

Abstract of the Thesis

The idea of culture, as perceived within common parlance, and the realm of the Muslim subject are often seen as oppositional and contradictory to each other. In contemporary times, Muslim community are often scrutinized through the lens of politics and race that often cast them as either silent objects or a problem to be solved. At the present time, to articulate “culture” in connection to Muslims is naturally, to invoke their silent but nonetheless defining Others, non-Muslims. “Muslim culture” unsettles the internal orderliness of an equally monolithic “West”, something which is nothing more than ahistorical wish-fulfilment on the part of ideologues on both sides. There lurks the epistemic danger of understanding culture as something static and fixed. The notion of Islamic civilisation and culture since 9/11 has been stripped of its complexities, with debates surrounding them from foreign policy to the politics of dress. In the wake of 9/11, Muslims across the globe are increasingly finding ways of empowering themselves through a reaffirmation of their religious faith, particularly in the realm of the public sphere. They are to choose between the sacred and secular components of their identity. These separate mechanisms of faith and secularism which, as Judith Butler observes, may well be ‘a fugitive way’ for certain kinds of ‘religion to survive’, are meshed together with the politics of representation and counter-representation of Islam in the framing of identities.

Timothy Fitzgerald in *Discourse of Civility and Barbarity* opines that ‘religion is a modern invention which authorises and naturalises a form of Euro-American secular nationality. In turn, this supposed position of secular rationality constructs and authorizes its “other”, religion and religions’. Borrowing Robert Gleave’s words in “Should we Teach Islam as a Religion or as a Civilisation?”, it can be said that in these days we can see a movement ‘from

an uncritical acceptance of the category of “religion”, to-wards a critical interrogation of “religion” as a category’. From the post-Rushdie affair to the wake of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’, religion, culture, race, representation run the risk of being employed in dis-loyalty or threat or something which is artistically compromised. In Europe, in spite of the state-sponsored approach of multiculturalism, Muslims are the ‘enemy within’ as *Kulturkampf* runs as a presence of the binary of ourselves and the Other, proclaiming the pre-eminence of a secular self that is culturally hegemonic. Since 1960 Christian fundamentalism surfaced as a challenge to secularism and later revivalist Islam percolating a presence in the public space only to assert the construction of what it takes to be Muslims. The complexity of the conflation between ethnic and religious identifications can be understood by means of the way identity is itself subject to stereotyping and monolithic representation.

I look at texts produced before and after 9/11 by novelists with Muslim backgrounds who are living in Britain. Some of them are less keen to identify as Muslim like Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Ahdaf Soueif, Nadeem Aslam and Zia Haider Rahman, and some of them are practising Muslims and publicly identify themselves as Muslims like Leila Aboulela. Novelists under discussion with a particular focus on the overlapping parameters of religion, representation, recognition and secularism distinguish between Islam as a religion and Islam as a culture. Salman Rushdie’s *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), Robin Yassin-Kassab’s *The Road from Damascus* (2008), Hanif Kureishi in *The Black Album* (1995), Nadeem Aslam in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), Qaisra Shahraz’s novel, *The Holy Woman* (2001), its sequel, *Typhoon* (2003), Leila Aboulela’s *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), Zia Haider Rahman’s 2014 novel *In the Light of What We Know* and Ahdaf Soueif’s 1999 novel *The Map of Love* explore some of the consequences of splitting Muslim culture and thinking from what

is perceived as an always-secular modernity and pick up on the monolithic and static depiction of almost all Muslim political organizations as a threat to secular western societies.

Some of the questions which the research work will address include the following:

I. How do the tensions between an individual subjectivity and a communitarian adherence to culture and faith manifest themselves in these coming-of-age narratives, as they negotiate between the pull of a liberal individualist lifestyle and that of family, community and mosque, between speaking as an 'I' and on behalf of a collective?

II. How has the politics of representation affected the way in which Muslim fiction is received?

III. To what extent have the questions of faith and religious identity been addressed in these novels?

I argue that British Muslim identity is not necessarily the clash of cultural values; rather, it negotiates the capacious dwelling of "being" British in accommodating differences within.

British Muslims' sense of belonging and communitarian adherence is often central to the framings of culture and identity; the dynamic interplay of differences and similarities exhibit the holistic nature of the revealed *din* within the dissonant realities of everyday religion.

Young Muslims' version of "living Islam" is evinced through the ontological premise of *tawhid*, personal piety and public practice of religious faith. The increasing religiosity among British Muslim young people post-9/11 foregrounds how religious faith is understood and practiced in reproducing interfaith communication as a marker of integration in a multicultural society. The shared sense of belonging, culture, and differences encompasses the frontiers between belief and doubt by navigating the fascinating detours of religious faith and loyalty to Britishness. Caught in the conundrums of a cultural divide, generalizations of

being a Muslim, and attenuated respective faiths, the "felt awareness" of British Muslims incur the otherwise subversive signification of the dominant metaphors of Islamic reality. A renewed understanding of the site of the post-secular beyond the reified signposts of European Enlightenment could also offer us newer ways to understand how the public sphere and its space of policymaking need not divorce itself from the realm of faith and religion but must make inroads into that interstitial space that connects the community with the more inclusive elements of collective faith vis-à-vis ideas of the *umma* in Islam. The thesis has attempted to show how the stereotyping of the resurgence of faith as a counter to progressive modernity needs to be rethought in order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of what it means to gesture towards the ethical futurity or the democracy-to-come that would entail the sense of an unconditional hospitality (or an unconditional welcome) beyond the finitude offered by the binaries of the personal and the public, the secular and the religious, the one and the many.