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**The Travelling Body in Spiritual Encounter: A Geocritical Analysis of Backer's *From MTV to Mecca* and Hofmann's *Journey to Islam***

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**Abstract:** Travel involves movement across geographical spaces and cultures where the travelling self meets other bodies and gets acquainted with them. It is an amalgam of physical, spiritual and psychological experiences. It also helps the traveller encounter various ideologies, cultures and geographies that would otherwise be alien. By combining personal impressions as well as ethnographic descriptions of the visited land, a travelogue merges the 'self' and the 'other'. Encountering a new culture may result in changes in the writer's preconceived notions. The paper undertakes an analysis of two such Western autobiographies—*From MTV to Mecca* by Kristiane Backer and *Journey to Islam* by Murad Wilfried Hofmann—focusing on the writers' spiritual encounters with Islam through their journeys and travels. A spiritual framework is employed to analyse how their travels result in their internal quest. By combining the ideas of literary cartography and deterritorialization/reterritorialization with the concept of spirituality through travel and employing a geocritical analysis, the paper maintains that the narratives espouse travel as a symbolic journey of their internal quest for spiritual attainment and the attribution of meaning to their identity construction. The depiction of places visited and experienced by the writers creates a spiritual space, as reflected in the mapping of their spiritual journeys.

**Keywords:** *Travel, Spirituality, Islam, Quest, Autobiography, Literary Cartography, Geocriticism, Deterritorialization, Reterritorialization*

## Introduction

Travel refers to the geographical movement of the body across places that results in new encounters, challenges and opportunities. For an ardent traveller, this is highly significant as it offers the opportunity for familiarity with unknown places and people. It also helps the traveller encounter various ideologies, cultures and geographies that would otherwise be alien. By combining personal impressions as well as ethnographic descriptions of the visited land, a travelogue merges the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. For many centuries, these literary depictions of travel have led to the production of knowledge about the places and people visited by travellers. The depiction of the East by the West has been an important area of study in this regard. Travelogues like *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah & Meccah* by Richard Burton and *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by Thomas Edward Lawrence provide accounts of their travels coupled with their personal impressions of the people they visit. However, such travel accounts have also resulted in distorted and Orientalist representations of the East, especially of the Middle East and the Arabs.

It is also worth noting that encountering a new culture may lead to changes in the writer's preconceived notions. The paper undertakes a geocritical analysis of two Western autobiographical narratives—*From MTV to Mecca: How Islam Inspired My Life* by Kristiane Backer and *Journey to Islam: Diary of a German Diplomat (1951–2000)* by Murad Wilfried Hofmann—with a focus on how the authors’ travels facilitated their spiritual encounters with Islam and shaped their religious transformation. Drawing on insights from spatial literary studies and literary cartography, the paper employs Westphal’s geocritical concept of “transgressivity” and Deleuzean-Guattarian concept of “deterritorialization/reterritorialization” to analyse the mapping of writers’ spiritual journeys in their travel accounts. The places of visit are pivotal in this spiritual encounter and are analyzed to reveal their internal quest for meaning.

## Literary Cartography of Spirituality through a Geocritical Lens

The primary aim of literary Cartography is to map spaces and geographies described in literary representations. It focuses on how the writers act as cartographers to determine and organize various coordinates of their geographical description of places, which is more pronounced in the case of travelogues, as the writers determine which coordinates of their journeys to be chosen to describe their experiences of a place within the narrative. Hence, the narratives become “mapping machines” (*Literary Cartographies* 3). The spatial elements of literary representation can, thus, be symbolically analyzed and “translated into cartographic symbols” (“Cartographies of Fictional Worlds” 218). Spirituality is a significant aspect that warrants more attention from a geocritical perspective, given its relation to the spaces or places visited. Spiritual tourism and pilgrimage are concepts intrinsically

linked with the analysis of travel through a spiritual framework. Various definitions have been attested to the concept of spirituality, connecting it with numerous discourses. Unlike the historical definitions of the term, its contemporary usage encompasses both religious and non-religious dimensions. It focuses on the quest for meaning and a transcendental connection with something sacred. Sheldrake maintains that spirituality reflects “some kind of vision of the human spirit and of what will enable people to achieve their fullest, even transcendent, potential” (8), providing meaning to human existence. The European SPES Institute defines spirituality as “people’s multiform search for a transcendent meaning of life that connects them to all living beings and brings them in touch with God or Ultimate Reality” (qtd. in Zsolnai and Flanagan 3).

