

A PLACE FOR POETRY

Teaching *Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan*

i. London E7

Walking to work from the tube,
the High Road rattles with metal shutters
rolling upwards. Pavements become coastlines
from elsewhere: boxes of plantains, dudhi, arvee;
hunks of watermelon piled in a crate.
Long rolls of sari cloth lean against shopfronts,
offcut squares in baskets. One day I buy one,
unfold it in class like a map, pass it round.
Its blue is that of schoolroom globes;
silver threads cross it like shipping lanes.
I ask about their aunts, their gifts
from Lagos, Ilford, Manila:
lifelines cast from somewhere to now.

ii. Cumbria

I drive to work down hedgerowed lanes,
recycling lesson plans in my head.
This morning, I found the fabric,
a fragment from a decade ago,
pressed in a ringbinder marked *Poems*.
Different pupils run it through their fingers.
I show them Googled images
of salwaar kameez, Lahore.
We are answering questions –
Discuss. Compare and contrast.
I try to answer them, see myself,
then and now, staring through vertical blinds
in Year 10 English classrooms.

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