of the entertainment at the festival stated on the third day that:

“...women are crucial in society. They are the ones that hold everything together...”

(Fieldnotes)

Consequently, women were seen as a very significant and active part of this created community and wider society.

In a similar way to a ‘*halal* boundary’, there was also a ‘*hijab* boundary’. The *hijab* allowed Muslim women to associate themselves with a wider female British Muslim community.

Tarlo (2007) discusses this when she considers the agency of the *hijab* in people’s lives:

“...it is argued that for many women the adoption of *hijab* transforms not only their sense of self but also their relationship to others and the wider environment.” (p. 132).

Thus, the wearing of the *hijab* was a visible reminder to the attendees at *Living Islam* of the wider Muslim community outside of the festival. By wearing the headscarf they were enjoined into a British Muslim community that goes beyond *Living Islam*. Thus, the *hijab* was the boundary marker that linked Muslims at the festival to women wearing the headscarf around Britain. However, this boundary is fluid (Cohen, 1985, p. 12) as not all

Muslim women wore the headscarf at the festival. The wearing of the headscarf was optional and thus this was not a rigid boundary in place that distinguished Muslims from others. The *hijab* consequently marked a boundary that marked the similarities of Muslims, rather than distinguishing their differences. Cohen (1985) asserts that boundaries mark similarity and difference (p. 12). The *hijab* did not exclude those that chose not to wear it at the festival as everyone was included, but it did enjoin those that did to a wider British Muslim community who also choose to embrace the *hijab*.

The *hijab* did allow Muslim women to feel a part of a distinctive *Living Islam* community.

When I discussed the *hijab* with one of the attendees she stated that she chose to wear the *hijab* because:

“...I want to get in to the 'Islamic' mode of things. It's a similar thing in Mecca when Muslims go for pilgrimage. You may not wear it normally but everyone there wears it as it's seen as more modest and so we don't draw attention to ourselves... Also probably to feel 'Included' and part of the whole thing ...” (Fieldnotes).

This statement reflected how women were wearing the headscarf to feel part of the *Living Islam* community. By embracing the *hijab* Muslim women were able to feel involved and a part of the festival. Tarlo (2007) stresses this when she states that:

“What many *hijab* women speak of are the feelings of community they feel when they see other women in *hijab*” (p. 142).

Thus, the wearing of the *hijab* further emphasised a sense of a British Muslim community at *Living Islam*.

“Going to the hairdressers is not an easy process”

Living Islam provided a forum for activities that non-Muslims might take for granted in the ‘outside world’. For instance, attending the hairdressers can be a problematic event for some. Tarlo (2007) conducted an ethnographic study of a hairdresser salon, where she observed attendees and workers there. Tarlo (2007) mentions Lorraine, a recent convert, in her study, who cancelled an appointment to have her hair cut because she did not want to run the risk of a man walking into the salon and seeing her hair uncovered.’ (p. 137).

Lorraine’s story emphasises the difficulties that arise for Muslim women in the ‘outside world’. One of the attendees at *Living Islam* said:

“It is hard to find somewhere to get my hair cut because of the privacy aspect. I may ring a hair salon and they say it is all private but there are male hairdressers.” (Fieldnotes)

Tarlo (2007), and this attendee, talk of a problem that many Muslim women might face, which can make certain tasks a significant issue. However, at *Living Islam* there was a Beauty Salon for female attendees, which aimed to provide an area where Muslims could feel safe and comfortable, without the worry of being exposed in front of a male. *Living Islam* thus aimed to enable Muslims to engage in practices in a *halal* way.