In his foundational text *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, Bertrand Westphal outlines the tenets and methodological concepts of Geocriticism as an analytical tool. Geocriticism helps the analyst to “engage with the spaces that make life, through lived experience and through imaginary projections, meaningful” (Westphal xii). It is “a geocentered approach, which places *place* at the center of debate” (112) rather than the characters or writers. It seeks to understand the ways by which we ascribe meanings to both the real as well as imaginary spaces and how these are reflected in disciplines like literature. Focusing on theoretical aspects of Geocriticism, viz., spatiotemporality, transgressivity and referentiality, Westphal looks at “the importance of the text in the construction of a place” (6).

Geocritical and spatial literary studies of texts have been done with reference to literary depictions of London by Dickens, Dublin by Joyce or Hardy’s fictional world (Cook 2014; Bulson 2006). With the study of a place from multiple texts or sources, this approach provides a plurality of interpretations of the place under study. With a geocentric focus on “the ideological presuppositions of authors and the representational and argumentative choices they make, this kind of comparative analysis can reveal much about the meaning and significance of the places in question that would not otherwise be evident” (Prieto 21).

The geocritical analysis of Backer’s *From MTV to Mecca* and Hofmann’s *Journey to Islam* helps decipher the writer’s identity creation through the lived experiences of places travelled and experienced by the writers. It also helps to identify the ideological expression in the writers’ choice of description of places as contributing to their spiritual encounter and conversion. Thus, the places they visit influence and get influenced through their narrative, creating a reciprocal connection between writers and the places visited.

Westphal centers the geocritical approach from the postmodern perspective and at times when “society does not aspire to transcendence” (2) owing to Nietzsche’s declaration of the death of God. A geocritical analysis with spiritual and religious framework is to be more pronounced when compared

with the geocritical studies focused on concepts like ecocriticism, Anthropocene or postcoloniality. The literary cartography of spirituality through the mapping of cartographic symbols helps one to traverse the spiritual and religious quest presented by writers. The paper attempts a geocritical analysis of Backer's *From MTV to Mecca* and Hofmann's *Journey to Islam*, as literary cartographies of spirituality. For this, it focuses on their travel depictions as symbolic of their internal quest for meaning. Hence, geography becomes a tool for their ethics creation as "any movement in geographical space is significant in the religious and moral sense" (Lotman 172). The writers' travels are, thus, significant in the analysis of their spiritual journeys. By employing cartographic symbols in literary representations, Backer and Hofmann take readers through their spiritual journey. Similar to the cartographer, these writers map their spiritual journey through selection of significant episodes and travels in their life to substantiate their writing. While Backer details her pre-conversion and post-conversion experiences in detail, Hofmann mainly focuses on his experiences after becoming Muslim. As diary entries, his work is selective about events and experiences that focus on identity transition and philosophical reflections on human existence.

The physical mobility leads to spiritual mobility for the writers as depicted in their accounts. The titles of the select texts are symbolic of this journey of meaning-making. Backer's *From MTV to Mecca* is an autobiography that details her philosophical journey for meaning-making amidst the celebrity status at MTV. The narrative takes readers through this spiritual journey by detailing her physical journey. Her travels result in new avenues in her spiritual quest and her encounter with Islam which she elegantly portrays through her autobiography. The title of her narrative symbolizes this journey of transformation from her materialistic celebrity role to a European Muslim. The journey from MTV to Mecca has been strenuous with trials but the result of this transformative journey is her meaningful existence in this world. These travels result in spiritual and intellectual discussions on different ideologies and her tryst with Islam. Her reconciliatory role as a Western Muslim woman is evident in her narrative as opined by Tariq Ramadan in his foreword to her autobiography.

Hofmann's *Journey to Islam*, published in 2001 also reflects this journey of identity transition. He introduces this book as that which "mirrors specific stages of a mental process toward embracing Islam" (Hofmann 3). His diary entries from May 1951 at Schenectady, New York to May 2000 at Vienna are meticulously selected and organized to reflect his evolving ideological affiliation with Islam. The numerous diplomatic travels as part of his service in Germany and abroad provide him with not merely geographical familiarity but also with spiritual and religious familiarity. For him, being accustomed to a foreign culture is an intellectual and emotional endeavor which he considers an adventure. The self that he presents in his book experiences various facets of human existence through his diplomatic and spiritual travels.

