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**COMMUNITY, IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE
IN SELECT CONTEMPORARY BRITISH
MUSLIM FICTION**

Thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of Arts of Jadavpur University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in English**

by

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Certified that the Thesis entitled

Community, Identity and Resistance in Select Contemporary British Muslim Fiction submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my own work carried out under the supervision of Dr.Rafat Ali, Associate Professor of Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata; and neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.



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are distinct concepts that need separate research and geographic emphases. The broad idea of Islam as deen (as in deen-al-haq or deen-al-qayyim, as the religion itself is referred to in the Qur'an) cannot be co-opted within the narrow confines of culture itself, and the complexity of the conflation between the two focuses on the overlapping variables of religion as a historical phenomenon—a contingent 1400-year-old reality, Qur'anic faith and prophetic practices have to be critically distinguished from the embedded connotations and discourses of religion/culture widely understood in our everyday parlance of colonial modernity. Over the past two centuries, the practice of Islam has undergone changes that distinguish it from its preceding 1400-year history. In the aftermath of colonial modernity's emergence in the late eighteenth century, Muslims have turned to their religion as a source of intellectual resistance against imperialism. Under several imperial, cosmopolitan, and multifaceted cultural establishments—from the Umayyads and the Abbasids in the seventh century, the Fatimids and Seljuqid during the European Middle Ages, and Zangid, Ayyubid, Mamluks, the Safavids, the Ottomans, and the Mughals in the fourteenth century—the temporal and spatial appearance of Islam has

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DEDICATION

To my Maa, late Bushra Begum for everything

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INTRODUCTION

The Location of Islam

Islam as a religion and Islam as a culture are two different entities and realms that need to be studied and located differently. The broad idea of Islam as *deen* (as in *deen-al-haq* or *deen-al-qayyim*, as the religion itself is referred to in the Qur'an) cannot be co-opted within the narrow confines of culture itself, and the complexity of the conflation between the two focuses on the overlapping variables of religion as a historical phenomenon—a contingent 1400-year-old reality, Qur'anic faith and prophetic practices have to be critically distinguished from the embedded connotations and discourses of religion/culture widely understood in our everyday parlance of colonial modernity. Over the past two centuries, the practice of Islam has undergone changes that distinguish it from its preceding 1400-year history. During the late eighteenth century, with the rise of colonial modernity, Muslims have utilized their faith as a means of ideological opposition against colonialism. Under several imperial, cosmopolitan, and multifaceted cultural establishments—from the Umayyads and the Abbasids in the seventh century, the Fatimids and Seljuqid during the European Middle Ages, and Zangid, Ayyubid, Mamluks, the Safavids, the Ottomans, and the Mughals in the fourteenth century—the temporal and spatial appearance of Islam has shifted its established boundaries to a monolithic site of confrontation against the dominance of European imperialism. Furthermore, the European Enlightenment asserts religion into a private space by a non-negotiating stance of the non-Western yardsticks of modernity, which has resulted in a vengeful return of the repressed alterity in other sites of resistance. The European colonial modernity's confrontation with Islam's multifaceted discourse systematically fetishizes the

Islamic epistemological imagination in bringing out the reductionist reading of Islamic reality.

In contrast to the Western stereotypes surrounding Islam as a religion, rather than a culture that adheres to the idea of a community, the thesis attempts to locate Islam in terms of the concept of the *umma*, which suggests the transreligious and trans-identitarian kernel of the Islamic faith that cannot be co-opted within the idea of religion as understood through the framework of the Western secularist thesis. The *umma* or the kernel of a trans-identitarian community is premised on justice and truth that rewrites the contours of religious identity and its enunciation within the Eurocentric ways of understanding the Islamic faith. The Islamic epistemology and the colonial interfaces are brilliantly exemplified in works such as *Oriental Renaissance* by Raymond Schwab, *Orientalism in Crisis* by Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Anthropology and Colonial Encounter* by Talal Asad, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* by Maxime Rodinson, *Islam in European Thought* by Albert Hourani, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* by Bernard Cohn, *Early Orientalism: Imagined Islam and the Notion of Sublime Power* by Ivan Kelmar, and *The End of Two Illusions: Islam After the West* by Hamid Dabashi. The pervasive onslaught of European colonial modernity during the Enlightenment dismantled the Islamic cosmopolitanism that Muslims enunciated and practiced over many centuries. Under colonial duress, this becomes a one-dimensional cul-de-sac European event as it fails to realize the various syncretic and cosmopolitan elements in Islam that offer an alternative way of being and becoming in the monolithic European project of modernity. Islamic reality transmutes itself from the organicity of historical cosmopolitan disposition with a polyfocal and syncretic temper to what Hamid Dabashi argues is the “singular and exclusive site of ideological resistance to

colonialism”.¹The encounter with European colonial modernity not only altered the compatibility of sociohistoric plausibility, but also transformed the dynamics of the non-Western “habitations” of modernity²and coerced them to defend Eurocentric modernity in the name of reason, freedom, science, and progress. In addition, the process of secularization, which aims to separate society from religious differences, highlights an inherent problem with the binary oppositions between tradition and modernity, the religious and the secular, and Islam and the West. The European Enlightenment separated itself from the historical heritage it preceded and found Islam as the Other form of Christianity—an alien unreason. The cosmopolitan reality of Islam eventually gets reduced to the monolithic edifice of radical Islamism as some renowned ideologues, such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and other such revivalists, eventually appropriated the historic pluralism to enunciate a resistance against the onslaught of European colonialism. This reactionary practice was erected along the lines of a stringent and parochial identity politics that treaded the binaries of progress versus tradition and liberalism against radicalism.

Throughout history, from the Medinan period to the present day, the Islamic community of believers (*umma*) has retained its central importance and doctrinal significance, serving as a transnational/supranational union within the Islamic faith. It calls for the unity of the *umma* based on the concept of *din* and the *tawhidic* vision inspired by Qur’anic teachings. The Qur’an testifies that there is a wider family than the biological one, a family of faith based on truth and justice,³ a people who invited humanity to goodness and

¹ Hamid Dabashi, *The End of Two Illusions Islam after the West* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 18.

² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

³ *The Holy Quran*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 2000), 7:181.

right conduct⁴—a society that has a special status. The Qur’an says: “Ye are the best umma that hath been raised for mankind”⁵; not only is membership in the *umma* considered to be a privilege but its members are also enjoined to work together harmoniously: “And hold fast all of you together to the cable of Allah, and do not separate”⁶. In the Qur’an, the *umma* is not pictured as an ecclesiastical or monastic body, like the church, or an agnatic metaphor of kinship, like the “children of God”; rather, the transcendental and doctrinal connotations of this “Ecumenical Community”⁷ deals with the existential and ontological organicity of the faith-community as an idealized sacred imagination.

The Muslim construction of community does not derive its inspiration from an interaction between the institutional constitution of modern forms of knowledge and European modernity, but rather from the possibility of faith between the Sacred Text, (Qur’an) and the world. This dialectic of faith embeds itself not as a “political community”⁸ as advocated by Aristotle, or when Alasdair Mac Intyre rethinks Aristotle in his *After Virtue* in describing the “community” as epistemic and cultural “selves”; rather, the *umma* serves as a symbol of Islamic faith that goes beyond national borders and established religious divisions⁹. The encounter with European colonial modernity heightened the sense of belonging to a community of believers through non-institutional performative practices, while also prompting a reevaluation of the concept of Islamic piety. Scholars such as Charles

⁴ *The Holy Quran*, 3:104.

⁵ *The Holy Quran*, 3:110.

⁶ *The Holy Quran*, 3:103.

⁷ Hamza M. Zafer, *Ecumenical Community: Language and Politics of the Ummah in the Qur’an*(Leiden: Brill, 2020).

⁸ David J. Riesbeck, *Aristotle on Political Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Michael Walzer speak of “community” with regard to the production of the notion of “belonging” to a set of consensual values and norms that are critiqued by Robert Nozick, Bernard Williams, and Amartya Sen.

In *Identity and Violence*, Amartya Sen traces the concept of “community” as a matter of choice entrenched in political, moral, and cultural terms.¹⁰ Here, the idea of community no longer entails an imaginary realm pigeonholed into a sort of continuity by means of external ideological forces; it rather shifts the contesting definitions of a community premised on individual choice and assertion of identity. Other communitarians like MacIntyre and Will Kymlicka raise questions on the centrality of the concept of the “individual” by suggesting that a person’s choices are already circumscribed within the society in which they dwell.¹¹ Their choices have either widened the boundary of the self and the Other or they may draw boundaries. Here, the notion of self and the other gets its sum in the paradigm of belonging in a community under the formation of a community of choice instead of a community by birth and affiliation. The blurring of the line between the self and the Other in the Islamic religious faith demonstrates the belonging to the community of believers by witnessing *shahada* and the centrality of the oneness of God as a form of belonging and believing. The bonds of faith (*din*) within the *umma* have been a mainstay to the markers of the universal sense of belonging.

The key understanding of belonging to the community of believers is the Islamic faith and the witnessing of the Islamic faith (*Dâr al-shahâda*). Tariq Ramadan’s voice is important here as he develops the thought: “Those who know texts (*‘ulamâ’an-nusûs*) and those who

¹⁰ Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

¹¹ Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

know contexts (*'ulamâ'al-wâqi'*) must now work together, on equal footing, to set in motion this radical reform we call for".¹² Ramadan's reference to a communitarian adherence that gets to the soul of transcendence and experience is "a priori universal"¹³ through the contours of a "citizen's religiousness".¹⁴ The force in community binding that provides an allegiance to Islamic normativity and the faith in social mobility and cultural displacement is not a prearranged category; rather, this spatial piety foregrounds the absolutist integrity of acquiescence in *taqwa*, the oneness of God. The Muslim *umma* that works collectively as a transcendental signified believes in the *yu'minun bi-al-ghayb*—"believe in the Unseen"—the supreme authority of Allah the Unseen.

The reality of the Muslim *umma*, unlike the modern nation state, has its origin in the first community of the *as-hab* and the *taabi'in*. The spirit of the new order (as established by Umar), which symbolized the Muslim community as a whole, an inclusive polity making a palpable presence along with the reality of plurality under the renowned "Medinah Pledge," initiated by the Prophet, established an inclusive socio-cultural realm that embraced the diversity of faith communities, fostering awareness and acknowledgement of the religious Other. The Qur'anic concept of the religious Other, represented by the Ahl al-kitāb or the People of the Book, highlights the notion of "God's people" (*iyāal Allah*), a broader and more inclusive category that extends to those outside religious boundaries. This concept should not be confused with the European understanding of the "nation" and the "nation-state," which

¹² Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10–11.

¹³ Tariq Ramadan, *L'autre en nous. Pour une philosophie du pluralisme [The Other in Us: For a Philosophy of Pluralism]* (Paris: Presses du Châtelet, 2009), 31.

¹⁴ Tariq Ramadan, "Discursive Contours of a Secular Citizen's Religiousness and Islamic identity in Tariq Ramadan", in *Paroles d'islam. Individus, sociétés et discours dans l'islam européen contemporain*, ed. Felice Dassetto (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2000), 205–221.

erroneously links it to the Qur'anic verse (3:110) praising Muslims as the best community of believers.

Islam, Ethicality and Law

The idea of community, religion and the functional imperative of law can further be understood if we take a closer look at the etymology of Western ethics and the rise of community-based legal imperatives that surround the contours of faith and religion. Immanuel Kant proposed in the 18th century that the essence of religion is rooted in ethical principles, conscience, virtuous conduct, and morality. Kant goes on to say that it is the duty of every individual to belong to a community based on a shared end—“the highest good as a good common to all”.¹⁵ Kantian ethics, in other words, is not “individualistic” but inherently “communal”.¹⁶ Islam as a form of ethics (*akhlaq*) and aesthetics concerns personal behaviour, whereas law is more general and has divine/political authority. Morality and law are well inclined in the shariah that governs the ethics of religiosity. Talal Asad, in the *Formations of the Secular*, reasons that shariah as a legal imperative is inseparable from “ethics”.¹⁷ The fusion of law and ethics in the shariah, though problematic for the model nation state, is “not just concerned with law or morality; it has to do with a whole cultivation and education of the self and a way of relating to others”.¹⁸ Wael B. Hallaq, a renowned and contemporary scholar of Islamic law, extends this view and proposes that

¹⁵ Allen W. Wood, *Kant and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 166.

¹⁶ Wood, *Kant and Religion*.

¹⁷ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

¹⁸ “Talal Asad Interviewed by Irfan Ahmad”, *Public Culture* 27, no. 2 (76) (2015): 265.

One may even add that law defined not only the Muslim way of life, but also the entire culture and psyche of Muslims throughout fourteen centuries. Islamic law governed the Muslims' way of life in literally every detail.... It determined ... how they viewed themselves and the world around them. If Islamic civilization, culture, or state ever constituted a regime of any kind, it was one of nomocracy. There has never been a culture in human society so legally oriented as Islam.... Islamic law was not merely a legal system ... it was in addition a theological system, an applied religious ritual ... in short, a worldview that defined both Muslim identity and even Islam itself.¹⁹

In an Islamic society, the leitmotif of Muslim administration comes under the semantic registers of "laws" and "ethics" drawn from the Islamic legal and discursive tradition, which had entered into various kinds of rituals to practices like prayer (*salat*). Qur'anic hermeneutics not only culminate in the gifts of piety (*taqwa*), rectitude (*rushd*), and righteous conduct (*khayr*/goodness) for the community of "the purified faith" (*al-din al-khalis*) but also a sacred law (shariah) that regulates in detail all behaviour to become a man of faith (*mumin*) or a woman of faith (*muminah*). The submitters' (*al-muslimun*) effortless trust (*tawakkul*) placed in God's plan and providence with a nomological reading of the scripture bears a conflictual and contradictory relationship between the Islamic faith and democracy. The Islamists' politicization of shariah leads to the politicization of Islam and it projects a monolithic shariah in the form of an unmalleable code that has no basis in Qur'anic epistemology. The term "shariah" is often wrongly equated with Islamic law, which refers to the "Way of God and the pathway of goodness."²⁰ Its objective is "not necessarily the

¹⁹ Wael B. Hallaq, "Muslim Rage and Islamic Law (Justice Matthew O. Tobriner Memorial Lecture)", *Hastings Law Journal* 54 (2002–2003): 1706.

compliance with the commands of God for their own sake”, as such compliance is directed towards a greater purpose. In Islamic legal theory, the "dalil," which refers to the evidence, is how God conveys His way, the shariah. The Qur'an and Sunnah remain the two primary sources of legitimacy in this context.

Secularist Islam and the Western Framework of Religious Secularism

Talal Asad's work, *Genealogies of Religion*, provides a critical analysis of the concept of "religion" and reveals its deep-seated roots as a product of European colonial modernity. Asad argues that over time, the constructs of religion and secularism became intricately intertwined, with one assuming a despotic and dominant role while the other aimed to emancipate individuals from this domination. Furthermore, the category of "religion" is a construct specific to Christianity, created by European colonial modernity to establish the authority of the church over practices and beliefs of the colonial Other, imbued with a sense of historical significance. Asad's understanding of religion highlights the colonial inclinations of the Orthodox Church and centralized Christianity.²⁰ The advent of modernity in European nation-states was built upon a portrayal of religion as fetishized, which can be traced back to a long-standing history of secularity within Latin Christendom. Charles Taylor presents an alternative perspective to the conventional understanding that secularity emerged solely as a result of modernity. Instead, he locates the genesis of secularity in the religious transformations that unfolded throughout the history of Western Christianity.²¹ Therefore, the reified phenomenon of “Islam” as a hegemonic structure of the body politic with its religious faith poses a certain threat to the idea of secularism in the West. Cantwell Smith argues that

²⁰ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

²¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

“mentally making religion into a thing, gradually coming to conceive it as an objective, systematic entity” renders it as a monolithic belief system.²² This objectified Islam is a construct of radical structural alterity, which often explicitly contests the framework of religion through the material institution of the Church as an instrument of Christian epistemology under the European discourse of Enlightenment. Quoting Gil Anidjar is pertinent here:

And Christianity turned against itself in a complex and ambivalent series of parallel movements ... while slowly coming to name that to which it ultimately claimed to oppose itself: religion. Muchausen-like, it attempted to liberate itself, to extricate itself from its own conditions; it judged itself no longer Christian, no longer religious. Christianity (that is, to clarify this one last time, Western Christendom) judged and named itself, it reincarnated itself as secular.²³

The secularization of Christianity and the Christianization of secularity in the study of modernity/coloniality is symptomatic of the coloniality of knowledge that infuses the de-Christianization of Islam under the religious/secular binary.

Unlike Christianity, Islam does not revolve around a church, that is, a central sovereign epistemological power that coalesces ecclesiastical and mundane happenings together. Moreover, like Christianity, Islam is *not* a religion. The construction of the category of “religion” became integral to the binary of “Islam and the Christianity”, which was copulated on the structural differences of the framework of faith embedded in “*Ilm Usulud-Din*” (Fundamentals of *Deen*), “*Ilm al-Tawhid*” (the Oneness of Allah), and the “*Aqeedah*”

²² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962, and Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 51.

²³ See Gil Anidjar, “Secularism”, *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Autumn 2006).

(creed). The word *din*, though commonly used for faith/religion, is non-translatable and is very difficult to describe under the normative structure of religion. As Talal Asad argues in *Secular Translations*, it is not only the non-translatability of the Arabic language per se or the essence of being sacred but rather “the enunciation of divine virtues” within the Qur’an “whose full sense is not given in a dictionary” that requires cultivation.²⁴ Moreover, this can be attained not only by cultivating, nurturing, and reading the text but by feeling and living in it. *Din*, having an Indo-European origin, precisely meaning “that which is given” in old Persian, appears ninety-four times in the Qur’an only to affirm *tawhid*—unadulterated monotheism, the oneness of God.

The injunction in the Qur’anic verse “Ali Imran” where we find the engaging references to the word *din* entails the recognition of commitment to *tawhid*. It is an essence of the community in the context of the *din* of God in contradistinction to that of the Christians and Jews. Moreover, this is clearly reflected in Sura Kafirun,²⁵ where “*lakumdeenukumwaliyadeen*” (To you be your way, and to me mine) is enmeshed in a metaphysical ethos of something transcendent with the undercurrent of religious pluralism and tolerance. *Deenis*, what W. Montgomery Watt finds, “a whole way of life” that percolates the whole fabric of society, centring on the spiritual faith in God, His oneness, and the belief in the notion of seeking the organic wholeness of life as a processual one.²⁶ It is the very process by which the hermeneutics of epistemic assumptions finds Islam in essentializing divine (alternative modernity) underpinnings with absolutist positivism.

²⁴ Talal Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2018), 60.

²⁵ *The Holy Quran*, 109:6.

²⁶ W. Montgomery Watt, *What is Islam?* (London: Longman, 1968), 3.