However, *Living Islam* seems to provide an idealistic community. Baumann (2001) states that community stands for the kind of world which is not available to us, but which we would dearly wish to inhabit (p. 3). This was true at *Living Islam*. By providing a Beauty Salon at the festival it should have allowed Muslim women to easily have their hair cut and have beauty treatments without any worries or concerns. Outside of the festival this is an unlikely ideal, and moreover, the ideal wasn’t realised at the festival. The Organisers had good intentions; however the reality was less than perfect. Although the ideal would be for

female Muslims to be able to attend the Beauty Salon in comfort and without concern, the reality is that it was a very cramped space with four or more clients in the room at the same time. One client stated:

“I was supposed to be getting a facial but it all seemed very cramped. One person was having their hair cut, another was being waxed and another was having a facial...If the person having a facial moved an inch they would have been covered in hot wax.”
(Fieldnotes)

Although the Beauty Salon provided an area for women to have treatments without the presence of men, the cramped conditions meant that it was not a pleasurable experience. The creation of an idealised setting that would allow Muslims to engage in Islamic practices was not at all times possible. However, the existence of the Beauty Salon emphasised the importance of *halal* practices which aimed to allow Muslims to feel safe and a part of a Muslim community with shared values and practices.

Furthermore, *Living Islam* would perhaps not be considered to be *halal* by all. There are those who would not consider it to be Islamic enough. The term *halal* could be seen to be subjective as some Muslims are completely against Music, whilst others embrace it for instance. Moreover, there are those that might oppose any form of gender interaction, or even the wearing of the *hijab*.

One of the speakers at *Living Islam* queried the term *halal*. She gave an example of when she went to the *halal* butcher and saw the chickens. She asked the audience whether these chickens are *halal* even though their wings have been cut off whilst they are still alive to stop them flapping around (Fieldnotes). Moreover, there are issues surrounding the certification of *halal* meat which make it a much contested subject (Fischer, 2008, p. 2). Fischer (2008) suggests that the lack of a state body that is responsible for regulating the

halal markets means that it is open to fraud (2008, p. 2). Thus, I acknowledge that not everyone would agree that the festival was Islamic enough. The ISB aims to bring Muslims together (ISB. *The Organisation*. Available at <http://www.isb.org.uk/pages06/organisation.asp>. Accessed: 13 July 2011), however diversities amongst Muslims mean that not all would agree on the approach of the ISB, and might consider the festival to be very far from *halal*.

"It is an Islamic festival!"

This work has previously suggested that there was the Islamization of language and this also extends to other aspects of the festival. A notable account was when I and a Muslim acquaintance went to get an ice cream:

"My friend said 'hi' before proceeding to ask for an ice cream. The ice cream seller said: "We are at *Living Islam* it is not 'hi' it is *As-Salaamu Alaikum*" and made her say it. After he gave her the ice cream he was quite rude telling her how to speak to him and how she should respond. She got annoyed and said she didn't need to be lectured about it. He was enforcing Islam and she felt that it was too much." (Fieldnotes).

This event showed how those present were drawn into a community and that there were certain perceptions that they should behave in a certain way because of being a part of this community. By being a British Muslim it seemed that there were certain assumptions about how one should engage with others because of their religion. This incident highlighted that certain individuals at *Living Islam* might have wished for the Islamization of Lincolnshire Showground to ensure that it was a strictly Islamic festival. Power relationships come into play here. The ice cream seller might have felt like he had more power because he was

working at the festival and thus held a distinct position of power which enabled him to 'police' the site. Moreover, there might have been this power relationship because he was a male and my acquaintance was female. Although, I have suggested that at Living Islam there were not strict gender distinctions, some individuals might have embraced a patriarchal viewpoint. This episode emphasised that *Living Islam* provided a setting for the creation of an Islamic community, although some attempted to make it more Islamic than others.

Chapter Three: *Jumma* and the Outdoor Prayer Arena

Salat, the Muslim ritual prayer, is one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam that all Muslims should abide by (Ruthven, 1997). As a core activity that should be undertaken by the Muslim community, prayer warranted a specific study in this current community focussed study. This chapter focuses specifically on the Friday congregational prayer, *jumma*. A spatial analysis is adopted here to explore this, as well as for examining how the Outdoor Prayer Arena transformed into a setting rich with meaning due to the events that took place within it. This has been chosen as the primary analytical tool as it played a significant role in the representation of a community at the *jumma*.