Hofmann's diary entry at Bonn on 25 September 1980 signifies his official declaration of becoming a Muslim after various spiritual encounters. He maintains that "As of today I am a Muslim. I have arrived" (48). This arrival signifies a pivotal moment of his spiritual journey. However, this moment eventually paves way for new experiences as a European convert. His later travels on both diplomatic and religious missions provide avenues for exploring diverse cultures, philosophies and people across the East and the West.

### **Body in Spiritual Voidness**

The initial pages of Backer's autobiography depict her celebrity self that has tasted the fame and glory of stardom as the MTV Europe star music presenter. This role also invites her as hosts for famous music festivals and shows by bands across the world. However, she grows weary of London life, feeling like a hamster on a running wheel, with endless shows and programs leaving no room for spiritual or metaphysical reflection. Although she admits its significance in her rendezvous with important celebrities, the materialistic, consumer-driven London music biz is depicted as contributing to her declining spiritual and mental health. Her meeting with Imran Khan, the cricketer, accelerates this internal conflict. Readers realise this conflict when she alternatively juxtaposes descriptions of her London celebrity life with those of her first trip to Pakistan. The places depicted in her narrative are topographic markers of her spiritual journey. Like the elevations, depressions and plains of geographical areas, her account describes the vicissitudes of her spiritual journey. For example, the earlier London life that she enjoys at MTV reflects her materialistic life that lacks inner meanings. Backer's first trip to Pakistan with Imran provides her with a respite from this busy life and her initial encounters with Islam for Backer gets a different experience of human resignation to destiny and God's will. Despite hardships and scarcity of resources, the Pakistanis seem to be adaptive to their conditions and live contently with mere resources. The meetings with common people, experiencing their content life despite adversities, and reflections on nature's beauty while on mountain hiking prove highly significant in providing room for her spiritual contemplation. Backer maintains that Imran's question about the purpose of life and subsequent discussions during this adventure provide a spiritual meaning to this journey as "For the first time in years, I'd had time to breathe and think about more than just fashion and filming schedules" (Backer 13). This realisation pushes her to a disillusioned stance on Western materialistic norms.

Hofmann's diary entry starts with his observations on the modern Western education system. He comments that his studies in Sociology in New York focused mainly on "materialistic, mechanistic concept of life and intelligence," providing no room for theological interpretations (Hofmann 3). However, unlike Backer, Hofmann does not depict himself as deeply spiritually disillusioned. This

could be due to his travels on diplomatic missions, which have resulted in his encounters with the Near East and Islam at a relatively young age, as well as his intellectual knowledge about Christianity. Moreover, he compiles diary entries that prove pivotal in his affirmation as a Muslim and hence focuses on non-consecutive entries. It is his travels that have provided vast avenues for his spiritual encounters.

### **Travelling Body in Spiritual Encounter**

Voluntary travel can result in one's growth providing new avenues for exploring oneself along with new places. Thus, there is a discovery of oneself and the other. The narratives of such travels help in philosophical pondering of one's existence in relation to others, identity exploration and thereby human flourishing (Pérez-Martínez). Analysing personal narratives of volunteer tourists, Willson focuses on "how transformative life experiences can lead individuals to seek spiritual meaning through travel" (11). Backer's music tours and public outreach programs at MTV have provided avenues for her exploration of various ideologies. Her student exchange program gives her a glimpse of the American life and her exploration of various religious ideologies. The Jewish family with whom she stays during this program gives her a glimpse of the role of religion, but not in everyday life. Her curiosity about the spiritual dimension also leads her to explore different ideologies. During her stay in America, she takes part in sermons at Gospel church and visits the Bhagwan Ranch where she experiences different manifestations of spirituality. The visit to Pakistan with Imran and to Morocco with her family after becoming the MTV presenter pushes her to contemplate her star role, for she realises the inevitability of "personal and emotional sacrifices" (Backer 49) for her professional success and the necessity of a spiritual dimension to combat this discrepancy.

Several factors prove vital in Hofmann's encounter with Islam during his internal quest for meaning. The impetus for his inclination towards Islamic philosophy was his service as an Attache at the German embassy in Algeria during the Algerian War of Independence. He maintains the resilience of the Algerians and the indigenous forces who guarded the German offices rested mainly on their commitment to God. This eventually leads to their ability to face adversity with patience and prayer, but strong and committed to the national independence cause. His later diplomatic travels to Eastern countries like India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan also provided him with experiences of Muslims. Being interested in artistic and architectural marvels, Hofmann details his observations of places like Granada, Konya and Istanbul which furthered his interest in Islamic architecture and consequently Islamic ideology.