The normative notion of Islamic body politic rests at the roots of sunnah and semantic engagements of the doctrinal essence of *tawhid*. Moreover, to witness that “[t]here is no god but God; Muḥammad is the Messenger of God”—the *shahada*—is the ultimate testimony to formulating a legislation revolving around piety. More clearly, this is tantamount to shaping the state of transcendence composed of the expression of “*tawhid*”: faith in the unity of the Creator “Who does not beget nor has He begotten”.²⁷ The idea of the unity of being and becoming is epitomized here as ontological and phenomenological consciousness with an organic correspondence in “everything” in space, knowledge, and time, as this consciousness emanates from Allah and returns back to Allah as an absolute reality in the Qur’an.²⁸ The essential ontology of *tawhid* as the epitome of Islamic reality is based on the phrase *lā ilāhā illā ʾllāh*, “There is no god but God”, with the unity of symbiotic knowledge in the oneness of and between “everything”. This underpinning of *tawhidi* ontology emerges as the divine law as Being towards the *tawhidi* epistemology culminating in the *tawhidi* phenomenology of Being to Becoming with the Qur’an and Sunnah. The *tawhidi* oneness of “everything” is central to the notion of the *shahada*, or “*witness to faith*”, and everything in Islam stems from the affirmation of the *Kalimah* (the formal content of the declaration of faith). This holds the essential organicity in the faith of Islam. The essential aspect of piety unfolds the nearness to the concept of monotheism and the nature of God in *Surat al-Ikhlās*, witnessing the facet of God’s nature. The “straight path” (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), a metaphor that is ubiquitous in the Qur’an, is the *din* and the monotheistic disposition of piety and prayer—a profound state of reliance, or *tawakkul*. This perspective highlights how the Muslim faith is often reduced to a collective identity, disregarding the inherent diversity

²⁷ *The Holy Quran*, 112:3.

²⁸ *The Holy Quran*, 2:156.

within the category of monotheistic faith. It emphasizes the dynamic nature of Islam, characterized by improvisation, adaptation, and invention, which contradicts the assimilative tendencies of secular modernity. The latter is often grounded in predetermined and monolingual discourses, resulting in ideological blind spots.

Islam is neither necessarily “a religious system”²⁹ nor a contingent reality but rather an essence based on *din*—aprocessual domain of Qur’anic hermeneutics. Islamic reality collapses the category of “religion” and exonerates itself from the political development of religious knowledge under the misplaced veracity of faith during the one-sided colonial promises of Enlightenment modernity. Unlike Christianity, there is no priesthood or authority in Islam. There is no church in Islam, and Islam does not augur the problem with modernity. The problem of modernity is that it turns the culture of epistemological pursuance into an institutional authority where the spirit of modernity is missing. Like modernity, Islam believes in change, but not in changing an institution; rather, the change bespeaks the divinity, oneness of God, the sanctity of the Holy Qur’an, and the nobility of Prophet Muhammad. The manufactured and forced binary of “Islam” and “secularism” is a trap of colonial modernity where the processual rubric of literary humanism (*adab*) decouples with European colonialism and Enlightenment modernity. This colonial modernity is a seeker of knowledge and experience but it misses the putative correspondence between *din* and the metaphysical underpinnings of divine *tawhid* in progressively epistemic imagination of divine worldliness. Islam is not a religion or a culture; rather, religion is a political concept. Faith is what connects the transcendent moorings of the body politic to the textuality of

²⁹ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 55.

tradition, history, and Western modernity, which betrays the canons of logic as well as the testimony of history.

Islam, as it appears, with its semantic distinction, is the exception where European colonialism finds the secular fabric of modernity by delinking the terminological niceties of the Muslim rationale of faith to survive. The transcendent essence of the Islamic faith conceptualizes the body politic where the order of the church, state, caliph, pope, court of law, parliament, and mundane authority *do not* incarnate the ostensible premise of authority. There is no human institution in Islam; rather, Islam is a faith with no mundane, ecclesiastical, or historical structure. In other words, to speak of Islam with the contingent Europe's Enlightenment modernity is an epistemological untruth of the binary of the fundamental sacred–profane distinction. Markus Dressler, by taking a cue from Talal Asad, poignantly contends that the “world-ordering machinery of secularism” establishes with the “political projects that are actively involved in differentiating between religious and secular spaces, symbols, bodies and practices”.³⁰ On the other hand, fetishized and rarified constitutive elements in conceptualizing Islam as a “culture” and the use of this qualifier as “religion” in common parlance are savage configurations born out of European Enlightenment and capitalist modernity.

Capitalist Modernity and the Representation of Islam

With the major forces of capital, European capitalist modernity, which was palpably the dominant modernity, created a paradigm for parallelism to the relationship between “faith”

³⁰ Markus Dressler, “Making Religion through Secularist Legal Discourse: The Case of Turkish Alevism,” in *Secularism and Religion-Making*, ed. Markus Dressler et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 187–208.

(known as religion) and “culture”. Moreover, the eminent misnomer of the semiotic concept of culture undergoes a paradigmatic shift with Huntington’s representation of “the Clash of Civilization”, Fukuyama’s articulation of “the End of History”, and Bernard Lewis’s Orientalist concoction of the manufactured fallacious opposition between “Islam and the West”. These fantastical liaisons attempt to expose the nativist bellicosity and formulated divides of cultural and civilizational boundaries with a pervasive, sustained demographic and categorical shift in the culturalization of Islam. Thus, “Islam” and “culture” alike become normative fixtures of historical, cosmopolitan, and civilization organicity that propagate the erroneous imagination of the binary of “religion” and “culture”.

Samuel Huntington’s essay, titled “The Clash of Civilizations?” in *Foreign Affairs*, delves into the probelamtics that emanates from the conflict of cultural differences and religious faith between various civilizations.³¹ Huntington, Fukuyama, and Lewis’s conceptualization of culture/religion/civilization framework “as interworked systems of construable signs” is the very process of “the interpretation of cultures” that they establish in their works.³² However, in locating culture/religion as “a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms”,³³ it is the need of the hour to pay careful understanding to how different communities find compliance with symbolic patterns to understand and evoke the disparate elements involved in culture/religion/civilization. What emerges, thus, is the historicity and culturization of Islam, which repudiates the propagation of the colonized imagination of the reified conceptions of Islam with its coercive faith as

³¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

³² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89; he is quoting Susanne K. Langer.

³³ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 19.

“culture”. Rather, it is quite the opposite, as Clifford Geertz argues, “It is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something.... Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape”.³⁴ Here, Geertz draws on the “Continent of Meaning” in exonerating himself of the responsibility of recognizing the means by which a community constructs meaning in culture/religion. Geertz encourages his readers to decipher the deeper implications of religion in interpreting “religion as a cultural system”.³⁵

Shahab Ahmed, a renowned thinker of Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University, also likes to draw attention to the conceptualization of culture/religion: namely, meaning. He contends that “to all Muslims Islam is meaningful”, whatever different versions of Islam may mean to them, and, unlike Geertz, he does not portend that “to understand culture is to interpret its symbols”³⁶ with an unaffected virtuous association; he demonstrates a keen interest in engaging closely with the self-conceptualization expressed by the native population, including their languages, vocabularies, and modes of reasoning and debate. Ahmed’s adjacency to John Bowen, who is “interested less in the overall cultural style” than in *din*, is nothing but the symptomatic conceptualization of Islam in uncovering the rubric of its “Continent of Meaning”.³⁷ The notion of the continent is “continuous, connected and contained”³⁸ if this essence is

³⁴ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 20.

³⁵ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 90.

³⁶ Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 249.

³⁷ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 20.

³⁸ Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 250.

demographically, topographically, and climatically prismatic in nature. Geertz's notion of culture discerns and underlines the specific nuances of affiliated meanings and generic essentialization in deciding the friction and resistance of larger social structures of what William H. Sewell Jr. argues as the "semiotic community" by invoking the structured "semiotic logic".³⁹

What becomes clear is that Islam is a discourse of faith, not a religion, and it should not be looked at as a cultural system under the impact of intense globalization in the true sense of the term. The idea of culture not only banks upon the locally determined social production of meaning but also finds an equal connotation associated with *umma* (community) with a potential source of conflict. Moreover, culture attempts to assert itself in terms of a priori territorial and hermeneutic markers that refuse to acknowledge the liminality embedded in its "other" contested sites. A fundamental distinction persists between "culture" and "civilization," with civilization encompassing intercultural tendencies, sectarian inclinations, and extensive historical narratives, while culture is rooted in localized meaning creation. The evaluative assessment of the civilizational foundations of "Islam" is believed to have been influenced by a colonial and colonized imagination, reflected in the contrasting construction of the indispensable reactionary counterpart to "Western civilization."

Although many organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jamaat-e-Islami attempted to create an Islamic body politic in defending the integral Islamic tradition of the *tariqa* as well as the shariah, it is crucial to envision the Islamicity of *umma* and the civilization tension of the sacred along with worldly imaginations. The civilization formula of Islam and the West is what Walter D. Mignolo, an Argentine semiotician, argues is the

³⁹ William H. Sewell Jr., "The Concept(s) of Culture", in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 35–61.

“gnoseological invention”⁴⁰ (not a “representation”) structured in the binary logic undergirding the idea of Western civilization. We have to extricate ourselves from these binary illusions in order to administer the “subjective and intersubjective”⁴¹ correspondence of the same. The structural opposition is a kind of trap that creates what Deepa Kumar, an Indian American scholar and activist, contends is “an essentialized West”.⁴²

The genealogy of this constructed binary is also categorically described in Hamid Dabashi’s scholarly work, *The End of Two Illusions*, published in 2022. Dabashi dismantles the delusions fabricated between two fetishized abstractions: “Islam” and “the West”. During the European Enlightenment, Dabashi contends that “the West” emerged as an ideological commodity and a civilization in foregrounding the ascension of globalized capitalist modernity as an epicentre, whereas Orientalist ideologues equally put together the false abstractions in shaping some inferior civilizations such as China, India, Latin America, Africa, and the Islamic world.⁴³ Moreover, this prototype of such civilizational hostility in the “works of Huntington, together with those of Francis Fukuyama, Bernard Lewis, and Alan Bloom, demonstrate a collective fear of losing the stronghold of white Christian supremacy”.⁴⁴ The presumed opposition between “Islam” and “the West” conforms to the era of globalized capital when “a fictive center and a global periphery”⁴⁵ entails corrosive forces of the dual construction of “Islam and the West” by virtue of its power and hegemony. Islam

⁴⁰ Dabashi, *The End of Two Illusions*, 2.

⁴¹ Dabashi, *The End of Two Illusions*, 2.

⁴² Dabashi, *The End of Two Illusions*, 2.

⁴³ Dabashi, *The End of Two Illusions*, 2.

⁴⁴ Dabashi, *The End of Two Illusions*, 14.

⁴⁵ Dabashi, *The End of Two Illusions*, 14.

serves as best-suited machinery to serve the colonial interests of “The West” in positing “Islam” as a “religion” precisely “as a cultural system” having a civilizational entity and an epitome of inexpugnably semantic connotations to the available signposts of European colonialism.

The traditional civilization of Islam, a kind of governance, a *fard kifaya*, a collective enterprise, and a lesser obligation to piety, *fardayn*, betrays the patterns of faith as body-Islamic, and it mutates towards the body politic of the theo-political federation of accepted religion and state, which formulates the Islamic nation state treating faith in, as what Michael Muhammad Knight feels, a “zero sum game”.⁴⁶ The normative processes of faith as a religion and the garb of culture and civilization arise from and through the designation of the *différence* between the place of Enlightenment (the West) and the fundamentalist civilizations of the East. The Islamic faith and its practice hold a significant focus on tariqas, which are spiritual paths that follow the teachings of the Qur'an, the divine law of shariah, and the exemplary life of Prophet Muhammad (*sunna*). This creates a harmonious relationship between *din* (Islamic faith) and *dunya* (worldly affairs), where the Islamic faith embraces contemporary practices while maintaining a sense of complete reliance on the divine will (*tawwakul*) and unwavering devotion to Allah through normative ritual practices (*ibadat*). Moreover, Islamic faith encompasses both the inner/private (*batini*) and outer/public (*zahiri*) dimensions of belief and practice, blending elements of shariat (law), *tariqat* (inward progress), *haqiqat* (truth), and *ma'arifat* (gnosis). This holistic approach to faith allows for a balanced and comprehensive spiritual journey within the Islamic tradition.

⁴⁶ Michael Muhammad Knight, “The Taqwacore Version”, *Critical Muslim* 2 (April–June 2012): 75.

Islamic epistemology, grounded in a Qur'anic worldview, harmonizes discursive, rational knowledge (*ilm*) and intuitive, experiential knowledge (*ma'rifa*) acquired through spiritual practices. This integrated approach acknowledges the prevalent use of metaphorical expressions within the Islamic tradition. The profound realization and personal encounter with the oneness of God (*tawhid*) profoundly influence the Islamic perception of knowledge. The combination of outward observance (*shariat*) with inner enlightenment (*tariqat*) calls upon the followers to follow the path of Prophet Muhammad, bridging the realms of mystical knowledge (gnosis) in an ongoing and infinite manner, seeking a visceral experience of continuity and a profound connection to the Divine.

Islamic Revivalism and the Return to the Religious

In response to the dichotomous constructions of “tradition” and “modernity” in foregrounding the global Muslim identity, a group of Muslim reformers and revivalists including Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Iqbal, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, and Mawlana Mawdudi broadened the spiritual and temporal fields of activity including social behaviour, politics, and economics, as Mawdudi maintains that Islam “provides a complete code of action to mankind”.⁴⁷ To judge Islam and the Prophet of Islam on the merit of Christianity is to incur a fallacy since the Qur'an rejects the separation between the church and the state, and there is no such church or institutional authority in the Islamic faith. The entrenched theories of modernization and secularization invite the role of religious faith in framing the relationship between traditional values and modernity as a political doctrine. To this, Talal Asad's observation is pertinent, as he upholds that, despite its essential ambiguity, modernity is now a universal political-economic “project”:

⁴⁷ Wahid Bakhsh Sial Rabbani, *Islamic Sufism: The Science of Flight to God, in God, with God, by God and Union and Communion with God* (Lahore: Sufi Foundation, 1984), 145–146.

It is right to say that “modernity” is neither a totally coherent object nor a clearly bounded one, and that many of its elements originate in relations with the histories of peoples outside Europe. Modernity is a *project*—or rather, a series of interlinked projects—that certain people in power seek to achieve. The project aims at institutionalizing a number of (sometimes conflicting, often evolving) principles: constitutionalism, moral autonomy, democracy, human rights, civil equality, industry, consumerism, freedom of the market—and secularism.⁴⁸

In more rough terms, the *habitus* of religious faith, which carves for itself an alternative sphere to the typical binary of institutionalization, unsettles the European secular imagination. The structural hermeneutics of the Islamic faith read the tropes of Qur’anic proposition as the central signifier of Islam that engages with sign, symbol, signification, and *tawhid* under the contemplation of the signs (*ayat*) that God has placed in the world. Some theologians find the linguistic signs inscribed in the Qur’an as *al-Qur’ān-al-tadwīnī* (the written Qur’an), while the signs in the natural world are the cosmic Qur’an as *al-Qur’ān-al-takwīnī*. What emerges is the conceptualization of Islam as a continuous process of signification, having a parallel to the notion of *ijma* (consensus) in recognizing the signs bearing an essence to believers, the Muslim *umma*. Like Geertz, Waardenburg’s idea of “signification system” pays hardly any attention to the production of meaning as he proposes that “the networks of signs that constitute Islam can be read, interpreted, and practiced in different ways in different Muslim societies, depending not only on the intentions of the interpreters, but also on contingent historical, infrastructural, and socio-political factors

⁴⁸ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 13 (emphasis is in the original).

obtaining in these societies”.⁴⁹ Waardenburg’s postulation of the independence of the sign also gets a parallel as he sees

Islam, in the first place, as an empirical historical and social reality linked to the presence of Muslims who made and maintain it. Furthermore, especially where the study of Islam as a religion is concerned, I see it as a set of norms (religion, morality, law) of what I call normative Islam. But third, I also see Islam as a tapestry of meanings and values by which people communicate with each other and that is spread over reality, giving it social meaning. Islam functions in this way not only as a law or doctrine but also as a “signification system” consisting of a number of elements that convey meaning as signs and symbols of things that may become “Islamic” discourse.⁵⁰

He divides “normative Islam” and “practiced Islam” based on communitarian adherence and the temporal/spatial bordering as factual *sui generis*. For him, normative Islam comprises the proscriptions, norms, and values that are recognized as mandatory by the community.⁵¹ These are taken from the basic normative texts, mostly with what is held to be their authoritative interpretation by the “*ulamā*’ and *fuqahā*’” whereas practised Islam stands on “all those forms and movements, practices, and ideas that in fact, empirically, have existed in Muslim communities in different times and places that have locally been considered ‘Islamic’ and consequently legitimate”.⁵² Therefore, the paradigm of tradition/modernity and religion becomes the otherwise circuitous proclivity of European colonial modernity. The binary of

⁴⁹ Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims as Actors: Islamic Meanings and Muslim Interpretations in the Perspective of the Study of Religion* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 79.

⁵⁰ Waardenburg, *Muslims as Actors*, 30.

⁵¹ Waardenburg, *Muslims as Actors*, 72.

⁵² Waardenburg, *Muslims as Actors*, 72.

“tradition versus modernity” frames alike the counterintuitive ideological contestation and the epistemological violence produced and sustained after the cataclysmic events of 9/11. Islam as a signifier unfolds and exacerbates the parallel dialogues of “being a Muslim-in-the-world”⁵³ with the militant ideologies of Osama bin Laden, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, former US President George W. Bush, and former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Umma and the Community of Faith

The Islamic *umma*, according to Talal Asad, is “not an imagined community” but a “theologically defined space enabling Muslims to practice the disciplines of *din* in the world”.⁵⁴ Asad emphasizes the “imagined” states, which connote the different “modes of being and acting” and the Islamic *umma* necessitates individuals who are “self-governing but not autonomous”.⁵⁵ This is neither a state, an ideological/political community, nor what Victor Turner calls “performative reflexivity” as a “condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members, acting representatively, turn, bend, or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, and codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public ‘selves’”.⁵⁶ This process gives rise to a reflexive fabric where symbols and codes become integrated into the fabric of traditional religious culture and are encountered in everyday life's shared spaces. It aims to “culturalize” Islam, seeking to navigate a dynamic category within the context of a globalized world view. The Muslim *umma* revolves around God’s omniscient *uluhiya* (divinity) and omnipresence along with Muslims’ consciousness to

⁵³ Hamid Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World* (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2013).

⁵⁴ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 197.

⁵⁵ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 197.