Literature that focuses on 'space' and 'place' is considered here, as this is the lens through which this topic is being explored. There is existing literature on the theme of spatial analysis, such as: Massey (1999) who examines the power and symbolism of space. Nassar (2005) and Metcalf (1996) both emphasise the portable nature of Muslim space. Whilst Werbner (1996) shows how a profane space can be ritually sacralised.

Transformation into 'Sacred' Space

I observed the *jumma* from the outskirts of the Outdoor Prayer Arena, which gave me a considerable view of the goings on within. The prayer facilities in the Lincoln Showground were two-fold. There was the permanent building which housed the prayer hall for the weekend, and there was the empty mass of land which became the Outdoor Prayer Arena. Focus shall be placed on the latter. Although the land was physically empty, it transformed into being symbolically 'full'. The reasons for this transformation will be discussed below.

The land that contained the Outdoor Prayer Arena became a make-shift mosque. The use of land to act as a make-shift mosque warranted a consideration of space and place and its impact on Muslims.

Although the site of worship was very basic, the simplicity of the site enhanced the impact of the coming together of Muslims for prayer. The sparse prayer site consequently emphasised community relations. Nasser (2005) considers the mosque to be a powerful symbol of Muslim identity (p. 73). This make-shift mosque reflected the communal identity of those present. Thousands of Muslims joining together on the prayer site marked not only a *Living Islam* community with shared values, but also a wider Muslim community that transcends time and place.

Metcalf (1996) observes that:

“It is ritual and sanctioned practice...that creates “Muslim space”, which thus does not require any juridically claimed territory or formally consecrated or architecturally specific space.” (p. 3).

Metcalf (1996) shows that it is the religious practice that is of importance for Muslim prayer. I observed that this was true of the prayer site at *Living Islam*. The enjoining of Muslims for prayer transformed the empty space into a symbolic area. Thus, the prayer created an important religious setting.

Werbner’s (1996) work on the process of religious spatial ‘conquest’ affected by a transnational Sufi regional cult (p. 309) is consulted here. Werbner (1996) observes that:

“Twice a year, winding their way through the drab dilapidated streets of Birmingham, Manchester, or London’s immigrant neighbourhoods, processions of Muslim men celebrate anniversaries of death and rebirth. As they march they chant the *zīkr*, the remembrance of God. In chanting this, they not only purify their hearts and souls, they also sacralise and

‘Islamicize’ the very earth, the buildings, the streets, and the neighbourhoods through which they march.” (p. 312).

Werbner (1996) further contends that marching must be grasped as a performative act, which inscribes and re-inscribes space with sanctity (p. 311). Similarly, the prayer space at *Living Islam* was able to be ‘inscribed with sanctity’ when prayer took place. The empty space became loaded with Islamic meaning when Muslims came together there for their shared faith.

Cohen (1985) stresses that boundaries mark the beginning and end of a community, and that this boundary encapsulates the identity of the community (p. 12). Expressions of boundaries can vary from the very physical to being subjective to the beholder (p. 12). The Prayer Arena was a mass of empty space that was enclosed within a barrier of hedges around the outside of this rectangular space. The hedges acted as the physical boundary to the Arena. Taking Metcalf’s assertions that ritual practice creates ‘Muslim space’ (1996) and Cohen’s ideas about boundaries (1985), the Outdoor Prayer Arena became a spiritual place rich with meaning when the space was full with Muslims. The designated prayer space was full of religious symbolism which began and ended at the hedge barriers. Of course, the entire Showground was transformed into an Islamic setting for the weekend but this space marked a transition into the distinctly religious.

The enrichment of this space was associated with the communal interactions of the prayer participants. One attendee commented that:

“Praying together is more rewarding. The community comes together for *jummah*”

(Fieldnotes).