## Geographical and Spiritual Transgressivity

The writers focus on border crossing through their travel depictions, thus, preparing readers for their identity transition through the act of transgressing physical borders. The body that is disinterested in the excessive materialistic vision of Western modernity experiences different spiritual encounters through travel. Transgressivity is a significant aspect of geocriticism as its focus is on continuous mobility and fluidity. It refers to the state of “a nascent overlapping of movement that disturbs the dominant equilibrium” (Westphal 46).

This state of transgression “accompanies movement and motive” (46) as reflected in Backer’s and Hofmann’s accounts. The geographical transgressivity through visits to different countries in the East gradually results in the writers’ spiritual and religious transgressivity. Their experiences during these travels provide philosophical reflections on the purpose of life. Hence, their geographical boundary crossings result in their spiritual transgressivity from the capitalist and materialistic ideology to an ideology that centers on the human-divine connection. Backer’s disillusionment amid the celebrity social circle that hinges on fame, popularity, and material possessions lacking deep meaning is presented as addressed through her encounter with Islam. Hofmann also contrasts the methods of boosting morale according to the German norms with those of the Algerians during his service in Algeria. He maintains that while “alcoholic uplifting” and other worldly pleasures seem essential for the German civil servants during the Algerian war, the Algerian Harkis or guards face their adversity with unwavering support for their religion (Hofmann 13).

The transgressivity attempted by them in both physical and spiritual spheres results in the reorientation of their identities. Relying on Deleuzean-Guattarian concepts of “deterritorialization” and “reterritorialization”, Westphal focuses on transgressivity as a means to approach literature on minority identities. This concept can be highly emphasized in Backer’s and Hofmann’s narratives owing to their description of new identities in their spiritual journey. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari delve deep into the concept of deterritorialization/reterritorialization with regard to motion in biological organisms like cells and plants. They maintain that:

An organism that is deterritorialized in relation to the exterior necessarily reterritorializes on its interior milieu. ... Every voyage is intensive, and occurs in relation to thresholds of intensity between which it evolves or that it crosses. One travels by intensity; displacements and spatial figures depend on intensive thresholds of nomadic deterritorialization (and thus on differential relations) that simultaneously define complementary, sedentary reterritorializations (54).

The first phase of deterritorialization occurs owing to the writers' disillusionment with modern Western standards of meaning. It is this first phase that pushes them for a spiritual quest and later encounter with Islam. The encounter eventually results in the second phase of deterritorialization, i.e., the disruption and deconstruction of preconceived Orientalist notions of the East. For instance, Backer's preconceived Orientalist notions about the East get a reality check and are dismantled by Backer in her depiction of Pakistan. Apart from her observations on cultural differences and hygiene of the country, Backer comments positively on Pakistanis. Deleuze and Guattari maintain that "In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification (3). The select narratives are texts that reflect these lines of articulation, lines of flight and deterritorialization through their depiction of writers' spiritual and religious transgressivity.

The travelling body presented in the narratives and the places visited complement each other in deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The body through geographical transgressivity encounters places that prove vital in their spiritual quest, imparting a sense of importance to the place in the narrative. The places, in turn, affect this travelling body through deconstruction of Orientalist ideas while simultaneously providing more spiritual reflections on human existence. This results in reterritorialization in their narratives.

### **Creation of a Reterritorialized Identity**

Backer's and Hofmann's description of their transitioned identity as European Muslims signify the reterritorialization in the Western context where the merging of the Islamic and Western ideals as a convert occurs. Their narratives signify reconciliation of "two selves in one subjectivity" (Khalifa 165), resulting in a reterritorialized identity. Being different from both heritage Muslims and religious majority groups in the West, the identities created by Backer and Hofmann as Western convert Muslims inevitably call for an exploration of their transitioned minority identity. Similar to the geographical transgressivity through physical border crossing, the writers' journey symbolizes transgressivity at spiritual and religious levels. The hybrid space created represents the merging of different identities thus creating a body in motion. The cyclical nature of deterritorialization and reterritorialization is highly significant here as the body is always in motion, encountering new experiences that prove pivotal in their identity affirmation. Reterritorialization does not entail switching back to the original territory but creation of a new territory owing to the influence of the deterritorializing element.