⁵⁶ Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ, 1986), 24.

din. The recovery of the sacred that is integral to the faith-centred community—a kind of *al-Mujtama'a* (Arabic word for society) is a continuum between the individual and the righteous collective with an affirmation of *La Hawlaw La QuwattailaBillah* (there is no power or strength except from Allah).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr finds a vertical relationship between the modern world and Islam. Sacred patterns of Islamic faith and modernity on Earth are interrelated, whereas Tariq Ramadan and Bassam Tibi paint a horizontal relationship between the two. For Ramadan, communication and cooperation between believers and non-believers are essential through a structural and processual dynamic between individual acts and communitarian adherence.⁵⁷ For Nasr, the abode of Islam and *umma* are intimately related as the abode of Islam is “the geographic area in which the Islamic umma lives as a majority and where Islamic Law is promulgated and practised, although there may be other *umam* (plural of umma) such as Jews and Christians living within its borders”.⁵⁸ Nasr proclaims that there is no such notion of “secular” community, whether it be democratic, liberal, communist, or communitarian. What emerges is that the metaphysical communitarian framework provides an alternative system of dynamic stability and non-institutional marker of critical register along with the “ontological presupposition”⁵⁹ of religious subjectivity.

At this point, Manzooruddin Ahmed claims that “the idea of contract permeates the basic concepts of Islam” and “the universal character of the umma distinguishes it from other

⁵⁷ Tariq Ramadan, *What I Believe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10–17.

⁵⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper-San Francisco, 2002), 163–166.

⁵⁹ Saba Mahmood, “Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (2009): 862.

kinds of community”;⁶⁰ on the other hand, Peter Mandaville further goes on to say that “many Muslims do not see global processes simply as a means by which to bridge the differences and distances between them, but rather as an opportunity to critically engage with the question of who, what, and where Muslim political community can be in the time of translocality”.⁶¹ The Muslim *umma* as a collectivity of believers founded in seventh-century Medina though provides a rejoinder to the established tropes of modernity and seeks a shift in the level of the prolonged assumption of abstractions of fetishized modernity with the particularities of belonging and believing. The theologian Paul Tillich, one of the twentieth century’s greatest theological thinkers, in his discussion in *Dynamics of Faith*, justifies: “Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man’s ultimate concern.”⁶² Tillich’s “ultimate concern” is derived from the theology of religious phenomenology, which points to the abstraction they represent. Tillich contends that sacred symbols entail the nature of the divinity toward which they gesture in engendering an encounter with the infinite. The Muslim *umma* participates in the divinity to which they gesture, intersects with a secular semiotic fashion, and coterminously stays alive within secular modernization. To be obvious, non-ascriptive categories such as faith, rights, and community give rise to an unorganized subjective notion of anonymous collective energy. Moreover, it is much beyond Durkheim’s “effervescence”⁶³ that describes the affective arousal and social conformity mediated through the ritual.

⁶⁰ Manzooruddin Ahmed, “Umma: The Idea of a Universal Community”, *Islamic Studies* 14, no. 1 (1975): 28–29.

⁶¹ Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001), 115.

⁶² Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1958), 4.

⁶³ Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls, ed. S. Lukes (New York: Free Press, 2014), 215–216.

Victor Turner's understanding of *communitas* can be discussed at this intersection to get a sense of the social framework often connoted as a community. In *The Ritual Process*, Turner subtly develops his notion of *communitas* by distinguishing between three different types: existential, normative, and ideological. Existential *communitas*, which is absorbing and spontaneous, is also a fleeting one. Turner argues that this type of *communitas* "can never be adequately expressed in structural form, but it may arise unpredictably at any time between human beings who are institutionally reckoned or defined as members of any or all kinds of social groupings, or of none".⁶⁴ Normative *communitas*, the very structure that Turner emphasizes, *communitas* subverts, is the systemization of existential *communitas* as it is "organized into a perduring social system".⁶⁵ Moreover, the ideological *communitas*, unlike the existential *communitas*, which is caught up in structure, "is the way in which it polarizes the general and particular, the universal and the local".⁶⁶ Within ideological *communitas*, a specific symbol within a ritual context in which *communitas* arises at once conveys the "Great Tradition" (mythical, ritual, and traditional legacy) and, at the same time, the local "Little Tradition" (local adaptation of the mythical and ritualistic practices).⁶⁷ What appears is that *communitas* is "a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal total and individuated human beings stripped of structural attributes" and therefore a "relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities".⁶⁸ It is a kind of anti-structural bond in the sense that they are egalitarian, unconventional, undifferentiated, existential, non-rational, immediate, and

⁶⁴ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 137.

⁶⁵ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 132.

⁶⁶ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 132.

⁶⁷ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 53.

⁶⁸ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 250.

spontaneous; it is “not institutionalized, it is not abstract.... Communitas does not merge identities; it liberates them from conformity to general norms”.⁶⁹

For Turner, *communitas* inverts, skips, and disregards structure. Turner’s observation of *communitas* determines the interstices of structural and routinized forms to the anti-structure of *communitas* with a purpose to re-enter, reframe, redirect, and re-vision the structures in which we live. The Islamic *umma* that is based on piety and shared divine consciousness proffers a consensus-based epistemology for the undergoing process of both singular and collective with the caliphal consciousness. In this spatial imaginary, the nation becomes synonymous with the community of the faithful—the ontological union of the testimony of faith (*al-shahadah*), God’s transcendence (*tanzih*), and immanence (*tashbih*). The roots of this type of *communitas*, I argue, should embrace critical thinking into the religious discourses of believers, ensuring an intellectual pluralism.

Towards Democracy: Islam in the Contemporary Era

Democracy has its root in political ideals and is integral to modernity, and it is a received notion of the Enlightenment that religious faith is a problem for democracy. However, sociologists such as Tocqueville, Durkheim, José Casanova, and Robert Bellah uphold that religious faith plays an important role in the social construction and development of democracy in civil society. The phenomenon of the Arab Spring, where Muslims protested for democracy, unsettles the “flawed assumption”⁷⁰ of Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington and the very arguments of incompatibility to some extent. Democracy, which is entrenched in capitalist modernity, bears the context of the concomitant colonial encounter in the Muslim

⁶⁹ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 250.

⁷⁰ Dabashi, *The End of Two Illusions*, 17.

world. It (the Muslim world) yearns for Enlightenment modernity's ambitions through the prism of colonialism, which is essentialized so much so that the *umma* never constitutes "agency". The agency of the Muslim *umma* has seriously been compromised by the insistence of mainstream Enlightenment modernity where the Muslim reality of *din* is transmuted into the Western critical imagination.

The normative tools of colonial modernity posit the institutionalization of the colonial condition that runs counter to the non-institutionalization of the shariah. Given the practice of homogenous colonial order, shariah echoes the necessary development of a "theodemocracy"⁷¹ in accordance with religious faith and a non-institutional nation state. It also offers a credible alternative to the dominant institutionalization of colonial lived experience. The ambivalent shadow of modernity collectively does not bemoan the absence of sustained alterity of divine faith, as Charles Taylor succinctly exhibits the transformative events in the early modern period of Europe: "The origin point of modern Western secularism was the Wars of Religion; or rather, the search in battle-fatigue and horror for a way out of them."⁷² The internal erosion of these certainties worked to undermine the ramifications of divine subjectivity in producing the oppositional markers—Islam/West, democracy/caliphate, and modernity/tradition.

Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* speaks about how religious faiths in America contributed to the growth of democracy,⁷³ and John Keane, too, in *The Life and Death of Democracy*, vindicates the conception of democracy, which was spotted not in

⁷¹ Syed AbulA'la al-Maududi, *Islamic Law and Its Introduction* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1955), 13–14; Youssef M Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (London: Cassell, 1997).

⁷² Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism", in *Secularism and Its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31–51.

⁷³ Alexis deTocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Washington Square, 1964).

Greece but in the ancient tribal assemblies of the Middle East.⁷⁴ Though the observations of Tocqueville and Keane postulate the roots of democracy, Islam does not endorse an institutional system; rather, the notion of mutual consultation (*shura*) is encouraged in the Qur'an. The concept of a civil contract (*aqd*) exists between the ruler and the ruled, involving a mutual commitment of support (*baya*) from influential members of the community, interpretive judgement (*ijtihad*), and Islamic juridical concepts of consensus (*ijma*) are the Qur'anic democratic connotations that work as the spots of spontaneous decolonization of Enlightened modernity.

Following the events of 9/11, Muslims worldwide are increasingly seeking ways to empower themselves by reaffirming their religious faith, particularly within the public sphere. This process often involves navigating the tension between the sacred and secular aspects of their identity. As Judith Butler suggests, this negotiation can be seen as "a fugitive way" for certain "kinds of religion to survive"⁷⁵, intertwining with the politics of representation and counter-representation surrounding Islam and the shaping of identities. In *Discourse of Civility and Barbarity*, Timothy Fitzgerald observes, "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"⁷⁶. Drawing from Robert Gleave's perspective in "Should We Teach Islam as a Religion or as a Civilization?," it can be observed that there is a growing movement "from an uncritical acceptance of the category of 'religion' towards a critical interrogation of 'religion' as a category"⁷⁷ in present times.

⁷⁴ John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 113.

From the aftermath of the Rushdie affair to the period following 9/11 and the war on terror, there is a danger of exploiting religion, culture, race, and representation in ways that can lead to disloyalty, perceived threats, or compromises in artistic expression. In Europe, despite the state-sponsored approach to multiculturalism, Muslims as the “enemy within” as *Kulturkampf*⁷⁵ runs as a presence of the binary of “us” and the Others, proclaiming the pre-eminence of a secular self that is culturally hegemonic. Since 1960, Christian fundamentalism has 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 Muslim. 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. In his writing, “Religion in the Public Sphere” on the post-secular sphere, Jürgen Habermas mapped the European instance of the secular public sphere as a departure from the normal course than as the standard in its habitual revolt against public religion.⁷⁶ This aberration, according to Habermas, is evident in the case of America, where political religion has a long pattern of actively being a part of the public sphere without being seen as a threat to democracy. Habermas imagines that there are possibilities of religion entering into the public sphere of the secular state. In the public sphere, the articulation of religious rhetoric should not find a split without a secularizing translation of religious overtones. Habermas finds that the religious citizen is differentiated by modern reflexivity through the discursive nature of the secular public sphere in a heterogeneous society.

Research Questions

⁷⁵ Geoffrey Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 3.

⁷⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 115–125.

Here in this research work, I look at texts produced before and after 9/11 by novelists with Muslim backgrounds living in Britain. Some of them are less keen to identify as Muslims 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, Robin Yassin-Kasab, and Qaisra Shahraz. These novelists are discussed with a particular focus on the overlapping parameters of religion, representation, recognition, and secularism, and how their works and ethical contours provide us with adequate pointers to distinguish between Islam as a religion and Islam as a culture, and how this informs the sense of community consciousness within the *umma* as well as belonging to the secular modern nation states. Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*, Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road from Damascus*, Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album*, Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*, Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman*, its sequel, *Typhoon*, Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*, Zia Haider Rahman's 2014 novel *In the Light of What We Know*, and Ahdaf Soueif's 1999 novel *The Map of Love* are the texts under examination delve into the repercussions of disconnecting Muslim culture and thought from what is perceived as an inherently secular modernity. They also shed light on the tendency to portray almost all Muslim political organizations as a monolithic and unchanging threat to secular Western societies. The research work addresses several key questions, some of which are as follows:

- I. How do the tensions between an individual and their chosen field of action and autonomy intersect with the communitarian commitment to culture and faith? Also, how do these tensions influence and shape coming-of-age narratives, as individuals navigate the contrasting forces of a liberal individualistic lifestyle on one hand, and the influences of family, community, and religious institutions, such as the mosque, on the other? I also wish to explore how these narratives reflect the struggle of balancing

personal agency and self-expression as an individual "I," while also grappling with the responsibility of speaking on behalf of a collective or community?

- 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?
- IV. How do these novels help to understand the ways in which a certain reconciliation might be sought between the supposed oppositional forces of Western modernity and the syncretic principles of the *umma* enunciated in ethical Islam?

Chapter 1 investigates the notions of religion, secularism, majoritarian politics, and communitarian adherence in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* and Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road from Damascus*. Both authors have openly acknowledged their ties to the Muslim faith, though they differ, of course, conceptually, in their views and reading of religious faiths and secular attitudes in delving deep into how world communities under the aegis of global capitalism lived in a relatively snug ambit of cosmopolitanism till it was disrupted by a series of events that changed the global world order and the idea of liberal democratic systems as the last bastions of peace and inclusivity. The exploration of both *The Enchantress of Florence* and *The Road from Damascus* interrogates cross-cultural relations through the theoretical lens of community in history with secularism.

Chapter 2 attempts to read and situate fundamentalism, history, and terrorism to show how they function among people, as portrayed by Hanif Kureishi in *The Black Album* and Nadeem Aslam in *The Wasted Vigil* in both the pre- and post-9/11 geopolitical milieu. Though both Kureishi and Aslam belong to a Muslim heritage, they are not practicing Muslims per se. Kureishi's *The Black Album* is important in terms of its representation of Islamism against a

neo-Thatcherite background in the context of the problematic onslaught of neoliberalism and secularism as an alternative form of religious and socio-political identity. I have tried to look at the links between religion and violence in the pre-9/11 socio-political climate and the rise of fundamentalism during and after the Rushdie Affair in 1989. In the second part, I have attempted to explore the historical association between war and fanaticism and how neoliberal capitalism is always in denial of its complicity in the very formation of fundamentalist religious movements and its different affective fields. In these novels, the memory of traumatic histories exemplifies the scale of human catastrophe in the time of widespread global Islamophobia. Through Aslam's *Afghanistan*, I look into the material sedimentations of war and terrorism that surpass the lived experiences of the human and the non-human in that geopolitically precarious area. The chapter shall also attempt to understand and locate how different transnational acts of terror form the resonances of a counter-hegemony in Western liberal democracy.

Chapter 3 discusses Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman*, and its sequel *Typhoon*, along with Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*, to further look into problematics and polemics that surround the post-9/11 scenario and the peculiar sense of precarity and ambivalence that was experienced by different sections of the Muslim immigrant population in Britain. Both Shahraz and Aboulela are British Muslim women writing their fiction by depicting Muslim women especially, their society, and religious faiths in a post-9/11 scenario. Though Shahraz explores aspects of race, gender, and cultural divides in her select novels to bring out the politico-cultural connotations and problematics associated with clothing, female modesty, and multiple identities, Aboulela is different in depicting her protagonist, who keeps or finds religious faith spiritually in strengthening the sense of piety, and in building an interconnectedness between the performance of religious actions and the creation of a self.

The problem of clothing in association with female subjectivity is highlighted in the novel, *The Holy Woman*, whereas issues of gender, society, and religion are problematized in Shahraz's other novel, *Typhoon*.

The questioning of agency, religiosity, and gender are different in both. The novels of Shahraz and Aboulela have been selected and explored by keeping in mind that they are quite different in attitudes towards their representations of women and men and social adherence through piety and God-consciousness. In doing so, I have also thoroughly discussed the Sufi aspect of *The Kindness of Enemies* through history in diagnosing the Sufi faith that Aboulela discusses in her novel, which highlights spirituality and materialistic modernity, and faith and present-day substantiality. The historical, socio-religious and materialist aspects of Sufi spirituality have been explored through a critical and historical method that, unlike modern historiography, attempts to understand its etymology and progress through cultural and temporal fields that move beyond the usual chronological historical templates. Aboulela, in structuring the religious narrative with a meaningful polyphony, which powers more of a Sufi voice and historical rationale in alternative perspectives with dissenting views, destabilizes the prevailing prejudices in the framing of discourses about religious faith and the secular narrative. The exploration of the feminist face of religion in intertwining the stereotypes of gender and religion delves into the misinterpretations, the division of reason versus religious faith, the semantic tools in penetrating the mysteries of Muslim women with concern for the realization of cultural otherness, racism, and cultural myopia. Aboulela has been emollient enough in claiming the embattled Sufi modernity with a pervasive production of stereotypes, obscurantism, and spiritual anomie. The devotional and religious aspects of history, historical estrangement, and alienation of Sufi spirituality, unlike modern historiography, in building

the past and the present have been explored extensively to contemplate the issues through a trans-materialist historiography and a differential critical lens.

Shahraz's literary sensitivity is structured within the social, and an absolute focus on the woman question and customs like forced marriage, celibacy, hijab, brutality in female sexuality, divorce, inheritance, and childbearing in the postcolonial milieu of rural Pakistan. Shahraz's work showcases the position of Pakistani women in the postcolonial rural context. It also brings to the fore the narrative of the feudal master working as a surrogate to the deceased colonizer and eventually evolving into the indigenous colonial bourgeois. She brings out the tensions between a liberal idea of individual subjectivity and devotional attachment to community, culture, and faith, and how the autobiographical form shapes and is reshaped by these tensions. Whilst the select novels of Shahraz form a subversive critical enquiry from within the limits of the patriarchal discursive framework that shapes a potential feminist agency, Aboulela builds a genuine attempt to narrate a particular mode of spiritual subjectivity with a certain degree of faith in the post-9/11 fictional world.

Chapter 4 examines Zia Haider Rahman's 2014 novel *In the Light of What We Know* and Ahdaf Soueif's 1999 novel *The Map of Love* to unearth the relationship between finance, identity, transnationalism, and history. Soueif hinges between the present and the past with an attestation of imperial power. To her, the past highly dominates and shapes the present with a shifting approach to history, as she finds no escape from history. Rahman writes his novel much after 9/11 to showcase the symbiotic relationship between the financing of war and life, with the contours of biopolitical life by understanding how the modern nation-state invests in a certain kind of political subject hood. Soueif, on the other hand, engages directly in the act of writing back against the hegemony of cross-cultural relationships through a focus on intimate and familial relationships; she looks to the past through the lens of imperial

historiography and transnational cartography in order to make sense of the present. Both novelists are placed in parallel to each other to bring out the distinctive differences in their attitudes towards the economic manoeuvrings of war, borders, and cultures, before and after the war on terror. Rahman and Soueif do not negotiate public manifestations of Islamic piety; instead, they dissect shared tropes and concerns in relation to the broader contours of geopolitical conditioning and the mechanism that contribute to their cultural fetishization of Islam.

Rahman offers an evocative and problematic enquiry into the relationship between finance and knowledge. He reflects on the obliteration of the political crisis at the centre of post-Fordist capitalism, which is defined by growing economic fetishism, inequality, and a pervasive sense of political intemperance over the accumulation process. In his novel, he makes us see the genealogy of economics and knowledge, whereas Soueif examines the ontology of nationalism with reference to the preoccupations of empire and conflict in historical consciousness.

In retrospect, the thesis shall also attempt to debunk the secularist thesis that essentializes the inherent syncretic alterity of Islam, and show how these specific novels work to demystify the “clash of culture” theory and relocate the oppositional realms of the *umma* in Islam and the forces of Western modernity in terms of an ethical opening wherein an unimagined futurity of unconditional onto-political hospitality and being could be gestured towards. What is significant about this research on the British Muslim narrative concerning the post-9/11 war on terror relates to the various conflicts over identity formations and the formation of Islam as a religious faith and cultural offshoot. The research continues to promulgate a vision of identities of the “self” and the “other” in navigating questions of being and believing through the dynamics of an overwhelming religious resurgence post-9/11.