The *Living Islam* website also stresses how important praying together is:

“Be part of this collective remembrance of God...with over 5,000 Muslims. Praying...with one another. ‘Living Islam’ will, insha’Allah, strengthen your faith, your hope, your confidence and your will.” (ISB. *Nine Reasons to be at Living Islam*. Available at: <http://www.livingislam.org.uk/9-reasons-why.html>. Accessed: 11 July 2011)

These two quotations show that shared worship is able to bring a community together. By sharing religious acts, shared meanings were generated. Although attendees of *Living Islam* were diverse, they were able to unite during prayer. Esposito (1994) stresses that:

“Despite the rich diversity in Islamic practice, the five pillars of Islam remain the core and common denominator, the five essential and obligatory practices all Muslims accept and follow.”(1994, p. 89).

Prayer was a significant area where I observed that the shared values of Muslims brought them together as a community. However, it should be noted that outside of *Living Islam* lots of Muslims may not participate in *jummah*. One of the attendees at *Living Islam* stated that many Muslims at the festival take part in the prayer because it is scheduled in to the timetable, but outside of the Showground people may be less inclined to participate (Fieldnotes). Nevertheless, at the festival there was a great deal of community integration during prayer at the festival, which marked a distinct Muslim community, both a *Living Islam* community and a link to a wider British Muslim community that also partake in *jummah*.

The act of unity during prayer was a very symbolic representation of the community at the festival. Not everyone at the Lincoln Showground was Muslim. For instance those helping out with technical equipment or sporting activities. Thus, this enclosed portion of the site provided an area for Muslims to come together for their shared practices. Moreover, although there were physical boundaries, there were subjective boundaries too. There were

some Muslims who chose not to pray for medical or other reasons, who although were outside of the 'boundary', could still be a part of the process. Cohen (1985) describes how boundaries are subjective (p. 12), and thus those who sat outside the arena, although not performing the ritual acts, could still feel involved by watching the process of their fellow Muslims and sharing in its meaning.

Gendered Space



Figure 5: Gender divide in the Outdoor Prayer Arena.
Photo from the Living Islam website (www.livingislam.org.uk), Living Islam, 2005.

Although other areas of the festival revealed gender interaction rather than segregation, the *jumma* stressed traditional gendered values. The separation of men and women was apparent by a section of grass that was between them in the Outdoor Prayer Arena. One attendee had commented on the gender interaction at the festival: "This gender interaction we witness here is very unusual." However, at *jumma* the usual separation of men and women was evident. Ruthven (1997) notes that at the mosque:

“Males and females are usually separated, with women worshipping behind the men (or in a screened off section of the mosque.” (p. 143)

As there was no facility for a screened off section which Ruthven mentions, the distinction was made through a mass of space between the men and women, with men at the front. Here there became an invisible boundary between the male and female worshippers which led to the production of a gendered space which transported traditional values to the Showground. The separation of men and women created a sense of traditional community values that had been re-created at this festival. This showed that Muslim communities are able to take their religion wherever they may go and express it in new regions whilst forming new temporary communities.

The Multi-Purposes of the Outdoor Prayer Arena

There was a transformation of the prayer arena when *jummah* had finished and the festival attendees remained in the make-shift arena to observe an air display. The space was still rich with symbolism but this shifted from being solely religious to being more focussed on family entertainment. Thus, as soon as prayer had ended the atmosphere became more informal and women and men engaged more freely. While previously there were spiritual relationships between attendees, at this point the relations were predominantly familial and communal. The space that became vacant after *jummah* could transform in to an: “...area for the community to assemble in excited awe of the air display” (Fieldnotes).

The mass of land became full of group appreciation for the entertainment. Although the symbolic aspects of the site had diminished, there was still community affiliation through

these alternative means. Clarke and Jepson's case study of a community festival in Derby (2011) observe festivals as being about:

"Participation, involvement, and the creation of a sense of identity..." (para 1)

When I looked out from my prominent position on the outskirts, the solidarity of attendees was apparent. The shared appreciation of the air display created a communal harmony to add to the spiritually communal values already expressed. The creation of a community was apparent.