Reading her autobiography, one realises the effects of conversion to Islam in the West and the efforts put forward by Backer in her identity formation as a European Muslim. Owing to her religious

transition to Islam, she had doubts about the Western music industry that catered mainly to the pleasure principles, devoid of ethical or philosophical reflections. Backer's visit to Bosnia on an invitation for the opening of the Pavarotti Music Centre reinforces her identity as a Muslim in the music industry. The "European Muslim" identity that "sometimes seemed to be at odds with one another" but which she earnestly wants to hold on to gets reaffirmed after her meeting with Dr Mustafa Ceric, Bosnia's Grand Mufti (Backer 192). He maintains that embracing Islam does not signify the complete cessation of previous identities as "The only thing that Islam does is make you stronger in your identity in terms of actualising your personality, and in understanding who you are, what you're supposed to do and what the purpose and meaning of your life is" (192-3). Moreover, assurances from her colleagues and acquaintances about her MTV shows that provide respite during war times provides her with more tranquility. Hence, Backer's experiences in Bosnia furthers her European Muslim identity. Experiencing Bosnia as a living history of Sufism also adds to her beliefs, for she is particularly interested in this doctrine. Her travels with the tariqa group to Morocco, Konya, Turkey and other Eastern countries also help her to explore this belief and visit places of Sufi interest, furthering her spiritual cum religious path.

Hofmann gives his readers a glimpse of his later reterritorialized identity as a European Muslim in the book's opening pages. His reflections here hinge on his readings of the French translation of the Qur'an, comparative studies on three Semitic religions and his reflections on Muslims across the world. This representation acts as justification for his conversion to Islam. The fact that these reflections span places like New York, Bonn, Algiers, Cambridge, and Granada provides readers with the geographical extent of his travels. Moreover, the places of his visit after his religious transition widen up including places like Mecca, Medina, Kayamkulam, Brussels, and Lahore. These places are depicted as contributing to his knowledge of diverse perspectives and people, as well as affirming his reterritorialized identity.

A cartographic symbol that proves highly significant in the writers' reterritorialization of their identity is their pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Religious practices often involve movement through space, such as pilgrimages, which transform physical spaces into spiritual experiences. The Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages are significant experiences in a Muslim's life in this regard as these result in spiritual explorations of human existence and solidification of pilgrim's commitment to Islam. Mecca, the center of this pilgrimage, is depicted as a haven of spiritual reflection through these rituals. Pilgrim accounts focused on journeys to Mecca and Medina are abundant in Muslim travel literature and have been studied for their geopolitical, social or cultural dimensions. Backer's and Hofmann's pilgrimage descriptions also reflect these aspects while focusing on existential aspects of human existence through a divine connection. The acts of pilgrimage are considered embodiments of religious affiliation to

Islam and are more emphasized by convert Muslims as part of their religious commitment. The idea of the pilgrim's progress in the internal quest for meaning is deciphered in them as the geographical, cultural and climatic difficulties faced by the writers do not deter them from their yearning for another pilgrimage.

Hofmann's descriptions of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia get two separate mentions within a span of ten years and serve as cartographic symbols of his spiritual commitment. The first visit for his Umrah (the lesser pilgrimage) in 1982 describes the materialization of peace and serenity upon beholding Ka'bah, the center of Islamic prayer, and while performing Umrah rituals. His narration of these rituals and symbols gets more detailed and philosophically driven when he performs Hajj (the greater pilgrimage) in 1992. For instance, he talks about the physical and mental effort to cope with adverse conditions like the climate, illness, or transportation glitches. He also stresses the spiritual preparation for this religious endeavor as Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam that is to be performed within a fixed timeline. He acknowledges that unlike the Umrah he has performed, the Hajj in 1992 occurs in summer adding to the heat and related casualties. He also stresses the fact that he is just "one in two million pilgrims" (Hofmann 199), performing the rituals in unison with people of different nations and races. The Hajj pilgrims further in their connection with the divine owing to various hajj rituals and heartfelt prayers that reflect one's commitment to faith. The intensity of this devotion to God propels them during this pilgrimage. It is also to be noted that Hofmann also provides critical comments on the lack of environmental awareness during the pilgrimage. The necessity of proper food waste disposal, especially during the day of sacrifice, coupled with measures to combat vehicle exhaust is a matter to be addressed.