Democratic nation state's interplay of faith, loyalty, and scrutiny under the alleged potential risks and moral panics in aligning the landscape about Islam redefine the notions of the community of believers. In this context of religious resurgence and community adherence, the separate mechanisms of faith and secularism locate the registers as "Muslim" rather than "Islamic". The projection of the global community as a supra-national organizing principle through the ontology of nationalism constructs a more capacious mode of being in the world that disturbs the ubiquitous desire for homogeneity in the wider episteme of European modernity. Community consciousness and citizenry in the British Muslim narratives in an evolving global multicultural context are rooted in modernity governed by their religious faith. They are "modern" by their faith that constitutes their "modernity", and the palpable shift towards regarding Muslims as the "enemy within"—a mass of jihadists is defined by what American investigative journalist Robert Dreyfuss finds as ill-conceived foreign policies of paramount neoliberal capitalist nations in the pre- and post-9/11 era.⁷⁷

The research seeks to disassociate the notion of *umma* between the differential epistemology of "Islamic threat",⁷⁸ "moral panics",⁷⁹ and the spatial alternative to secular neoliberal democracy. The evolving practices and separatist phenomenon of exclusionary practices based on religious and cultural differences stigmatize the gaze of a "culturally dominant"⁸⁰ other. It also brings out the structural fissures affecting Muslims, in particular in

⁷⁷ Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (New York: Metropolitan, 2005).

⁷⁸ Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 107.

⁷⁹ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972).

⁸⁰ Talal Asad, "Religion, Nation-state, Secularism," in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, ed. P. van der Veer and H. Lehman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 178–196.

attaining equal Britishness where a “common sense of belonging”⁸¹ and a willingness to “respect and cherish deep cultural differences”⁸² remain oxymoronic. The lack of mutual recognition and religious understanding generated by neoliberal practices of segregation, “differential inclusion”,⁸³ and moral panic witness a uniform shift in the assertion of Muslim subjectivity. It travels from the landscape of liberal multiculturalism to the marginalization and Othering of British Muslims by a dominant assertion of porous Muslim citizenship.

⁸¹ Bhikhu Parekh, “The Future of Multiculturalism”, inaugural address at the launch of the Centre for Research on *Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism*, University of Surrey, 9 June 2004.

⁸² Parekh, “The Future of Multiculturalism”.

⁸³ Gaia Giuliani, *Monsters, Catastrophes and the Anthropocene: A Postcolonial Critique* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 8.

Chapter One

Community, Religion, and Secularism: A Re-reading of *The Enchantress of Florence* and *The Road from Damascus*.

In an interconnected yet diverse world, the study of Muslim literature can provide valuable insights into the intricate relationships among Islam, communal identity, cosmopolitanism, religious dynamics, and secularism. In the first chapter, I explore the notions of religion, secularism, and communitarian adherence in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* and Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road from Damascus*. Both the authors have openly acknowledged their ties to the Muslim faith, though they differ, of course, conceptually, in their views and reading of religious faiths and secular attitudes. Salman Rushdie's literary journey began much before the apocalyptic event, called 9/11, whereas Robin Yassin-Kassab's literary oeuvre can be located only in its aftermath.

The chapter will try to investigate how world communities under the aegis of global capitalism lived in a relatively snug ambit of cosmopolitanism till it was disrupted by a series of events that changed the global world order and the idea of liberal democratic systems as the last bastions of peace and inclusivity. Incidents such as the decline of the Caliphate after the First World War, the creation of Pakistan, the formation of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in 1969, the rise of organizations such as Ikhwan and Jamaat-e-Islami before 1980—all, in a certain way, signalled the arrival of a different sort of ethos that significantly reshaped our understanding of liberal secularism and democracy. An overwhelming religious resurgence of Islam across global communities ushered in during that turbulent time in the form of these events—and with the emergence of the 1989 Rushdie affair and the incidents of 9/11 in the US and the 7/7 in the UK, the clash of beliefs between

the religious and the secular, and the believers and the non-believers—suddenly gains density and prominence all across the globe. This chapter attempts to diagnose the shifting registers of otherization within and outside the insidious kernel of race and ethnicity with/toward a particular religious group in the West.

I have developed a theoretical framework that aims to demonstrate the interconnected and interdisciplinary nature of concepts such as community, history, cultural memory, religion, and religious faith. Within this framework, I have drawn connections and identified parallels between political research and literary analysis. By examining both *The Enchantress of Florence* and *The Road from Damascus*, I have explored cross-cultural relations through the theoretical perspective of community in history and secularism. Additionally, I have delved into the profound conflicts inherent in religion and the appropriation of performatives for religious purposes, particularly emphasizing the “us and them” dichotomy. I would begin by approaching an introductory portrayal of the lives of the Jews, Christians, Muslims, and other communities who have long entered into a state of unending migration since the dawn of civilization within an unprogrammed and fissured multicultural milieu. Furthermore, considerable attention has been given to the examination of cross-cultural identity and race relations, particularly in the context of tracing ancestral roots during the era of imperialism. This focus becomes crucial in a cosmopolitan environment. However, significant events such as the Rushdie affair, the aftermath of 9/11, and the advent of the war on terror have complicated the ongoing discussions surrounding community, identity, religion, and religious faith. These discourses now face challenges in providing a diverse and globally interconnected representation of ambivalence regarding identity and difference in contemporary post-9/11 fiction.

In the pre-Islamic era, Egyptian pharaohs were admired as supreme human beings. Kingship, military powers, and political and religious powers were blended together with the emergence of temple communities in the fourth and late third millenniums BC. For the construction of temples between 2700 and 2400 BC, it was important to organize the labour resources from the pastoral mining people to the temples.⁸⁴ Thereafter, the temple communities emerged as differentiated groups. From the ancient age to the late Roman and Sassanian period of the Islamic empires, the Christian churches had appeared as autonomous institutions, and the Sassanian rulers modelled a policy established as the millet system.⁸⁵ As the Byzantine design called for the singularity of the church, the Sassanians made allowances for a multiplicity of religions and churches. They influenced the relationship between communities and the state in the early Islamic era.

During the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., the Middle East witnessed significant transformations with the Arab Muslim conquests. This period marked the introduction of Islam into Arabian society, bringing forth a new ideological foundation.⁸⁶ In this society, Prophet Muhammad formulated a Muslim community with belief, ethics, family, and commerce. The Prophet believed that “Jews, Christians, and Muslims follow one and the same book”⁸⁷ rather than different religious books. Craig Considine states that “in addition to encouraging Muslims and Christians to form bonds of solidarity, he [the Prophet Muhammad] advises individuals in each group to vigorously defend each other.”⁸⁸ People

⁸⁴ Ira M. Lapidus, “State and Religion in Islamic Societies,” *Past & Present*, vol.151, no. 1 (May1996):6.

⁸⁵ Lapidus, “State and Religion”,7.

⁸⁶ Lapidus, “State and Religion”,7.

⁸⁷ Craig Considine, “Religious Pluralism and Civic Rights in a ‘Muslim Nation’: An Analysis of Prophet Muhammad’s Covenants with Christians,” *Religions*, .vol.7, 15(March 2016):6.

⁸⁸ Considine, “Religious Pluralism”,6.

lived peacefully on religious grounds in a pluralistic and syncretic form of coexistence. Considine argues: “A special place is reserved in Islamic scripture for Christians as well as Jews. In the Qur’an, beliefs in the truth of Christian and Jewish doctrine are encapsulated in the term *ahl al kitab* (‘People of the Book’), or people who have received and believed in earlier revelations from the prophets of the Abrahamic tradition.”⁸⁹

As an act of rehabilitation, the Prophet sowed the seeds of fraternization among Jews, Christians, and Madinans. For their livelihood, they worked and helped each other in the everyday business of life. In order to strengthen their presence in Madinah and facilitate effective coordination in matters of religion and politics, the Prophet encouraged the participation of both Muslim and non-Muslim residents of the province. Through a process of public consensus, he presented the people with a written constitution that outlined the rights and responsibilities of all citizens. This constitution served as a gift to the community, aiming to establish a framework for harmonious coexistence.⁹⁰ This constitution espoused the freedom of religion, especially for the Jews, to whom this act afforded equal opportunity with Muslims in every sphere. In the Madinian social and political arena, communities relied not only on religious performatives alone, but also involved themselves in studying how religion interacts with other ethnic, cultural, and political forces. Prophet Muhammad migrated (*al-hijrah*) from Mecca to the city of Medina⁹¹ and became the ruler of a community (in June 622, that marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar).

After uniting Arabia and establishing a community of global extent, the Prophet promulgated a newly founded Islamic society based on the Quran and Sunnah and principles

⁸⁹ Considine, “Religious Pluralism”,6.

⁹⁰ Muhammad Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan,1992),12–14.

⁹¹ Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*,20–25.

such as *ijma* or consensus in Mecca and the Medinan community.⁹² The Prophet represented and propagated a moral order with compassion, goodness, and piety that became valuable virtues in an understanding of the community. He conducted the prayers and the armies, arranged the collection of taxes, fixed the laws, and brought justice to people.⁹³ Medinah was interestingly a space of syncretism, dissensus, and politics. People established themselves as a variegated and resourceful ideological group, not as a monolithic ethnic community. Submission of life, property, and children to the will of God was expected by the believers. People agreed to sacrifice their children as a gesture of total obedience. Thus, the faithful ones—the “People of God”, like the Christians and the community of believers—drew lines around themselves to exclude the others. An uneasy *modus vivendi* operated through the ages, and a stable, essentialized identity was used to rope people together under the umbrella of a heterogeneous group. The relationship between “Judeo-Christian” and Islamic society was similar to that of siblings imagining themselves to be alien in values, although they followed the same way regarding the necessity of ethics and God–human relationships.⁹⁴

Jews, Christians, Muslims, and other faiths as multiethnic, multicultural communities existed in a seemingly harmonious manner. Muslims and members of other eastern communities established a healthy relationship with those whom they variously termed as the “others”. Since the banishment of the Jews from England in 1290, the primary meetings of Britons with Jews were held in Istanbul, Algiers, Aleppo and other Islamic cities. In these cities, the British people were dependent on Jews for places to dwell and also for seeking

⁹² Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, 130–133.

⁹³ Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, 130–133.

⁹⁴ P. G. Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path between Two Faiths* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 10–32.

domestic help in organizing marketing and financial transactions.⁹⁵ Cultural equality, self-respect, and self-esteem were aligned with the community and culture. With a desire of converting the eastern Christians to the faith of the Protestants, Anglicans also entertained a dialogue with the Orthodox churches, and established a common passage against Catholic France and its Jesuit missionaries. The Britons also met some of the oldest Christian communities, namely the Nestorians, the Maronites, the Coptics, the Armenians, the Syriacs, and other “[n]ations and distinct Denominations of Christians.”⁹⁶

The concept of “community” bears myriad implications. Historically, a multitude of definitions and theorizations have surfaced to analyse the essentially contested idea of community. The privileging of the individual–state axis and inter-relationality with a socially derived subjectivity tend to be understood in terms of a backdrop within specific places and times. It can be analysed through the matrix of being a subject (active) or being an object (passive). Empirical social sciences have sought to find community as an object, downplaying the role of active social relations and experiences.⁹⁷ The usual meanings in the study of the community have always been slippery, complex, and multifaceted, covering a wide range of social phenomena.

Community is a major presence where the self is evolved and undone gradually. According to Benedict Anderson, nations are imaginary communities as their members would not be able to know their compatriots though they deem themselves as belonging to the same

⁹⁵ Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558-1713* (Oxford and New York:Oxford University Press, 2011), 7–10.

⁹⁶ MacLean and Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World*,22–26.

⁹⁷ Conrad M. Arensberg, “The Community as Object and as Sample,” *American Anthropologist* 63, no. 2(April1961): 241–264.

group.⁹⁸The term has unfolded gradually in defending its interpretation and reconfigured as a drifting course of endless becoming. The emergence of identity politics is bound to a specific historical moment. Hegel's dialectic, and its primary contention, which is the basis of all his studies, discovers that conflict and aporia are integrated and internal aspects of each identity. Identity, a protean thing, is continuously refashioned,⁹⁹ and thereby one's religious affiliation as a Muslim intersects with various other aspects of identity. Islam sees history based on religious terms and sees other people not essentially by their semantic or racial associations but by their religious identity. So, often, the references of the *ummah* of Jesus in Islamic scriptures are found when we explain Judaism and Christianity.¹⁰⁰ In Islamic liturgy, Sunni as well as Shi'i maintain a strong bond with the members of the community. Religious faith is what transforms believers into one entity.

Moreover, the belief system strengthens the tendency of the community to perceive God as its symbolic representation. The community, based on its religious acts, periodically regenerates itself gradually. The division of labour and differentiation in kind make women and men more dependent on the community than their presumably individualistic and atomized actions. Women and men live as members of associations—tribes, clans, and sects. Collective identity is the base and structure of society.¹⁰¹The Islamic *ummah* is restrained by solidarity to the Quranic words of spiritual oneness and sovereignty, the *sunnah* of the

⁹⁸ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁹⁹ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Williams, Patrick and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 392–403.

¹⁰⁰ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1993), 70–75.

¹⁰¹ Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, 12–14.

Prophet, and the recognition of the Divine Law (*al-Shariah*).¹⁰² Islam's multifaceted organization as advocated by Amin Malak, is noteworthy: "Islam constitutes not only a cardinal component of Muslims' identity but also becomes a prominent feature in the identity of the non-Muslims (be they Hindus, Zoroastrians, Jews, or Christians) who happen to live in Muslim communities."¹⁰³

For decades, scholars have tried to frame an adequate terminology for differentiating the diverse ideological tendencies within Islamic culture. There is a sense of a universal identity and of faith-based solidarity among ordinary Muslims all over the world in the time-space of *Ka'ba Qibla* orientation. If *Ka'ba Qibla* is thought to be the centre stage of Islam, then "no one can deny the glory of the caliphate, the might of the Ottomans or the transformative impact of modern Europe.... The caliphs and sultans—at least some of them—deserve their fame.... And above all, the story of Muhammad (a.s.) and early followers has been a linchpin of Islamic identity for fourteen centuries."¹⁰⁴ Now, the obvious question is: How did all those Muslims cultivate a coherent ambience while Europe, despite its Christian oneness, was so fractious and varied? Though the Quran is critical of some Jews and Christians, it also appreciated the generosity of other religious people, primarily Jews and Christians, to consummate the spirit of tolerance amidst religious pluralism. The Quran clearly indicates to that effect: "Verily, those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and Sabians¹⁰⁵—all who

¹⁰² Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan, *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 2005), 116–119.

¹⁰³ Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (Albany: SUNY, 2005), 4.

¹⁰⁴ Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 7.

¹⁰⁵ "The Sabians seem to have been a monotheistic religious group intermediate between Judaism and Christianity." See *The Message of the Qur'an*, trans. Muhammad Asad (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1984), 14.

believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.”¹⁰⁶ The underlying message it imparts is the recognition that the universe is not constructed around a single religion or nation. If that were intended by God, it could have been directly established. Instead, God desired the inhabitants of this world to possess diverse religious beliefs and to be comprised of numerous nations. This intentional heterogeneity serves as a catalyst for constructive and beneficial engagement, enabling individuals and communities to grapple with each other's perspectives and foster growth. Undoubtedly, disparities in ideas exist between the Sunni and Shi'i branches of Islam, as well as in the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants within Christianity, and similarly within Judaism. Here, John Lukas's statement is pertinent to some extent: “After all, everything a man does depends on some kind of belief. He will speak or act in a certain way because he thinks that this kind of speaking or acting is better than another.”¹⁰⁷

With the intervention of Western modernity, the conflictual relationship between historicity and religions suggest a vision that stems from several interpretations. Taking birth in a Muslim family automatically helps one to pick up their parent's confessional identity without necessarily endorsing the practice of one's faith, just like a Jew subscribes as “Jewish” without having the Halacha. The term “Muslim” proclaims ethnicity and communitarian adherence, but not essentially to the religious faiths. Islamic revelation showcases a theology by advocating a modern pluralistic belief that other faiths are not merely inferior manifestations of religiosity but are indicators of the innumerable forms of

¹⁰⁶ *The Holy Quran*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 2000) 62.

¹⁰⁷ John Lukas, *At the End of an Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 88.

individual and communal desire for the transcendental kernel of human existence. Islamic civilization does not use difference to frame ontological and epistemological distinctions between “nations or tribes”.¹⁰⁸ It does not consider differences as degenerative. Instead, the locus of differences enables us to recognize a universal humanity: “O Humanity [*Insan*]! We created You from a single (pair)/Of a male and a female,/And made you into Nations and tribes, that/Ye may know each other/(Not that ye may despise/Each other). Verily/The most honoured of you/In the sight of God/Is ([the one] who is) the most Virtuous of you.”¹⁰⁹ Differences rather than sameness enable us to have mutual recognition, and the absence of differences renders self-knowledge absolutely unattainable and elusive. Later, in the eleventh century, the famous jurist Al-Ghazali provides a compelling defence of the centrality of intellectual freedom, reason, and dialogue to the construction of religious meaning through a possible praxis of critical reasoning, or *ijtihad*. Further, Ibn al-Arabi, the most influential thinker of the second half of Islamic history in Islamic Spain, analyses the concept of divine unity through the lens of inter-religious reconciliation.¹¹⁰

The emergence of Islamic resurgence, the dissolution of the Caliphate after World War I, the establishment of Pakistan, the formation of the OIC, and the influence of organizations like Ikhwan and Jamaat-e-Islami collectively contributed to shaping a global socio-religious landscape. In the late 1970s, an Islamic resurgence was observed in the Muslim world. Islamism, what Daniel Bell calls a “return of the sacred”,¹¹¹ befell under the

¹⁰⁸ Asma Barlas, “*Believing Women*” in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an* (Austin, TX : University of Texas Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁹ *The Holy Quran*, 49:13.

¹¹⁰ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 207.

¹¹¹ Daniel Bell, “The Return of the Sacred,” in *The Winding Passage: Sociological Essays and Journeys* (New York: Basic, 1980), 325.

conditions of a two-fold crisis: one was “normative and relates to secular modernity, and the other is structural and relates to failed development.”¹¹² It is not a “religious renaissance”,¹¹³ but rather, a body in politics where the “religionization of politics”¹¹⁴ is important in the name of an imagined community, the ummah. It is a kind of “religionized political agenda, not a spiritual one”¹¹⁵ aimed at the remaking of the global world at large. It centres on piety, strict religiosity, Islamic dress, and restrictions in every sphere of life in order to combat unIslamic public activities and results in intolerance, political extremism, and violence among the sects of Islam. Arab ideology and practices, known as Arabization, bifurcated the Muslims and non-Muslims in their adherence to religious practices and regional traditions.¹¹⁶ Turkish influences in Central Asia and Arab influences in Southeast Asia were associated with political militancy. In the Arab Middle East, the impact of the Iranian revolution found some assertion in the Islamization of the Palestinian and Lebanese conflicts.¹¹⁷ Before 1979, Islamism was not prominent in these conflicts. The two fundamentalist movements, namely the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun), which owed its source to Egypt, and Wahhabism of the Arabs, had been the primary begetter of extremist activities. They started preaching and spreading *da'wa*, the word of Islam, with some philanthropic work to expand to armed uprisings.¹¹⁸ Since the 1970s, Wahhabism also

¹¹² Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 2.