Chapter Four: The Bazaar



Figure 6: The Bazaar. Photo from the Living Islam website (www.livingislam.org.uk). Living Islam, 2005

This chapter focuses on the market area, the Bazaar, which was a hub of activity. The chapter will centre around two areas; the intimate community relations that were exerted in this market place, and the prominence of charities at the Bazaar that reflected an understanding of a wider community outside of *Living Islam*.

Buying and Selling - A Communal Activity

As I wandered around the Bazaar I was acutely aware that the buying and selling process of the market place was a very sociable and data laden activity. To explore this, the analytical tool of retail geography is utilised. Retail geography has been used as a method for analysis

by scholars such as Crewe (2010) and Birkin *et al* (2002). This approach is used here to explore the impact of the retail space of the Bazaar on community relations.

Notably, the Bazaar was a very communal area:

“Everyone is so very friendly, and easily engaging with one another, there seems to be some sort of community ‘spirit’ here...” (Fieldnotes).

A community spirit existed in the easy interaction between buyers and sellers. Buyers and sellers engaged in ‘chat’ which was more than merely talking about the products for sale. Crewe (2000) believes that shopping is an elaborate sociological ‘game’ played out in sites loaded with meaning (p. 2). The Bazaar was one such place that was full of meaning which encouraged community relations. The buying and selling process was a form of community interaction that was very symbolic. Increasingly, there has been interest in emphasising the ‘performing self’ (Featherstone, 1991), and the construction of identities through consumption rituals (Williams *et al* 2010, p. 206). Crewe (2000) suggests that contemporary exchange is seldom an ‘unembedded’ material commodity transaction. Rather, it is a richly symbolic activity which can have important emotional consequences quite apart from any material changes which may result.’(p. 283;284).

I chose to buy a bag from the Bazaar and experienced for myself the emotional exchanges of the market-place. “I decided to buy a black bag...it wasn’t a mere exchange of money but a process of rapport...” (Fieldnotes). I found that rather than the seller merely acknowledging my presence but little else, there was an entire exchange that occurred. There may be a distinction between this type of selling and that of a retail outlet due to economic reasons.

For instance a supervisor at a retail outlet may have no vested interest in the economic outcome of selling goods. However, at *Living Islam* the stalls present may have had greater concerns with earning money as it was likely to be their own stall, as I discovered through casual conversations with the sellers. However, although emphasis was possibly placed quite strongly on the selling of the products for economic reasons, there was a much more engaging experience than in conventional retail outlets. On approaching the stall selling bags the seller was exceptionally welcoming. As we engaged in conversation she offered me a mirror to model the bags and advised me on which suited me best, as well as getting people from other stalls to give me their opinion. We talked about the festival, as well as moving on to 'chat' about her family. The process was much more than the mere buying of an item, instead a relationship was formed. Crewe and Gregson's (2004) work on the car boot sale is a similar kind of retail setting. Crewe and Gregson (2004) found that:

"For buyers too, car boot sale consumption is a communal activity in which sociality, tactile interaction and tribal solidarity as part of the crowd figure centrally in an atmosphere which is far removed from the anonymous crowd of the mall." (p. 42).

Similarly, the buying and selling process of the Bazaar allowed individuals to engage in conversation that created a lively sociable and communal atmosphere. The Bazaar thus provided an environment where relationships were formed which assisted in the construction of a temporary Muslim community.

Moreover, people recognised others from their shared tents, or from talks and sporting activities, whilst shopping at the Bazaar. The area allowed relations to develop further and many would see one another in the Bazaar and carry on to their next activity together.