Backer also details the spiritual significance of these pilgrimages in her account, focusing on the devotion and fervor with which pilgrims perform the associated rituals. She performs umrah along with her Sufi group in 2001 and Hajj in 2005. However, Backer's and Hofmann's experiences of their pilgrimage differ primarily in their gendered perspectives. To recover from marriage failure and to add more to her spiritual faculty as a Muslim, Backer enthusiastically prepares for the Umrah pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. However, the rule that "unmarried women without family couldn't just enter the country; they needed a mahram, a male companion to whom marriage is prohibited, usually a family member" (Backer 264) makes formalities difficult for her as a letter from a Saudi acquaintance in London regarding her pilgrimage did not reach the authorities by the time of her arrival at Jeddah airport, resulting in her being denied entry to the country. After heated discussions and receipt of the letter, she was granted entry. As a Westerner, she also comments on the perception of complete veiling in Saudi Arabia, the perception which she has to endure during her travels there. Despite such instances, the Umrah feels refreshing and marks a new beginning for her. She brilliantly presents the serene

atmosphere of devotion: “Walking around the Ka’ba, I realised that God truly was the centre of the universe” (272). Her Hajj with a group of single women, including her friend Dr. Amina, proves more fruitful in her religious commitment. Opting for the basic package devoid of luxury, she willingly endures the hardships of Hajj. Her first stop at Medina in route to Mecca gives her lots of experiences as a Muslim woman. She talks about her visit to the Prophet’s tombs, the veiled Saudi women, marriage proposals she receives and the physical and mental preparation of the women for the imminent Hajj. She describes her state when she switches to the *ihram*, for performing Hajj:

At two o’clock in the afternoon, after we had performed our *ghusl*, to symbolically wash away our impurities, and dressed in our *ihram*, we gathered outside our flat to catch the bus to Mecca. Now without even a hint of mascara or eye pencil, which I usually wore, I felt almost naked and a bit embarrassed at facing the world without it. In the state of *ihram* all negative emotions such as anger and irritation must be avoided. The magic word on Hajj is *sabr*, patience (317).

The sight of alms-seeking people, instances of rude drivers, soaring prices of commodities that disregarded “the principles of mercy and spirituality” (323) become glitches in this pilgrimage. But overcoming these glitches is her spiritual tranquility which is further reinforced in Arafat gathering, one of the prime Hajj requisites. She is enamored by families with babies, couples and the elderly performing the rituals in masses which she eloquently describes in her narrative.

An identity construction occurs through these travel depictions as the narratives help the writers form an idea about their identity, along with knowledge production about the people and places visited, as it “is also a way of asking individual questions” (Pérez-Martínez, 2). Embarking on the geographical journey through these travel depictions, readers also arrive at conclusions about the writers’ identity formation. Hence, Backer’s and Hofmann’s accounts provide a spiritual mapping of their internal quest for meaning through their geographical journeys.

## Conclusion

Travel narratives are symbolic acts of identity creation. It is a form of mapping, organizing space along with experiences. Literary cartography studies such mappings in literary representations through varied frameworks. One such analytical framework is the literary cartography of spirituality and religion in travel narratives. In the modern world, where individuals often feel disconnected, the narrative becomes a symbolic act of connecting the self to others. This is evident in both Backer and Hofmann as they embark on their travels. Drawing on insights from literary cartography as well as Deleuzian and Guattarian concepts of “deterritorialization” and “reterritorialization”, the paper employs

Westphal's geocritical concept of "transgressivity" to analyse the mapping of writers' spiritual journey and creation of identities through their travel accounts.

The travelling bodies in *From MTV to Mecca* and *Journey to Islam* represent spiritual and, consequently, religious transgressivity owing to their geographical transgressivity. The select texts for this study shift from the indifference of the materialistic world towards divine power and transcendence to focus on their spiritual encounters through their narratives. Consequently, the writers create a synthesized, reterritorialized identity by merging their Western and Islamic ideals. Hence, their narratives can be considered the manifestations of "spatially symbolic act" ("On Literary Cartography" 4). Embracing Islam during their internal quest for meaning reflects the reterritorialization of their identities in the new context. The paper thus maintains that a spiritual mapping of their internal quest across various ideologies and their tryst with Islam is evident through the depiction of the physical journeys in their narratives, the crux of which is reflected in the title of their books.

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