¹¹³ Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 2–3.

¹¹⁴ Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 2–3.

¹¹⁵ Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 2–3.

¹¹⁶ S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books, 2003), 8–17.

¹¹⁷ Mansoor Moaddel, *Class, Politics, and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 249–255.

¹¹⁸ Francis Robinson, *Islam, South Asia, and the West* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 200–235.

advocated and bolstered their organizations across the Islamic world through fundamentalist exhibitions.¹¹⁹ In some Gulf states and Egypt, Salafi movements were observed. Salafists, inclined to be stricter Sunnis, hate mysticism and the adoration of saints across the world. The Ikhwan, a major part of Al-Saud forces in Arabia, attempted to escalate Wahhabi Islam as a stricter and original religious belief and became the state-sponsored ideology.¹²⁰ Both Wahhabism and the Brotherhood wanted to see Islam under the garb of political activism, which had a radicalizing effect on the Muslim world and beyond.¹²¹ In Morocco, the emergence of Islamism affected the democratization process. It stressed the importance of Islamization of society from the inside and outside, and Morocco became a caliphate with a constitution and society based on Islamic law. During the early years of the twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire, serving as the Caliphate's stronghold, emerged as a pivotal center of political influence for Muslims in the realm of international relations.¹²² Bassam Tibi argues that

the return of Islam in the shape of Islamism is not a return of faith but rather a return of the sacred with political claims. Islam never receded as a faith, but it no longer served as a vehicle of political legitimacy after the abolition of the caliphate in 1924 and the subsequent ascent of the secular nation-state throughout the Muslim world.¹²³

The Young Turks' revolution in 1908 had a significant impact on World War I as it bolstered their influence. Taking control of the Ottoman State, the Young Turks effectively dismantled

¹¹⁹ Francis Robinson, *The Islamic World in the Age of Western Dominance*, Vol.5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011),135–150.

¹²⁰ Robinson, *The Islamic World*, 135–150.

¹²¹ Robinson, *Islam, South Asia, and the West*, 199–202.

¹²² Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998),316–324.

¹²³ Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*,37.

the political authority of the Caliphate. The Ottoman Caliphate, which had endured for thirteen centuries as the last Sunni Caliphate of the late medieval and early modern era, was ultimately abolished in 1924. Throughout the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire underwent a gradual process of modernization. This transformative period ultimately led to the separation of the Ottoman order, which was rooted in Islam, in 1923. Additionally, the implementation of Kemalist policies in 1924 resulted in the abolishment of the Caliphate.¹²⁴ Turkey, after transforming itself into a secular state, established a relationship with the Jewish state of Israel. Islamists targeted the Jews and Zionists for instigating the decline and elimination of the Caliphate post-World War I, and in dividing the Muslim community across the globe into small and weak nations. Therefore, the global idea of a Muslim community in a postcolonial and post-Khilafat world confronts the particularist entity of new and emerging nation-states.¹²⁵

During the period of British colonial rule in India, the notion of a Muslim community gained significance as the promotion of a nation built on religious and ethnic identities became prevalent, preceding the partition of India and Pakistan. The All India Muslim League played a prominent role in safeguarding Muslim interests and openly challenged the legitimacy of Indian nationalism. On April 26, 1945, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then a high-school student in Bombay, penned a letter to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, expressing his thoughts on the matter:

Musalmans should realize that the Hindus can never and will never unite with us, they are the deadliest enemies of our Koran and our Prophet. You Sir, have brought us

¹²⁴ Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*, 52.

¹²⁵ Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1990), 10–12.

under one platform and one flag ... Our destiny is Pakistan, our aim is Pakistan ...
Nobody can stop us, we are a Nation by ourselves and India is a sub-continent ...
Being still in school I am unable to help the establishment of our sacred land. But the
time will come when I will even sacrifice my life for Pakistan.¹²⁶

This letter by Bhutto, who was still in school, sums up as the precursor of the sentiment of the masses on the eve of partition in 1947. Later, under the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Pakistan formed a nationalist-populist and socialist agenda in the 1970s.¹²⁷ During the late 1970s to the late 1980s, various Islamist parties, including Jamat-e-Islami, gained significant political influence in Pakistan. While certain Islamist parties such as Jamat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood had already been promoting the cause of Islamization during the 1940s and 1950s, it was in the early 1980s that Islamist organizations such as Jamat in South Asia, Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in Palestine, Refah in Turkey, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Taliban in Afghanistan emerged as prominent advocates for Islamization within the realm of geopolitics. Among the major Muslim organizations such as Jamiat-i-Ulema, Tablighi Jamaat, and Muslim League, the Jamaat-e-Islami, a moderate Islamist organization in South Asia, stood out due to its distinctive approach. Unlike the others, the Jamaat-e-Islami aimed to reform the existing socio-political system by advocating Islamist perspectives and striving for the establishment of an Islamic state. In 1941, Syed Abul Ala Maududi established Jamaat-e-Islami and outlined its constitution with the aim of transforming India into a "Dar al-Islam", a society characterized by peace and Islamic principles. After the partition of India in 1947, which led to the creation

¹²⁶ Farzana Shaikh, "Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Pursuit of an Asian Pakistan," in *Makers of Modern Asia*, ed. Ramachandra Guha (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 267.

¹²⁷ Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 31–38.

of Pakistan as a separate Muslim state, Jamaat-e-Islami divided into two entities: Jamaat-e-Islami Hind in India and Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, with Maududi relocating to Pakistan.¹²⁸

The OIC in 1969 had organized a conference in Morocco, a symposium of representatives of Muslim-majority countries to pass the statement that “Muslim government would consult with a view to promoting among themselves close cooperation and mutual assistance in the economic, scientific, cultural and spiritual fields, inspired by the immortal teachings of Islam.”¹²⁹ The OIC, which is based on religious grounds, is at present an international system that includes Islamic states across the world. The organization takes part in global politics with the aim of the “return of religion to world affairs”¹³⁰ in order to make people refrain from “unIslamic” negotiations in public life. They tried to establish civilizational entities in world politics and presumably speak for the Islamic community worldwide. These phenomena provide the backdrop of the rise of religious conflicts in this twenty-first century, primarily during the Rushdie Affair and especially after 9/11 and the war on terror. The discussion of the two novels, namely Salman Rushdie’s *The Enchantress of Florence* and Robin Yassin-Kassab’s *The Road from Damascus* is based on these backgrounds. These two texts will investigate the issues of religion, the conflict and fissures that arise between the differential realms of the secular, the religious and the sacred with a greater emphasis on the polemics of the shift from race and ethnicity to a religious resurgence of faiths in the West.

¹²⁸ Irfan Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islami* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 2–4.

¹²⁹ James Ciment and Kenneth Hill, *Encyclopedia of Conflicts since World War II* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 185–186.

¹³⁰ Bassam Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe From Jihadist to Institutional Islamism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 104.

Taking place in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the novel's narrative commences with the arrival of a mysterious guest at Sikri, the residence of the esteemed Mughal emperor, Akbar the Great. This enigmatic visitor goes by different aliases, including Mogordell'Amore, the Uccello di Firenze, and Niccolò Antonio Vespucci. His purpose in approaching the emperor is to divulge a concealed secret, one that could either jeopardize his life or bring about a remarkable turn of fortune. Vespucci, with his remarkable storytelling ability reminiscent of Scheherazade, skillfully employs his tales to fend off potential execution. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the central character, Angelica, lends her name to the novel. As the story unfolds, it is revealed that she is none other than Akbar's deceased great aunt, Qara Köz. Two generations before Vespucci's arrival at Akbar's court, this Mughal princess was compelled to leave her homeland due to a war truce, during which her brother exchanged her as a bargaining chip. The narrative traces her journey and her love affair with an Ottoman janissary named Argalia as they travel through the Western lands. Towards the end of the novel, these two narrative strands converge as Qara Köz unexpectedly returns to Akbar, who is grappling with a crisis of religious faith and mourning the loss of religious toleration. Akbar reflects on the future, expressing his pessimism: "the future would not be what he hoped for, but a dry hostile antagonistic place where people would survive as best they could and hate their neighbors and smash their places of worship and kill one another once again in the renewed heat of the great quarrel he had sought to end forever, the quarrel over God. In the future, it was harshness, not civilization, that would rule."⁵¹ Emperor Akbar's use of the word "quarrel" implies a disagreement of principles rather than a violent clash. He vividly describes the religious differences that have led to an era of violence influenced by religious beliefs. Akbar himself is tormented by a crisis of faith and mourns the loss of religious tolerance. He foresees the future as a violent one wherein different

communities will turn into hate-mongers and “quarrel over God”. The term “quarrel” within this novel implies a disagreement with non-believers concerning principles or attitudes towards God, depicting religious differences “without the advent of aggression being taken for granted”. The narrative explores the issues of religious conflicts, the impact of the fatwa against Rushdie in 1989 by Ayatollah Khomeini, the aftermath of 9/11, and the war on terror. It delves into the collision between faith and rationalism within polarized worldviews, all while examining the boundaries of secular freedoms. The main focus centers on the thematic registers that question the identitarian realms of a religious position in opposition to a secular one, and how one may negotiate the terms of faith and religion in a post-liberal multicultural society post 9/11.

In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie delves into the questioning of God and explores the themes of religious conflict and the intricate connection between monotheism and power. Within the novel, Akbar, while maintaining a personal religiosity, grapples with significant doubts about religion itself. He recognizes that religion is not a unified entity of unquestionable truths and ingrained practices solely based on powerful familial traditions. Instead, Akbar contemplates the possibility that such practices may be misplaced when humanity arrogantly seeks to assume the role of God:

Maybe there was no true religion. Yes, he had allowed himself to think this. He wanted to be able to tell someone of his suspicion that men made their gods and not the other way around. He wanted to be able to say, it is man at the center of things, not God. It is man at the heart and bottom and the top, man at the front and back and side, man the angel and the devil, the miracle and the sin, man and always man, and let us henceforth have no other temples but those dedicated to

mankind. This was his most unspeakable ambition: to found the religion of man.¹³¹

Rushdie's gradual fascination with the "quarrel over God"¹³² is evident when Emperor Akbar "would conjure a new world in Sikri, a world beyond religion, region, rank and tribe"¹³³ and that would be "a house of adoration, a place of disputation where everything could be said to everyone by anyone on any subject, including the non-existence of God and the abolition of kings".¹³⁴ The slain ruler opines that "in Paradise the words worship and argument mean the same thing" and also declares that "the Almighty is not a tyrant"¹³⁵ and in "the House of God all voices are free to speak as they choose, and that is the form of their devotion".¹³⁶ To Emperor Akbar, a historical figure, the emergence of this new "house of adoration" raises significant concerns as it signifies a commitment to aesthetic and political hybridity, as well as transmonistic pluralism. This utopian space takes the form of the "Republic of Heaven,"⁵⁹ which continually grapples with the possibility of secular liberalism. Akbar's idealistic pluralism stands in contrast to the prevailing dominance of religious authoritarianism and monism. With a secularist faith and a tolerant belief system, Akbar strongly advocates for the separation of religion from the public sphere, favoring its privatization. The confinement of religion to the private realm becomes a litmus test for the modernity of societies. In Rushdie's polemical essay "Yes, This Is about Islam," he criticizes the contemporary responses to the

¹³¹ Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*. 100.

¹³² Ibid. 435.

¹³³ Ibid. 51.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 46.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 44.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 45.

9/11 attacks that attempt to disassociate them from Islam. The quoted statement highlights Rushdie's rejection of such claims, emphasizing the connection between the attacks and Islam. He argues:

private faith, and the restoration of religion to the sphere of the personal, its depoliticization, is the nettle that all Muslim societies must grasp in order to become modern. The only aspect of modernity in which the terrorists are interested is technology, which they see as a weapon that can be turned against its makers. If terrorism is to be defeated, the world of Islam must take on board the secularist-humanist principles on which the modern is based, and without which their countries' freedom will remain a distant dream.¹³⁷

He further opines: "This paranoid Islam, which blames outsiders, 'infidels,' for all the ills of Muslim societies, and whose proposed remedy is the closing of those societies to the rival project of modernity, is presently the fastest-growing version of Islam in the world".¹³⁸ Rushdie critically examines radical Islam and its influential figures of the twentieth century, including Sayyid Qutb and Abdullah Azam (who mentored Osama Bin Laden). He juxtaposes their ideologies with the post-Enlightenment ideals of reason and the secularist concept of laïcité. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the tension between personal emotional inspiration and the superficiality of collective political rhetoric reflects Rushdie's perspective.

Akbar, who was gradually getting disillusioned with organized religion, "trusted dogs, music, poetry, a witty courtier and a wife he had created out of nothing. He trusted beauty, painting, and the wisdom of his forebears. In other things, however, he was losing

¹³⁷ Salman Rushdie, "Yes, This Is about Islam." *New York Times*, November 2, 2001.

¹³⁸ Rushdie, "Yes, This Is about Islam".

confidence; in, for example, religious faith".¹³⁹His wish to hold a debate on the subject of religious faith in his Tent of the New Worship "to investigate why one should hold fast to a religion not because it was true but because it was the faith of one's fathers. Was faith not faith but simple family habit? Maybe there was no true religion but this eternal handing down. And error could be handed down as easily as virtue".¹⁴⁰ Akbar's dilemma insinuates a serious question: "Was faith no more than an error of our ancestors?"¹⁴¹ Emperor Akbar, influenced by the renaissance humanistic movement, embodies a modern and rational individualism that offers a fresh perspective on the role and significance of religious faith. This perspective challenges the conventional notion of privileging faith as a central aspect of identity in a society where emphasis is often placed on ethnicity rather than the celebrated realm of "difference." Despite being identified as a "Muslim," Akbar embraces a range of identity choices that are shaped by the formative influence of Islam. Islam serves as a comprehensive worldview that encompasses various forms and modes of interpellation and critical engagement. Here, Akeel Bilgrami's argument is pertinent:

There may be some for whom Islam is nothing short of a monolithic commitment, overriding all other commitments, whenever history or personal encounter poses a conflict. But I think it is safe to say, despite a familiar tradition of colonial and postcolonial caricature in Western representations of Islam, that

¹³⁹ Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*, 69–70.

¹⁴⁰ Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*, 100.

¹⁴¹ Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*, 100.

such an absolutist project is the exception in a highly diverse and internally conflicted religious community.¹⁴²

Paul Berman's book *Terror and Liberalism* features an examination of Tariq Ramadan's perspective on faith and the role of doubt, as discussed in Ramadan's work *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity*. Berman references Ramadan's interest in the shared narrative of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, as depicted in both the Bible and the Quran. Berman suggests that Ramadan highlights the significance of doubt within the context of Western Enlightenment, symbolically manifested in the ethical dilemma presented by God's command to Abraham. In contrast, the Quranic revelation emphasizes unwavering obedience to God's will without questioning. Berman says:

In Western religious tradition, there is a space for skepticism and doubt. These two attitudes, skepticism and doubt, are elements of faith—the elements that prove the authenticity of belief in God...The God of the Old Testament instructs Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, and Abraham doubts the instruction and struggles to resist it, for a little while—and Abraham's doubt and struggle testify to the sincerity of his belief.¹⁴³

In the Biblical version, there is no explicit ethical conflict articulated between blind allegiance and disobedience. As the story goes, Abraham faithfully follows God's instructions by taking Isaac to the designated place, lighting a fire for the offering, and preparing the knife for the sacrifice. Berman and both scholars attempt to identify different aspects of religiosity.

¹⁴² Akeel Bilgrami, "What Is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity", *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 823. Bilgrami also points out a relative absence of reformist thinking amongst moderate Muslims, contributing to "the susceptibility of Islamic polities to constant threat from powerful minority movements that assert Islamic identity [as] nonnegotiable". (824).

¹⁴³ Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 2004) 26.

They seek to locate traces of religiosity within the Judeo-Christian tradition, where doubt, which holds significant value in philosophical thought, receives historical acceptance and validation. They also discuss the concept of *ijtihad*, which represents the kernel of criticality and doubt within the discourse of the religion.

Ramadan's analysis of Islamic faith primarily centers on the prevailing hegemonic structure that imposes specific interpretations, as all his arguments and assertions delineate a dominant experience for believers. In contrast, Paul Berman views doubt, questioning, and reasoning as indispensable elements of thought and action that supposedly differentiate the West from Islam. Ramadan interprets Søren Kierkegaard's influential work, *Fear and Trembling*, with a particular focus on the story of Abraham and Isaac. According to Ramadan, this interpretation reveals Christianity's core message concerning humanity's existence, encompassing a profound sense of sin, suffering, anguish, and fear. Within this context, faith is perceived as an inherent trial of inner turmoil and conflict.¹⁴⁴

Akbar, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, "wanted to be able to tell someone of his suspicion that man had made their gods and not the other way around. He wanted to be able to say, it is man at the centre of things, not God".¹⁴⁵ Undoubtedly, the emperor's words hold significance in critical discussions regarding the formulation of the concept of God. It becomes essential to deconstruct the prevailing notion of God as a transcendental signified, as well as the belief in a realm beyond the play of signifiers. Akbar's thought process transitions from a position of monism to align with the poststructuralist perspective: "If man had created God then man could uncreate him too. Or was it possible for a creation to escape

¹⁴⁴ Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity* (Leicester, UK : Islamic Foundation, 2001), 212.

¹⁴⁵ Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*, 100.

the power of the creator? Could a god, once created, become impossible to destroy? Did such fictions acquire an autonomy of the will that made them immortal?"¹⁴⁶

Akbar's realization of the potential for violence arising from the power of religion becomes evident with the tragic deaths of Tana and Riri, two girls with fundamentalist leanings, which deeply sadden the king. Despite his unwavering pursuit of religious tolerance, Akbar contemplates that it might have been easier to determine the nature of goodness if the concept of God had never existed. Departing from Sikri, he no longer feels compelled to submit to the "autonomy of the will" of God, which he recognizes as a fiction granting immortality. His desire for freedom and belief in God is intricately linked to his yearning for liberation from the tyranny of hegemonic truth systems, stifling corridors of authority, and the suppression of freedom of speech. Akbar perceives that "discord, difference, disobedience, disagreement, irreverence, iconoclasm, impudence, even insolence might be the wellsprings of the good," embodying a Bakhtinian sense of grotesque realism.