Relationships developed further with the swapping of phone numbers and comments about meeting up outside of *Living Islam*. This reflected the way that *Living Islam* could provide a catalyst for the development of relationships. Although, on departure from the site, many relations would diminish with the end of the temporary community construction at *Living Islam*, some would be able to continue outside of the interest community setting, which showed that Muslim communities are able to transcend a particular setting due to the portable nature of Islam (Nassar, 2005).

Charities

Charities were interspersed between those that were selling material goods such as sweets, books and clothes. The presence of charities at *Living Islam* was important in reflecting a wider community outside of the festival. I picked up leaflets from the stands that were encouraging those present at *Living Islam* to help others from across the globe. The emphasis on helping others can be seen in slogans such as: 'Help others in need!' (Fieldnotes). Such slogans allowed people to empathise with others who were less fortunate than themselves. The '*Living Islam* experience' was greatly focussed on encouraging thinking about the wider community. The ISB has alluded to this by suggesting that they aim to help wider society (ISB; Living Islam. *About Us*. Available at: <http://www.livingislam.org.uk/about-us.html> [Accessed 11 July 2011]).

Gilliat-Ray (2010b) stresses that British Muslims have made a significant impact in the charitable sector (p. 257). There are now numerous British Islamic charities, such as Islamic Relief, which operates internationally catering for both Muslims and non-Muslims (Massood, 2005, cited in Gilliat-Ray, 2010b, p. 257). This was reflected in the large number

of charities present in the Bazaar, which outnumbered the number of sellers of material products, and thus reflects the emphasis placed on helping others.

Whilst at the Bazaar I was handed a number of leaflets from a variety of charities. The *Muslim deaf UK* leaflet had the alphabet written in sign language for the reader to learn. On the leaflet it was stressed that the reader should: "Try practicing the alphabet in British Sign Language so you can interact with the Deaf community." It became apparent that the festival was more than just the creation of a Muslim community. The primary focus of this study has been on a kind of '*living Islam* community'. There has also been an examination of the wider 'British Muslim community' that goes beyond the festival. However, the *Muslim Deaf UK* leaflet expressed an alternative type of community. Just as I conceived of a '*Living Islam* community' there was also a deaf community that arose through shared interests.

Cohen (1985) emphasises that: "The symbols of community are mental constructs: they provide people with the means to make meaning." (p. 19). Thus, this charity allowed the learner of the sign language to assign rich meaning onto themselves to allow them to relate to a further community. Cohen also discusses 'boundary-marking rituals' which allow entrance into a community (p. 53). This leaflet suggested that the learning of sign language was one such boundary marking ritual. The festival thus provided the setting for the creation of a Muslim community through shared interests that existed alongside other communities. For instance whilst a deaf attendee became a member of a temporary British Muslim community, they were also a part of the deaf community. Moreover, a hearing attendee was able to become an 'honoury' member of the deaf community by learning sign language. Furthermore, a leaflet from FOSIS stated: "Your federation needs you" and "Only with your regular contribution of £1 a week or more, can we build a brighter future for our Muslim

students...” The discourse used in these two statements was used to encourage Muslims to help their fellow Muslims. This leaflet emphasised that Muslims at *Living Islam* were part of a wider community, outside of the temporary community construct, who they should help. By stressing the importance of helping others, there was the focus on assisting a wider British Muslim community. It was stated in the Event Guide that:

“Yes, we fully hope to inspire you, motivate you and rejuvenate you while you have come away for this event, but with the aim that it helps bring out passion for Islam in your everyday life...” (p. 4)

Through a reading of the Event Guide, it was reiterated that *Living Islam* was about more than just four days, it was about transforming ones life. Continual Donations to FOSIS were thus one way that Muslims were able to express their passion for Islam beyond the festival context.

Observations from the Bazaar clarified that *Living Islam* had created a Muslim community, but moreover that references were made to both a wider British Muslim community and a wider global community. Furthermore, it became apparent that there were other types of communities at the festival, such as the deaf community which co-existed within the constructed Muslim community.