Akbar's liberal humanism is influenced by Bakhtinian formalism, emphasizing the concept of the sacred as a means of upholding a society that values the emergence of individualism, secularization, and cultural hybridity. Religion and religious experience are understood in terms of beliefs and faith, defining the identities of believers. Talal Asad critiques Rushdie's claims, suggesting that the very idea of "religion" itself is a retroactive effect of secularism, profoundly altering understandings of what it means to be "religious." Asad argues that there has been a shift towards a secular "knowledge" where religiosity is understood less as a discourse of disciplinary codes and practices associated with the authority of medieval church institutions, and more as a set of "propositions" embraced by

¹⁴⁶ Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*, 100.

believers. This shift also involves a transition in authority from institutionalized practices towards the supremacy of personal "conscience," creating a "cognitivist" understanding of religion wherein the religious experience centers on one's beliefs. Over time, the concepts of "religion" and "rationalism" aligned with the philosophical ideals of modern liberalism, emerging within the secularized realms of thought and performance influenced by post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment advancements. Tariq Modood, however, believes:

This distinction between beliefs and the individuals who may or may not hold those beliefs may normally work, but there is at least one type of belief where it does not hold: beliefs that form the self-definition of a group, for there cannot be membership of a group without some idea of the relevant groupness.... A group exists only while some persons identify themselves and others in certain ways, and this cannot be done without beliefs.¹⁴⁷

People should be coerced to think whether their religious beliefs and performatives are premised upon a set of blind cultural norms and uncritical acceptance of a priori interpellative registers. To say that values and religious beliefs—religious or secular—are voluntarily chosen and readily abandoned follows “a strong sense in which what we are given rather than chosen”, and, like our racial, ethnic, or gender identities, “moral and religious belief/s ... are equally incapable of being given up simply by an act of will or on the basis of rational deliberation”.¹⁴⁸

In the novel, Akbar, a Renaissance humanist and a (postmodern) agnostic, envisions a world where humanity is placed at the center and questions the existence of a monotheistic

¹⁴⁷ Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity, and Muslims in Britain* (Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 120–121.

¹⁴⁸ Modood, *Multicultural Politics*,15.

God. Akbar dreams of embracing the great polytheistic pantheons, recognizing their captivating stories, abundance, drama, humor, and marvel. He finds the imperfect nature of the gods, their interference, vanity, petulance, and misbehavior, quite appealing. However, he acknowledges that despite this attraction, he and his people must remain true to their own faith. Akbar states, "The million gods are not our gods; the austere religion of our father will always be ours, just as the carpenter's creed is yours." To Akbar, identity and culture are not only shaped by collective beliefs in the sacred and transcendental but are also profoundly influenced by individual agency and choice. He sees them as the prerogatives of both individual and collective realms.

Debates about cultural difference, religious plurality, and existential conflicts have proliferated even more after the publication of *Satanic Verses*, which in turn brought renewed attention surrounding the debates about the public and individual realm of the "sacred" in religion. Focusing on the post-9/11 themes of terror and religious fundamentalism, Rushdie aims to grapple with the reality of these issues by drawing upon the concept of a "clash of civilizations" popularized by Huntington, a notion that can be traced back to the 1989 Rushdie Affair itself. According to Rushdie, addressing present-day terrorism requires simultaneously confronting its historical roots. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie explores a range of conflicting themes, encompassing personal and political struggles, religious and secular tensions, and the complex interplay between secularism and fundamentalism. The novel engages with the historical construction of East and West in sixteenth-century Florence and India, utilizing the metaphorical device of magical realism's inherent ability to blur the boundaries between the real, the unreal, and the conventional frameworks that shape meaning and existence.

Taking place in the sixteenth century, the novel's narrative alternates between the cities of Florence and Fatehpur Sikri in the Mughal Empire. The story unravels as a tale recounted to Akbar by a mysterious traveler from Florence named Niccolò Vespucci, also known as Morgordell'Amore (or "the Mughal of Love"). Rushdie skillfully references Jules Verne's character, Jean Passepartout, from *Around the World in Eighty Days*, coining the term "passe-partout" to describe the metaphorical quality that blurs boundaries within the story.

For Derrida, the "passe-partout" can be perceived as a type of interstitial "slash"—or "trait"—between the artistry and the outer external milieu: "One space remains to be broached...in order to give place to the truth in painting. Neither inside nor outside, it spaces itself without letting itself be framed but it does not stand outside the frame. It works the frame, makes it work, gives it work to do".¹⁴⁹ The concept of the "partition of the edge" serves as a liminal space that prompts us to question the precise boundary between a work of art and the external world. This liminality reflects the fissiparous nature of the borderline between one's own reality and that of others. It resonates with Derrida's exploration of "différance," which involves the deferral of "truth" or "meaning" from one signifier to another. In Rushdie's portrayal of cultural relativism and the interplay between Eastern and Western discourses, this concept finds expression in the shifting dynamics and relationships between different cultural perspectives.

Rushdie's intention in the novel is to challenge the significance of Said's *Orientalism*. According to Edward Said, the epistemological framework of Othering in Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory is ambiguous. Said argues that profiling and labeling the Other reflects a perceived "threat" by the West rather than a manifestation of Western hegemony

¹⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (University of Chicago Press, 1987), 11–12.

over the Orient. He suggests that the notion of a "clash of civilizations" is a fabricated and manufactured thesis. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of focusing on the dynamic interaction and mutual borrowing between cultures, which coexist in more interesting and nuanced ways than simplified or inauthentic modes of understanding can allow. The actual clash, as Said identifies, is not between civilizations but between the discriminations perpetuated by elites and the masses, particularly concerning the definition of truth. Said refers to this as "Western ignorance." Vassilena Parashkevova adds that the novel seeks to present alternatives to the neoliberal thesis that frames the contemporary relationship between the East and the West as a clash between Islam and the West, as well as challenges the depiction of a sword-wielding Islam encountering Hinduism on the Indian subcontinent. Overall, Rushdie's work aims to question the Orientalist perspective and offers a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between the East and the West, encouraging a shift away from simplified narratives of conflict and toward exploring alternative possibilities.¹⁵⁰ *The Enchantress of Florence* explores the potential of Saidean Orientalism to analyze the relations between the East and the West, focusing on the categories and epistemes that repeatedly emphasize perceived cultural differences. Rushdie, in the novel, highlights the East-West binary and the role of Orientalist stereotypes in shaping identity and history. When listening to Morgor's dialogue, Akbar reflects on the exotic and surreal nature of fifteenth-century Europe to the people of the East, recognizing their apparent propensity for extreme hysteria in their worship of gold. At the same time, Akbar contemplates the fantastical wisdom attributed to the East, where people work hard, live diverse lives, hold various beliefs that inspire great art, poetry, and music, and experience

¹⁵⁰ Vassilena Parashkevova, *Salman Rushdie's Cities: Reconfigurational Politics and the Contemporary Urban Imagination* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), 179.

both solace and confusion. Rushdie's portrayal of difference in *The Enchantress of Florence* disrupts the space between the present and the past, intertwining the contemporary binary of fundamentalist and secularist identities. This perspective challenges the perceived differences between the East and the West in terms of identity. In line with Neelam Srivastava's thinking, Vassilena Parashkevova argues that Rushdie locates a nascent form of Indian secularism in Sikri, albeit historically isolated, which later succumbs to sectarian violence. In Akbar's vision, the future is depicted as a hostile place where people engage in hatred, destruction of places of worship, and killing in the ongoing "quarrel over God." The world of Sikri, as portrayed in the novel, is not envisioned within the parameters of secularism as commonly understood in contemporary Western states, which may conceal biases against Muslims. Instead, political and religious tolerance precede and contribute to a unique Eastern understanding of secular vision that surpasses its Western counterparts at the time.

In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie presents established religion as a "circle," a force that encloses and restricts thought in a collective and rigid manner, collapsing the binary of "us" and "them." Akbar reflects on the possibility of stepping outside this circle and living with the unsettling strangeness of new thoughts. This rejection of fundamentalist thinking is echoed in Anshuman Mondal's critique of *The Satanic Verses*, where the radical difference represented by Islam is encircled and tamed by a secular skepticism that asserts its dominance over empathetic representations of religious belief. Rushdie transcends the confines of fundamentalist thought by pointing towards a secular state of trans-monism. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd argues that secularism has taken two distinct paths: a laicist trajectory that views religion as an adversary to modern politics, and a Judeo-Christian secularist trajectory that sees religion as a source of unity and identity that generates conflicts

in international politics. Rushdie aligns himself with the laicist path, rejecting the dominating frameworks of Eurocentric imperialism from the 19th century that have influenced the lives and thinking of millions over the centuries. In the novel, Morgor advises Akbar that the curse of humanity lies not in our differences but in our similarities. Additionally, the enchantress of Florence, Qara Köz, challenges the enchantment of the East, both in an Orientalist and an anti-Orientalist sense, by stating that “all human beings are foolish to the same degree.” In the post-9/11 context, Rushdie echoes Judith Butler's perspective, suggesting that reevaluating temporality and politics can offer an alternative approach to cultural differences that goes beyond the limitations of pluralism and intersectionality. The novel highlights the superficiality of religious faith through the depiction of the children's prison camp in Usküb, where despite many languages, there was only one God. The boys taken into slavery as part of the devshirmé tax had their identities forcibly altered to serve the Sultan's desires. The Sultanate's principle operated through metamorphosis, compelling the protagonist to abandon Christianity and adopt Islam. By analyzing these elements, Rushdie challenges the rigid boundaries of religious identities, critiques fundamentalism, and advocates for a secular perspective that embraces the complexities of human existence, transcending narrow categorizations.

At the end of the satirical paragraph, the picture of the “holy man” with his long beard and white hat converting the young minds portrays fundamentalist movements poignantly, and also, of all processes of ideological indoctrination:

On the parade ground in their new outfits the sullen children stood in ranks before a man in a frock, whose white hat was as tall as his white beard was long, the one rising three feet above his brow and the other falling an equal distance

from his chin, giving him the appearance of possessing a head of immense length.

This was a holy man, a dervish of the Bektashi order, and he had come to convert them to Islam.¹⁵¹

Then the metamorphosis of the boys begins, and “in their many accents the angry, frightened boys parroted the necessary Arabic sentence about the one God and his Prophet”.¹⁵²The fundamentalism of the Mughal “East” is reflected in the rise of a kind of separatism exacerbated by the search for the authentic self in the matrices of sovereign power, in the dynamic of the freedom-versus-restraint binary. It also affirms what Homi Bhabha has described as the “real blasphemy” of *The Satanic Verses*:

Blasphemy is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular; it is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation. Into the assorted authenticity or continuity of tradition, “secular” blasphemy releases a temporality that reveals the contingencies, even the incommensurabilities, involved in the process of social transformation.¹⁵³

The “perspective of historical and cultural relativism” and the subsequent “act of cultural translation” are essential to the understanding of blasphemy that necessarily hinges upon the multiplicity of differences between the East and the West, the “fundamentalist” and the “secular”, and “us” and “them”.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*, 214.

¹⁵² Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*, 214.

¹⁵³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 323.

¹⁵⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 323.

Robin Yassin-Kassab, in his 2008 novel, *The Road from Damascus*,¹⁵⁵ deals or dabbles with the mechanisms of secular, sacred, suspicion, and the troubled structures of the religious binary with the emergence of the Rushdie Affair, 7/7, and the war on terror. Yassin-Kassab is quite distinct in treating these events, unlike Salman Rushdie in *The Enchantress of Florence*. The British-Syrian novelist Robin Yassin-Kassab was born in London, grew up in Scotland, and studied at the University of Oxford. He is a regular media commentator on Syria and the Middle East. His first novel, *The Road from Damascus*, explores the British-Arab community, its anxieties, and the aspirations of its second generation in an atmosphere of religious faith and faithlessness at the heart of multicultural London. Sami Traifi, the novel's British protagonist of Syrian Muslim heritage, a disenchanted London-based Syrian, struggles to coalesce a secular identity in Britain with his Muslim heritage in Syria. Sami Traifi, who is pursuing his PhD in London on Arab poetry, decides to "get it all back on course, his place in the world, his marriage, his mother,"¹⁵⁶ and visits the Syrian mountainside with a desire to see the house of distant relatives who live in Damascus. Nothing helps his thesis or his "fraying life" in London.¹⁵⁷ He finds his imbecilic Uncle Faris after his release from prison after 22 years. Earlier, Uncle Faris was a member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in Hama, and participated against the Syrian Ba'athist Party in 1982. Sami's father, Mustafa, an informer, reports the incident to his government. For Sami, this is "too much information of the wrong sort, this Faris story".¹⁵⁸ Sami's wife, Muntaha, a Baghdad-born Arab dressed neatly and formally, is a practising Muslim. She, too, offers

¹⁵⁵ Robin Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008). All page references are to this edition.

¹⁵⁶ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 12.

¹⁵⁷ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 22.

¹⁵⁸ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 22.

prayers wearing her hijab to “to feel and look more like a Muslim woman”.¹⁵⁹ Her short-tempered brother, Ammar, reforms himself from a hip-hop phase to the garb and rhetoric of an Islamist. Her father, Marwan, who was a secular nationalist poet incarcerated by Saddam Hussein’s regime, wishes to hook up with those who share his background “on wide-ranging circuits of Arab London”.¹⁶⁰

In his early years, Sami finds himself in the “opposing camps of childhood” of the narratives of “Qabbani versus Quran”¹⁶¹ as Sami’s father admires the pan-Arabist poet Nizar Qabbani and supports the Syrian regime in spite of its repressive approach. Sami hears of the “prophets” from the voice that “vanquished” them. He learns “religion” through the “prism of civil war”.¹⁶² Disillusioned with nationalist ideology, Sami’s mother, Nur Kallas, who wears a patterned hijab and prays five times a day, turns to faith, and offers her son a “different mythology” based on “the adventures of God’s messengers”.¹⁶³

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 rationality. In turn, this supposed position of secular rationality constructs and authorizes its ‘other’, religion and religions”.¹⁶⁴ Religion has become a category with some analysis, as Fitzgerald indicates, to the process of fracture and reification that appeared, historically, in the formation of religion as an area of critical engagement and the supposition of the

¹⁵⁹ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 141.

¹⁶⁰ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 113.

¹⁶¹ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 83.

¹⁶² Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 83.

¹⁶³ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 78.

¹⁶⁴ Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse of Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

universality of religion. He doubts the “modern uncritical reifications of religion”¹⁶⁵ as something that stays in and for itself, as independent and definite from politics. As a result, oppositional and contested binaries like faith/reason and spiritual/material strengthen “religion” as an antithetical term to “non-religious”. It develops as a consequence of differentiating between spiritual and material nature and in the segregation from the public realm. Borrowing Robert Gleave’s words in “Should We Teach Islam as a Religion or as a Civilisation?”, it may be said that, these days, we see a movement “from an uncritical acceptance of the category of ‘religion’ towards a critical interrogation of ‘religion’ as a category”.¹⁶⁶ Gleave contends that if we analyse Islam exclusively as a religion, then we have the possibility of exposing the Salafi Jihadi argument, which finds religion as innocent and speaks of culture to be tantamount to negative augmentations.

Most studies of religion have been modelled on Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion, which turns on symbols, moods, motivations, and conceptions: “A religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”.¹⁶⁷ This approach, too, has come under criticism from anthropologists like Talal Asad. Asad’s critique revolves around two main points. Firstly, he argues that Geertz’s definition of religion is better suited for certain styles of religiosity, particularly Protestantism, which then becomes the underlying model for all religions. This approach,

¹⁶⁵ Fitzgerald, *Discourse of Civility and Barbarity*, 6.

¹⁶⁶ Robert Gleave, “Should we Teach Islam as a Religion or as a Civilisation?”, unpublished paper, Islamic Studies Network: Perspectives on Islamic Studies in Higher Education, Aston University (May 2010), http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/multimedia/audio/islamic_studies/Professor_Ron_Geaves.mp.

¹⁶⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

according to Asad, overlooks the significance of embodied practice and communal aspects that are essential to various religions, including Islam, Catholicism, and Judaism. Secondly, Asad's more radical point questions the fundamental nature of Geertz's definitional project. Bruce Lincoln summarizes this aspect, highlighting Asad's contention with the very essence of Geertz's definition of religion: "Insofar as the task of defining anything presumes a discrete object that can be identified in contradistinction to others, this implies a model of 'religion' that emerged only with the Enlightenment. Prior to that time, even in western Europe religion cannot be analytically (or practically) disarticulated from virtually all other aspects of culture."¹⁶⁸ The Enlightenment's division between the religious and the secular, as Charles Taylor contends, strangely grants certain forms of "religious" affiliation preferential treatment from the start.¹⁶⁷ This division, in turn, becomes a significant imposition of the colonial project.¹⁶⁸ Consequently, Islamist ideology, which emerged from centuries of Muslim anti-colonial resistance against the West, often perceives secularism as a pivotal aspect of Western decline.

Robin Yassin-Kassab shows an encounter between secular humanism and reinvented religious traditions, and considers secularism as "a late 19th-century hiccup".¹⁶⁹ Yassin-Kassab portrays Rashid Iqbal, here in this novel as a caricature of Salman Rushdie, whom Sami, the protagonist, encounters as "one of this country's leading cosmopolitan intellectuals".¹⁷⁰ We see him delivering a speech against religion at a London University. Iqbal says:

¹⁶⁸ Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1–2.

¹⁶⁹ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 406.

¹⁷⁰ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 400.

The storyteller liberated from Islam. Islam, you see, is not a civilization of narrative. It's rules, that's all. Rules and hygiene. It's washing. A religion of the bathroom.... So I present literature in opposition to religion.... Instead of the dominant narrative, I offer a competition of narratives, a hubbub of voices, a Babel. Instead of the one Word, I offer infinite words. Histories, novels, characters, fantasies. I do not say we do not have spiritual needs. I say we can fulfill those needs more profitably with literature.¹⁷¹

Rashid Iqbal, in his speech, advocates storytelling, literature, songs, and films in direct opposition to religion. The portrayal of Rashid draws a parallel to Rushdie's 1990 essay, "Is Nothing Sacred?,"¹⁷² in which we see the Muslim-converted academic who has been chosen by the university to respond to Iqbal's speech furiously say: "Scribbling about the spicy mix that was Islamic Spain. About the Greco-Judaic-Indo-Persian masala of medieval Baghdad. About Quranic allusions to Alexander the Great. About syncretism and Sufi visions and Muslim travelogues."¹⁷³ Their pluralistic responses to the narratives of Rashid Iqbal echo the dichotomies of "liberty versus authority, secularism versus religion, free speech versus censorship, universalism versus multiculturalism".¹⁷⁴ Here Rashid Iqbal's argument about Islam as single and monolithic stands in direct contrast to the historical narratives he cites. It also immediately evokes Rushdie's novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, as one of its chapters is actually titled "Malabar Masala", and the entire work alludes to Moorish Granada as well as

¹⁷¹ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*,404.

¹⁷² Salman Rushdie, "Is Nothing Sacred?," in *Imaginary Homelands*, ed. Salman Rushdie (London: Granta, 1991), 415–429.

¹⁷³ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*,405.

¹⁷⁴ David Edgar, "In the New Revolution, Progressives Fight against, not with, the Poor," *Guardian*, August 24, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/aug/24/revolution-1989-1979>.

the interchange between Hinduism and the three religions of the book in twentieth-century India.¹⁷⁵ The speech of Rashid Iqbal attempts to define the matter in terms of a stark opposition between good and evil, between literature and the set of rules of religion, as his version of Islam is no more than a superficial structure of archaic, disparate rules. Talal Asad, in his “Ethnography, Literature, and Politics”, argues:

When Rushdie says “literature” he means a very specific body of writing. His statement, and others like it, obviously belong to modern bourgeois culture-not because unbelief is either modern or bourgeois but because of something else: the assumption that the discourse called Literature can fill the role previously performed by religious textuality. The idea that Literature is the quintessential space for producing the “highest” norms of modern society has become quite familiar to us, although the genealogy of that idea, which includes higher biblical criticism and Lutheran fundamentalism, is less widely appreciated than it should be. For that genealogy reveals a profound shift from a hermeneutic method that was essentially parasitic on a pre-given sacred text to one that produced Literature out of an infinite variety of published texts.¹⁷⁶

Asad speaks about the “emergence” of literature as a “modern” type of illuminative work with a “modern bourgeois” leaning that has made it possible for “a new discourse” to imitate the standardized behaviour of spiritual texts in a progressively secular society.¹⁷⁷ The “bourgeois” principle is that literature where life is portrayed “more” than life represents has

¹⁷⁵ Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995).

¹⁷⁶ Talal Asad, “Ethnography, Literature, and Politics: Some Readings and Uses of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*,” *Cultural Anthropology* 5, no. 3 (August 1990): 250.

¹⁷⁷ Asad, “Ethnography, Literature, and Politics”, 250–251.

had a close relationship with royal culture as Lord Macaulay did for education in India.¹⁷⁸ By speaking about “rules” and conduct, Rushdie invokes the “assumptions of liberal individualism” that had reached its pinnacle in Thatcher’s Britain.¹⁷⁹ Though before the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie opined that “it needs to be said repeatedly in the West that Islam is no more monolithically cruel, no more an ‘evil empire’ than Christianity, capitalism or communism”.¹⁸⁰ It is not that Rushdie has personal animosity against Islam; rather, it is the well-known “post-Enlightenment conception of Literature”¹⁸¹ that is at play here. The caricature of Rashid Iqbal finds an easy distinction between literature and Islam, and later, asks the relationship of Islamic practice with “rules”, that poses the question of free speech and the “limits of liberalism” in entertaining the cultural and religious differences posed by Muslim communities in Britain.¹⁸² Asad argues that the concept of "religion" is a recent construct that has emerged as a result of secularism, reshaping our understanding of what it means to be religious worldwide. This transformation has displaced religion to the realm of secular knowledge, where religiosity is reduced to a set of propositions that believers adhere to, rather than a comprehensive system of disciplinary codes and practices associated with the authority of the medieval church. The shift in authority has moved from institutional structures to the supremacy of individual "conscience," emphasizing a cognitive understanding of religion based on personal beliefs. Asad reveals the intricate interplay between the religious and the secular, highlighting that the secular is neither a seamless

¹⁷⁸ Asad, “Ethnography, Literature, and Politics”, 251.

¹⁷⁹ Asad, “Ethnography, Literature, and Politics”, 254.

¹⁸⁰ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granata, 1991), 54.

¹⁸¹ Asad, “Ethnography, Literature, and Politics”, 126.

¹⁸² Rehana Ahmed, *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015),10.

continuation of the religious that preceded it nor a complete rupture from it. He asserts that the concept of the secular is inseparable from the idea of religion itself.

Aamir Mufti raises an important question regarding Asad's post-secular critique, particularly concerning the repeated invocation of liberalism as the underlying conceptual basis for approaching contemporary Islamist politics. Mufti points out that liberalism cannot be viewed as a unified intellectual system, as it encompasses various manifestations ranging from communitarianism to social responsibility. It is the failure of liberalism to effectively engage with religious differences within collective Muslim identities that poses a challenge. These quotations shed light on Asad's examination of the relationship between religion and secularism, highlighting the complexities and interdependencies between the two. They also raise questions about the role of liberalism in addressing contemporary Islamist politics and the limitations it faces in accommodating religious diversity within Muslim communities.

Robin Yassin-Kassab goes beyond the Manichean clash of liberal secularism versus faith and individualism versus collectivity. Yassin-Kassab surveys religion in all its heterogeneity. He discusses the diversification of Western religions from Anglicanism and Catholicism to the fringe Christianity of Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses -the new ageism of crystal healing and secular but bigoted practices of Freemasons and capitalists in the form of "fast food outlets". Sami recollects his childhood days in London that celebrates heterogeneity and plurality:

Just on his bus route to school there were as many one-and-only truths jostling for attention as there were fast food outlets. Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists. The Nation of Islam in natty suits and carved hair. Rastafarians, both black and (absurdly) white. Anglicans, sagely complacent despite the

colonization of their churches. *Hare Krishnas* singing while lapsed Catholics wolfed their free curry. Sikhs with daggers and briefcases. Freemasons with briefcases only. A Hindu incarnated as the bus conductor bowing inwardly to the elephant god. Scientologists offering personality tests. Grinning Discordians. A Sufi road worker at his drill, pruning the rose garden within. Rebirthers. Crystal healers. Buddhists of the latest version. To name but some. All of whom had found the exclusive answer.¹⁸³

The epigraphs to the novel, one taken from the Sufi sage Ahmad Yasavi's "unbelief itself is a religion with its own form of belief" and the other from Pascal's "Atheism indicates strength of mind, but only up to a certain point", suggest that atheism has its own types of extremism and satirizes a kind of secular fundamentalism.¹⁸⁴ It interrogates the binary that has recently been structured between "secular literature" and "Islamic dogma", Muslim and non-Muslim, secular and sacred, and the imaginative and religious stricture. Within the novel, there are flashbacks that delve into the lives of Sami's uncle, Faris, in Syria, and Muntaha's father, Marwan, in Iraq. These two men endured oppressive and ruthless regimes, facing torture due to their religious and political loyalties. The memories of this familial suffering are handed down to the present generation of the novel, Sami and his wife Muntaha, shaping their perspective as Muslims living in the West, distinct from the traumatic ordeals endured by their relatives.

Moreover, Sami and Muntaha's diasporic experiences are not only shaped by memories of their family's pre-migration hardships but also influenced by broader issues

¹⁸³ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 83.

¹⁸⁴ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 8.

concerning race relations in Britain. Sami embarks on a transformative journey, confronting his dogmatic and insular perception of Islam and his hesitancy to connect with his family in Syria. *The Road from Damascus* portrays how Muslim citizens and communities can perpetuate imperialist binaries, depicting an outdated East and a progressive West, just like native Britons. Sami's idealization of his father from childhood to adulthood is juxtaposed with his struggle to maintain a relationship with his mother. Following the secular father's passing, Sami's increasingly religious mother showed no visible grief, leading him to view this as a betrayal and ultimately refusing to forgive her. Sami's mother abandoned his father's secular ideals by wearing the hijab (headscarf).¹⁸⁵ And now, Sami's wife Muntaha is back in London and is asking about wearing the hijab, which somehow ruins Sami's hope.¹⁸⁶ Secular humanism, he fears, was an antiquated daydream shared by many modernizing Arabs: "The fort had already fallen. In its rubble a market place of religion had set up."¹⁸⁷

In the opening chapter of the novel, during Sami's visit to his family in Damascus, he expresses his inability to rationally comprehend the necessity for women to wear the hijab. Influenced by his secular father, he perceives this garment as a symbol of civilization's decline. Sami believes that Muntaha is adopting a symbol of Muslim patriarchy and backwardness by wearing the hijab, which, in his view, threatens her self-constructed identity as modern and fashionable. When Sami and Muntaha travel together on the underground to visit her father Marwan, Sami is constantly preoccupied with how they are perceived by others, even though they are in a multicultural city surrounded by a diverse mix of people,

¹⁸⁵ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 21.

¹⁸⁶ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 14.

¹⁸⁷ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 332.

including a Jew, a black woman, and some “natives”.¹⁸⁸ Sami feels that Muntaha’s hijab encourages people to perceive them stereotypically, as “Muslims out on dark business, their trauma children and a string of austere relatives left behind in an unfurnished overcrowded room”.¹⁸⁹ The description creates an impression of a family that appears “different” and unfamiliar to the cosmopolitan commuters encountered on the London Underground. Sami himself notices the stereotypes associated with Muslims, feeling that outward displays of Islamic beliefs contradict the modern, cosmopolitan ambiance of London, causing embarrassment. The novel delves into the past experiences of Sami's uncle, Faris, in Syria, and Muntaha's father, Marwan, in Iraq. Both individuals endured repression and torture due to their religious and political affiliations. This history of bodily suffering is inherited by the present generation, Sami and Muntaha, shaping their perceptions of life as Muslims in the Western context, distinct from the traumatic experiences of their relatives.

The diasporic lives of Sami and Muntaha are influenced not only by their familial memories of pre-migration suffering but also by broader issues of race relations in Britain. Sami embarks on a journey that challenges his dogmatic and isolated perception of Islam and his reluctance to connect with his Syrian family. The novel highlights that Muslim citizens and communities, like native Britons, can perpetuate imperialist binaries of an outdated East and a progressive West. Sami idealizes his father but struggles with his relationship with his mother. When his secular father passed away, Sami's increasingly religious mother showed no outward signs of grief, leading Sami to perceive this as a betrayal. His mother’s decision to wear the hijab symbolizes her departure from his father's secular ideals. Now, with Muntaha's return to London and her consideration of wearing the hijab, Sami's hope is

¹⁸⁸ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 109–110.

¹⁸⁹ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 155.

shattered. He fears that secular humanism, which he once embraced, is now replaced by a marketplace of religion, rendering it obsolete in the modernizing Arab world.

In the opening chapter of the novel, when Sami visits his family in Damascus, he expresses his rational inability to comprehend the necessity for women to wear the hijab. Influenced by his secular father, he sees the hijab as a sign of civilization's decline. Sami holds the belief that Muntaha's decision to wear the hijab aligns her with the symbol of "Muslim patriarchy and backwardness," potentially endangering their self-constructed identities as urban and fashionable individuals. While traveling on the underground to visit Marwan, Sami remains preoccupied with how they are perceived by others, even in the midst of a multicultural city surrounded by diverse individuals. He perceives Muntaha's hijab as reinforcing stereotypes, painting them as "Muslims out on dark business" with a history of trauma and a string of austere relatives. This depiction constructs an image of their family as "different" and unfamiliar to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of London's commuters. Sami himself observes the stereotypes associated with Muslims, finding the outward display of Islamic beliefs as embarrassingly contradictory to the modern and cosmopolitan vibe of the city.

The Road from Damascus departs from traditional narratives by portraying a gentler and more inclusive interpretation of Islam, exemplified through the practices of Sami's mother and his wife, Muntaha. The novel seamlessly incorporates Islamic symbols and rituals, including the wearing of the hijab and the observance of obligatory prayers, in a sympathetic manner in which "the ebullience of post-modern secularism gives way to a quieter, more serious Islamic faith, which nonetheless makes room for doubt and

uncertainty".¹⁹⁰ Within the neo-orientalist tradition in the West, Islam is synonymous with terrorism or burqa-clad women—two stereotypes as cognitive devices that have for centuries continued to present Muslim men as irrationally violent and Muslim women as victims of oppression waiting eagerly to be emancipated by the enlightened West. The latter concerning the status of women in Muslim society is reflected significantly in discourses about veiling. A Muslim woman's veil both disgusts many and arouses their pity. In other words, a woman's veil, which is considered a trope in negotiating traditional values and work with independence and honour, may identify women's active agency. Though it is a kind of approach and policy for some young women to mediate urban harassment and space, it further restrains mobility and refuses an entrance to some common spaces. Third world feminists have argued, as Chandra Mohanty does in "Under Western Eyes" accurately, that all feminists should cultivate a composite understanding of oppression, agency, and resistance that can resist masculinist and Western misconstructions of "oppression as agency and agency as oppression".¹⁹¹

Hence, the borderlines between resistance, choice, and agency, on the one hand, and coercion, domination, and oppression, on the other, get blurred. It is the act of oppression that may appear as resistance, and what looks like agency and free choice may, in fact, be oppression. A "Muslim woman[']s" identity, according to Miriam Cooke, is "a marker of a collective subjectivity, a way to pave the way for a new cultural standard for the *umma*",¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Claire Chambers, "'Sexy Identity-Assertion': Choosing between Sacred and Secular Identities in Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road from Damascus*," in *Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing*, ed. Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey, and Amina Yaqin (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 128.

¹⁹¹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984): 333–358.

¹⁹² Miriam Cooke, "Deploying the Muslim Woman," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24, no.1 (2008): 91–99.

and it also opposes the creation of counter-narratives that portray the Orientalist depiction of Islam. This “new kind of cosmopolitanism marked by religion” builds the way for Muslim women to have a gendered Muslim identity that is active and empowering politically. Cooke continues: “So extreme is the concern with Muslim women today that veiled, and even unveiled, women are no longer thought of as individuals: collectively they have become the Muslim woman.”¹⁹³

As a veiled woman, Muntaha is positioned between the reason/religion binary. Here, the veil is used as an apparatus of women’s active agency since it allows women to tread the patriarchal customs to gain their wish, assert their independence, and claim their own identity. Being a Muslim furnishes a sense of security, continuity, loyalty, and adherence to a specific group that has appeared as questionable cultural decisions. This position in the community is crucial to the identities of people, and it is the veil that assists women in traversing this “dual” position. Women, beguiled in this East/West binary, as veiled are seen as religious and unveiled as rational and reasonable.

In Europe, in spite of the state-sponsored approach of multiculturalism, Muslims are the “enemy within”,¹⁹⁴ as what Geoffrey Nash calls a *Kulturkampf*, a cultural struggle that functions in the presence of a binary of ourselves and the Other, proclaiming the pre-eminence of a secular self that is culturally hegemonic. Nash’s genealogical framework traces the transformations of representations from the “*Kulturkampf* against Islam”¹⁹⁵ to the contemporary moment. This period of *Kulturkampf*, between 1880 and the 1920s, identifies

¹⁹³ Cooke, “Deploying the Muslim Woman”, 91–99.

¹⁹⁴ See Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2004), 26.

¹⁹⁵ Geoffrey Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 3.

Islam as radical Other in the backdrop of the Enlightenment, imperialism, and a Christian worldview. Since 1960, when post-imperial immigration was changing British society, Christian fundamentalism surfaced as a challenge to secularism, and later, revivalist Islam percolated as a presence in the public space only to assert the construction of what it takes to be Muslims.¹⁹⁶ In order to gain recognition and to counter the rejection of their faith-based identities in secular nations, some Muslims were obliged to perform their religious identity through their dress and prayers.

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. Geoffrey Nash, in his book *Writing Muslim Identity*, traces the shift in perception of Muslims in the West from the 1970s to the 1990s from a cultural and ethnic category to a more “religious” one. In the post-1970s, diasporic Muslim identity was seen as “a relic of the past and would survive only as a private faith and a loose set of moral and ethical principles”.¹⁹⁷ Nash cites the experience of Tariq Modood highlighted in his book *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain*. Modood was “being considered Pakistani in the 1960s/70s, to Asian in the 1980s, and Muslim in the 1990s” as the New Right’s exclusion policies led to “the adoption of religion as a signifier of identity”.¹⁹⁸ Muslims are subsumed into one category under the umbrella of a multicultural society.

In his “Religion in the Public Sphere” on the post-secular sphere, Jürgen Habermas mapped the European instance of the secular public sphere as a departure from the normal

¹⁹⁶ Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity*, 3–27.

¹⁹⁷ Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity*, 1.

¹⁹⁸ Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity*, 7.

course than as the standard in its habitual revolt against public religion.¹⁹⁹ This aberration for Habermas is evident in its comparison with America, where political religion has a pattern of activity, being a part of the public sphere without being seen as a threat to democracy. Habermas opines that there are possibilities of religion entering into the public sphere of the secular state. In the public sphere, the articulation of religious rhetoric should not find a space of enunciation without a secularizing translation of religious overtones. Habermas finds that the religious citizen is differentiated by modern reflexivity through the discursive nature of the secular public sphere in a heterogeneous society. A secular person who stands by the elimination of religious faiths from the public sphere truly supports the annihilation of some part of the existence of the believer that, according to Habermas, is a “compelling objection” to secularism.²⁰⁰

In the modern public sphere, particularly in discussions surrounding Islam, the discourse on religion has often been overshadowed by the events of 9/11. Many analyses tend to portray secularism as the antithesis of Islam in the post-9/11 world. However, secularism does not imply the complete elimination of religion from civil and political domains. In fact, Judeo-Christian principles continue to implicitly influence public policies in several predominantly Christian Western countries. For instance, in the United Kingdom, where there exists an "established church" that maintains a "close link with politics and public policies," secularism is understood more as a way to manage religious freedoms. It is crucial to distinguish secularism from total irreligiosity and recognize that there is a distinction between "religious individuals who are secular and secular individuals who are not religious."

¹⁹⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 115–125.

²⁰⁰ Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 128.

Secularism denotes a separation between the religious and non-religious realms rather than their eradication. In the novel *The Road from Damascus*, the characters Sami and his wife exemplify contrasting positions, symbolizing both the religious and the secular. Sami's wife, Muntaha, represents the religious aspect as a devout Muslim, while Sami himself embodies the secular perspective. As non-native migrants residing in Britain, their presence in a new environment necessitates the negotiation of their identities. The body becomes a significant site through which these characters must navigate and express the intersection of their Muslim heritage and their contemporary British identities. It is through their bodies that they must "orient" themselves within British society. This process involves experiencing and performing various identities. Sami utilizes the imagery of bodily features such as eyelashes and tongues to anthropomorphize Islam, presenting it as a decaying body. This portrayal suggests that the teachings of Islam obstruct a forward-looking vision, represented by "cobwebs in their eyelashes." It also implies that Islam propagates outdated commands, depicted as "mould on their tongues." For Sami, his pivotal cultural memory revolves around a secular Syria, where scientific reason and nationalist poetry held greater significance than Islam. This memory shapes his worldview and contributes to his identification with secular values. For more than a decade, Sami has been endeavoring to write his research work on Arabic poetry, following in the footsteps of his deceased father, Mustafa, a secular, pan-Arabist intellectual who significantly influenced his academic identity in Britain. Sami's trip to Syria holds the hope of uncovering the essence of his much-needed PhD thesis. He plans to interview his aunt and cousins to gather the perspectives of ordinary Syrian Arabs on his poetic inquiries.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 15.