Conclusion

This work has examined what could almost be described as an invisible space. This term is used loosely as the setting was not physically invisible; however, 'invisible space' sums up the lack of literature that exists on *Living Islam*. The objective of this study was to examine the community dimensions of the festival, and resultantly this work has generated new data on Islamic public residential festivals.

Community studies have been important in providing a valuable insight into community relations of a range of people in varying settings. This study has shown that festivals can provide a unique setting for observing community construction and relations. The research has shown that there can be multiple expressions of community relations that can co-exist within a festival setting. *Living Islam* revealed a variety of community constructions: a British Muslim community; that was termed the *Living Islam* community, a community of attachment; which I was included into, a wider singular British Muslim community; that incorporated all British Muslims through core shared values, wider society and other interest communities; such as the Deaf community. Thus, not only was there the creation of a British Muslim community at *Living Islam*, there were also references to many more communities. This work is significant as it reveals that in a particular setting multiple communities can be constructed and referred to.

Existing literature has shown that there is an array of Muslim communities in Britain, such as Muslim communities in different localities (see Gilliat-Ray and Mellor, 2010; Bolognani, 2007; Werbner, 1979). Other studies have focussed on the demographics of Muslim communities through analysis of the 2001 Census (Gilliat-Ray, 2010b). This study has moved away from these popular representations of Muslim communities to focus on the

construction of temporary Muslim communities. Due to the portable nature of Islam, I argue that Muslim communities can be constructed in many settings, this work has provided a significant example of this. Future studies may wish to research alternative settings that enable the creation of temporary Muslim communities, such as at a *dar-uloom*. Access issues have meant that this site is under-researched. However, an in-depth study of a *dar ul-loom* would provide rich data on temporary Muslim communities.

The notion of a British Muslim community can be problematic. Firstly, the terminology can be a significant issue. Community boundaries can be subjective to each individual and thus an attendee at *Living Islam* may have aligned themselves more to an ethnic 'marker', such as Pakistani, rather than the 'Muslim' label. However, their presence at the festival emphasised that 'Muslim' was likely to be one of their 'markers'. Thus, I assert that it is consequently possible to categorise the '*Living Islam* community' as a British Muslim community. Religion was one factor of the created community, but significantly their coming together through prayer, learning and socialising, bound the community together. Thus, even though the Muslim community is diverse, the festival provided an arena to join them through shared interests and practices. Moreover, although I observed that the community was an example of a British Muslim community; my inclusion meant that there were not rigid boundaries that excluded me. Thus, the attendees were also bound together because there was a 'community of attachment' at *Living Islam* which brought people together for the creation of a 'sense of community'.

The *Living Islam* festival also provided an arena for Muslims to acknowledge that they are part of a wider united British Muslim community, outside of the festival setting, that although diverse, has core shared values. For the ISB, the ideal may be to bring all Muslims

together, although this is perhaps not possible due to socio-economic reasons for instance, *Living Islam* provided a forum to bring individuals together through the construction of a community. From the beginning of the festival it was stressed to the attendees that the event would mark the beginning of the rest of their lives. This work has attempted to show how there was the realisation of this through the assembling of a temporary Muslim community, that could then disseminate and spread what they learned to a broad British Muslim community and wider society.

Participant Observation proved to be a very useful method in producing in-depth research for this study. The use of other methods, in conjunction with participant observation, could allow for an alternative understanding of the field site if there was the time and space to do so. However, although this study was limited by time, through participant observation there was a detailed qualitative insight into the festival that was open-ended and fluid. Future studies may wish to consider additional methods, such as interviewing. Future studies may also wish to place focus on the analysis of visual methods, but limits of time and space have not allowed this current study to do this.

Living Islam provides a unique site for conducting research; further studies may wish to consider alternative aspects of the festival such as: diversity, gender and multiculturalism to compliment this innovative study. This research is important for the field of 'Islam in Britain' as it provides an original study in an under-researched area, which future studies should explore further.

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All field notes are available on request.