Sami is confronted with a choice between sacred and secular identities throughout the novel. His newly found interest in growing a beard and attending the mosque lead him into a crisis in the post-9/11 atmosphere. His identity is negotiated between the two contradictory poles of postmodernism and Arabism. In his undergraduate days, he wore numerous sports t-shirts painted with Palestinian flags or slogans celebrating the hedonism of the Acid House Movement, although “a member of his class in Syria would never wear one”.²⁰² The narrator opines that “the significance of signs had swivelled away from their original focus”.²⁰³ A decade later, he understood that Arab culture and politics seemed to be decaying. The narrator says: “Poets died and were not replaced. Religion grew in response.”²⁰⁴

In this novel, various shades of sacredness and secularity are palpable in the broad bifurcation between the attractiveness of atheism as represented by the condemnation of the brother-in-law of Sami’s father to decades of imprisonment for the sake of the necessity of secularism in Syria and religion as represented by his mother, wife, and brother-in-law. Sami’s father presents Sami with “Gilgamesh”,²⁰⁵ an epic poem dating back to the third millennium BCE as a substitute for religion and introduces him to the writings of the secular Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani and the Palestinian nationalist poet, Mahmoud Darwish; whereas his mother narrates the Quranic stories of Ibrahim and Moses, djinns, and Caliphs only to develop his approach towards education as “Qabbani versus Quran”.²⁰⁶ The juxtaposition of pre-Islamic literature such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Quran with seemingly opposed

²⁰² Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 26.

²⁰³ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 26.

²⁰⁴ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 56.

²⁰⁵ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 73.

²⁰⁶ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 83.

traditions cultivates a “third space” in-between the two by having a reciprocal relationship between religion and secularism.

The Epic of Gilgamesh has been termed, according to N. K. Sandars, “as much a secular poem as the *Odyssey*” since “there is no suggestion that it was recited as part of religious ritual”.²⁰⁷ There is no description of the king of Uruk, Gilgamesh’s miraculous birth, or the association of such supernatural incidents in his life and times. The flood myth in *Gilgamesh* bears a close parallel to the incident of Noah’s ark in the Bible²⁰⁸ and the Great Flood as mentioned in the Quran in verses 11 and 71, where the Prophet Nuh admonishes his people for abandoning the warnings from Allah through Nuh.²⁰⁹ Here, in *Gilgamesh*, as in Tablet XII, we find the Gods in a violent mood to eliminate mankind by means of a devastating tempest and deluge. In this crisis, the king thinks of Utnapishtim, who is supposed to have found eternal life after entering the company of the Gods. Utnapishtim usurps the plan from Gods and frames a gigantic boat to house his family and animals. As the flood sinks to the lowest ebb, Utnapishtim anchors the boat beside a mountain, and sends a dove followed by a swallow and a raven in search of dry land. He afterwards appeases the Gods with his sacrifice. He is the survivor of the flood. He is carried by the Gods to live at the mouth of the rivers, and he is named the Faraway. It is succeeded by the hunt for ancestral knowledge that takes Gilgamesh to the limits of the earth, as did Odysseus’s journey to find Tyresias. In the end, a serpent eats the plant of Youth Regained obtained from the sea’s bottom. It bears a close semblance with the Genesis story of the snake that convinces Eve to

²⁰⁷ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, ed. and trans. N. K. Sandars (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 30.

²⁰⁸ *Genesis* 3:1–6.

²⁰⁹ *The Holy Quran*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 26:32.

eat from the Tree of Knowledge for being an immortal one.²¹⁰ It also echoes the stories of the Bible and the Quran, where we get the knowledge of Moses or Musa, who turns his stick into a serpent.²¹¹ In an interview with Claire Chambers, Yassin-Kassab says:

Everyone should read *Gilgamesh*, the same way they read the Bible, because it's a constant source. It's about the relationship with the mother and escaping that relationship; the wild man, and the taming of the wild. It's Jungian psychology from thousands of years ago. There's a Noah story in there, and there's so much else in Sumerian civilization that you find again in the Bible and the Quran. Mesopotamia was the first literate society, so *Gilgamesh* is where literature begins.²¹²

The flood myth of Gilgamesh is narrated in the novel with a more nuanced and important concern about climate change and the destruction of humanity. Sami invokes spiritual assistance in addition to technological help in combating the environmental crisis, and it is the parallel between human hubris and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* that Claire Chambers argues leads to “climate change”.²¹³ There is no reason to distinguish the Scriptures of the *Ahle-Kitab*—religions of the Book—from *Gilgamesh* in this way, as they share themes, concerns, and ambience. The placing of pre-Islamic literature and the Quran allows Yassin-Kassab to make an oblique reference towards the mongrelization of apparently opposed traditions and the repudiation of the conflict between the secular and the sacred.

²¹⁰ *Genesis* 3:1–6.

²¹¹ *The Holy Quran*, 27:10.

²¹² Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 205.

²¹³ Claire Chambers, ““Sexy Identity-Assertion””, 123.

The conflict between the notions of the secular and the sacred anticipates the claims of thinkers such as Talal Asad and Timothy Fitzgerald that it is this dichotomy that inaugurates the moment of western Enlightenment, and the categories of “religion” and “secularism” should be interrogated for their Eurocentric assumptions.²¹⁴ Asad has argued that all attempts at an all-embracing definition of religion are destined to fail because religion as a concept is itself the construction of modern Western discourse. He argues that such all-inclusive claims are innocuous because they do not understand that the definitions of religion are inseparable from political struggle and structured to lay on certain categories of thought and power relations in a given society. Religion is a phenomenon disappearing in the process of secularization. With a different approach, Robert Gleave questions the potency of a division between the understanding of Islam as a civilization and as a religion. He argues that we should judge whether we wish to consider Islam solely as a religion (of *taqwa*) or as a cultural marker that merely uses Islam as a spiritual guidance in their everyday lives and thus bears no pejorative associations with it. They should not overlap.²¹⁵ The community is a choice of belonging and not cultural heritage. The individual and the community are in a perpetual reciprocal interdependency. Cultural traditions rooted in the community take several forms through their manifestations in their spatial and imaginary, symbolic manner.

At the end of the novel, in an Islamophobic climate, Sami is arrested because of his newly grown beard, one of the visible symbols of Islam, and the police impels him to serve as an informer of his own community.²¹⁶ Sami, with a long beard, is reified and reduced to signs and causes a general breakdown of analysis and ideological perceptions only to make others

²¹⁴ Asad, *Formations of the Secular* and Fitzgerald, *Discourse of Civility and Barbarity*.

²¹⁵ Robert Gleave, “Should we Teach Islam as a Religion or as a Civilisation?”

²¹⁶ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 209.

feel comfortable. In his twenties, Sami's identities were made of Black music, Arabic poetry, the "sexiness" of his Arabism, and Western popular culture.²¹⁷ But Sami's recognition in this era of widespread renewal of faith post-9/11 is a matter of increasing crisis. In a multicultural society such as Britain, members of ethnic minorities can be susceptible to recognition through their religion. Enshrining the recognition based on religion and cultural practices breaches "the trust and the proper terms of relationship between different cultural communities".²¹⁸ The recognition of subjects with symbolic representations clubs individuals with mistrust and places them in a critical position through the "triple forces of recognition, remaking, and marking"²¹⁹ in an inclusive multicultural atmosphere. Charles Taylor traces the basis for the politics of recognition to Hegel's phenomenology of self-consciousness in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, which proposes that it is through intersubjective communication and recognition by others that one gains a sense of self.²²⁰ Taylor sees the same impulse acting as a common denominator in many contemporary political groupings. He says:

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage... if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or

²¹⁷ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*, 28.

²¹⁸ Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 13.

²¹⁹ Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton/Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2006), 53.

²²⁰ See Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being.²²¹

In order to gain recognition and to counter the rejection of their faith-based identities in secular nations, some Muslims feel obliged to perform their religious identity through dress codes and other actions. Francis Fukuyama announced the “end of history”, which was understood as human beings’ struggle for some “recognition”.²²² He says that it is the demand “to be recognized as a human being, that is, as a being with a certain worth or dignity”. Fukuyama continues: “The desire for recognition, and the accompanying emotions of anger, shame, and pride...are what drives the whole historical process.”²²³ According to him, it is the unsatisfied demand rather than class conflict, ideology, or struggle for resources and territory that brings out the several conflicts in human history. Fukuyama argues that the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the ending of the Cold War were to usher in a new era of “recognition”, which he drew from the model of the Western secular, liberal democratic nation-state: “[L]iberal democracy replaces the irrational desire to be recognized as greater than others with a rational desire to be recognized as equal.”²²⁴ Like Fukuyama, Taylor sees “recognition” as the basis of human development. He opines: “Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.... Due recognition ... is a vital human need.”²²⁵ Fukuyama advocates for the emergent “new world order” and like Taylor offers a complex

²²¹ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition”, 25.

²²² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992), xv.

²²³ Fukuyama, *The End of History*, xvii.

²²⁴ Fukuyama, *The End of History*, xx.

²²⁵ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition”, 25–26.

engagement with “the politics of recognition”. As the police interrogate Sami, he gradually realizes that in the eye of the police, he is a suspect because of the “burden of the beard,... The burden of belonging”.²²⁶ Yassin-Kassab states that in “Britain Muslims meant Pakis, which meant crumbling mills and corner shops.... Neither sexy nor strong”.²²⁷ Judith Butler posits that the designs of discrimination are deep-seated than the dynamics of “the politics of recognition”. She proposes that Hegel,

misses a couple of important points. The terms by which we are recognized as human are socially articulated and changeable. And sometimes the very terms that confer “humanness” on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status.... These norms have far-reaching consequences for how we understand the model of the human entitled to rights or included in the participatory sphere of political deliberation.²²⁸

The “politics of recognition” in the context of "liberal" models and its enforcement after 9/11 and the war on terror reveal the inherent ambiguity of these norms. The concept of misrecognition holds equal importance alongside recognition. The desire for recognition within Muslim communities, which drives social and political struggles, stems from existing social misrecognition. This misrecognition serves as a powerful motivator for bringing about social change. Misrecognition occurs, for instance, when cultural identities are overly simplified and categorized within the justice system. While well-intentioned, this approach can ultimately lead to the erasure of diverse identities. Tariq Modood, in his work

²²⁶ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*,449.

²²⁷ Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus*,90.

²²⁸ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2. Compare Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 5.

“Multicultural Politics,” astutely points out that the recognition of Muslim identity can create the assumption that individuals who identify as Muslim seek complete separation from British culture. This kind of stereotyping or failure to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of ethnic or religious groups constitutes a form of oppression in itself.¹⁴⁷

In *The Road from Damascus*, disparate mechanisms of faith, sacredness, secularism, religion, and recognition are meshed together to explore the middle path of such variegated binaries with heterogeneous spaces and to establish a flexible belief system with a “third space” connecting the two, in which the interplay between religion and secularism is apparent and obvious. Recent trends in religious studies have focused on “Islam” as a set of discursive practices rather than as a stable religious or cultural signifier. Muslims are in limbo as they are no longer portrayed depending on their racial, social, or economic markers in comparison with established society, and yet, they are not seen exclusively through areligious framework either. Their religious faith is perceived as a contested zone of violence and cultural aberration, as in the wake of the global war on terror, the predominant antithetical constructions are rampant by making them mute and menacing spectators.²²⁹ The evil act of terrorism is nowadays not any more aligned with individual trade; rather, it is identified with the totality of a discourse. By the reiteration and amplification of cultural conflict, the imposed stereotypes are at play en masse. The manner in which post-secularism encourages religion into critical discussions of identity politics and negotiations on cultural underpinnings provides a base for this novel. The task of the post-secular reinterpretation of religion is to observe the dynamic association between the secular and the religious spheres suggestive of the new pluralisms that characterize the political and social space both within

²²⁹ Nath Aldalala’a and Geoffrey P. Nash, “Coming out for Islam? Critical Muslim Responses to Postcolonialism in Theory and Writing”, in *Islam and Postcolonial Discourse*, ed. Esra Mirze Santesso and James E. McClung (London and New York: Routledge: 2017), 231.

and across national borders. Their rumination hastened to restructure the deeper undercurrents of cultural conflicts as they pose a question on the success of rationale and reasoning over faith, of the immanent over the transcendent, and of Western modernity vis-à-vis its registers of monolithic nationalism over the different structures of collective identity. Yassin-Kassab depicts what Jürgen Habermas says is “a change in consciousness” for “the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment”.²³⁰ Emphasizing and by “complicat[ing] our understanding of the terms ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ [and] by deepening our awareness of the ideological, cultural, and historical valences of those terms”²³¹ in tandem, the novel has “re-awakened” our “interest in the role of religion in world society and politics”.²³²

Yassin-Kassab has brought about a significant shift in migrant literature, challenging the negative portrayal of religion and Muslims by advocating for freedom and secularism. Works by migrant writers, such as Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*, Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*, and life-writing by Arab immigrants like George Haddad, Ihab Hassan, Abraham Rihbany, and Salom Rizk, as well as memoirs of exile by Leila Ahmed in *A Border Passage* and Fawaz Turki in *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* and *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American*, delve into the immigrant experiences, multicultural dynamics, and the politics of reception.

²³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, “On the Relations between the Secular Liberal State and Religion,” in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World*, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence Eugene Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 20.

²³¹ Michael Kaufmann, “Locating the Postsecular”, *Religion and Literature* 41, no. 3 (2009): 68.

²³² Graham Huggan, “Is the ‘Post’ in ‘Postsecular’ the ‘Post’ in ‘Postcolonial’?”, *Modern Fiction Studies* 56, no. 4 (2010): 751.

While Ihab Hassan, Abraham Rihbany, and Salom Rizk draw from an Orientalist tradition, Leila Ahmed situates her life in Egypt within the context of contemporary political history. Leila Aboulela, on the other hand, presents an immigrant perspective with Islamic influences, drawing upon Orientalist assumptions. In the novel *The Road from Damascus*, it can be argued that Yassin-Kassab highlights the impending collapse of secular Arabism, which was sustained for a few years following the publication of the book during the Arab Spring. Yassin-Kassab challenges the notion that secularism dismisses religious subjectivity as an erratic or "archaic" belief system unfit for critical contemplation. Instead, the novel portrays Islamic identity within a discourse that goes beyond violence, facilitating a revivalist Muslim identity within contemporary cultural theory and countering the fear of "Islamic" terrorism through alternative voices. It is evident that Yassin-Kassab navigates multiple paradigms, which exert both pressure and partial enablement on the articulation of individual and collective identities.

Though Salman Rushdie hinges on the impossibility of absolute cultural relativism and, by extension, the incompatibility of Islam in a syncretic multicultural space (the heterotopic chutnification of culture being an alibi for the prevalent status quo), Yassin-Kassab gestures towards a certain transcultural cosmopolitanism in his novel to re-legitimize spiritual and theologico-political structures as modes of undoing crude identitarian binary formations that come in the way of realizing cosmopolitan non-identitarian spaces of becoming. Rushdie's representation of the disintegration of religion in literature shows the fragile border of faith and ideology as they struggle to resist the discursive tropes of secularism, whereas Yassin-Kassab syncretizes the alternative modes of belonging in the process of self-discovery. What emerges is the literalized promise of all-inclusive ambitions

that addresses the dilemma of irrevocable ambivalence in the religious parlour of secular discourse, opening up the diverse magnitude of burgeoning approaches towards the enchanted realms of peaceful coexistence and intercultural tolerance of differences. The uncritical acceptance of the binarization of the religious per se with its non-religious “other” should be engaged in what Aamir Mufti has termed “critical secularism” which is only generated through an aporetic and non-conditional engagement with the manifold modes of secularism.²³³

²³³Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 13.

Chapter Two

Remapping Fundamentalism, History, and Terrorism in *The Black Album* and *The Wasted Vigil*

This chapter attempts to decipher fundamentalism, history, and terrorism to show how they function among people, as portrayed by Hanif Kureishi in *The Black Album* (1995) and Nadeem Aslam in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), in both pre- and post-9/11 geopolitical milieu. Though both Kureishi and Aslam belong to a Muslim heritage, they are not practicing Muslims per se. Kureishi's *The Black Album* is important in terms of its representation of Islamism against a neo-Thatcherite background with the context of the problematic onslaught of neoliberalism and secularism as an alternative form of religious and socio-political identity. I have tried to look at the links between religion and violence in the pre-9/11 socio-political climate and the rise of fundamentalism during and after the Rushdie Affair in 1989. In the second part, I have attempted to explore the historical association of war and fanaticism, and how neoliberal capitalism is always in denial of its complicity in the very formation of fundamentalist religious movements and its different affective fields. In these novels, the memory of traumatic histories exemplifies the scale of human catastrophe in the time of widespread global Islamophobia. Through Aslam's *Afghanistan*, I look into the material sedimentations of war and terrorism that surpass the lived experiences of the human and the non-human in that geopolitically precarious area. Both the novels will provide some sense of the structure of the forbidden entrance of fanaticism and the emergence of weaponized religion in an environment of the politics of recognition. I will also deconstruct the ways in which different transnational acts of terror form the resonance of a counter-hegemony in western liberal democracy. The topographical emergence of a stricter faith-

system and the spherical dominance of a geopolitically sanctioned war on terror will be critically chalked out with the help of close and critical engagement of the two novels.

The Black Album draws on postcolonial theories regarding fundamentalism, identity as a hybrid space, and the idea of culture as a forever contesting and discursive space, along with Hanif Kureishi's own concept of effective multiculturalism. While "re-inscribing dominant liberalism as the norm",²³⁴ Kureishi emphasizes the ethical importance of embracing plurality and cultural hybridity, standing in opposition to systems that enforce fundamentalist and monolithic ideologies and rigid identity markers.. The dynamic and diverse elements of identity construction, characterized by fluidity and individual subjectivity, are regarded as sources of tension and disruption that challenge the dominant framework of a belief system conflicting with the broader context of cultural and identity blending. Hanif Kureishi examines the role and predicament of Muslim communities in Britain by drawing on incidents such as riots, book burnings, and the fatwa. Through this exploration, he sheds light on the implications of prevailing perceptions of belonging and culture in Western societies. He presents a conflict between Western liberalism and Islamist fundamentalism by placing the central protagonist at the crossroads of an ethical dilemma, wherein he is torn between the opposing ideals of western secular modernity and the extremist ideals of an Islamic revivalist group. Shahid Hasan valorizes individualism over collective identifications and his education in London and his sexual relationship with his tutor, Deedee Osgood, work to make him a subject who courts and even secretly desires western liberalism and its secular, trans-religious temperament. Shahid feels divided between music, "sex and secularity",²³⁵ and a moral restraint and a sense of identitarian solidarity

²³⁴ Ruvani Ranasinha, *Hanif Kureishi* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2002), 239.

²³⁵ Hanif Kureishi, *Collected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 243.

through his interactions with individuals like Riaz, Chad, Hat, and other members of an Islamist group. Eventually Shahid decides to prioritize liberalism over both supposed strict Islamic normativity and anti-racist activism. He visits a mosque, where he finds:

Men of so many types and nationalities—Tunisians, Indians, Algerians, Scots, French—gathered there, chatting in the entrance, where they removed their shoes and then retired to wash, that it would have been difficult, without prior knowledge, to tell which country the mosque was in.... Forty Ethiopians sat to the side of one room, addressed by one of their number in robes.²³⁶

Shahid is struck by the cosmopolitan and transnational nature of this space, which leaves him with an impression of being uncompetitive, peaceful, and meditative. However, he struggles to reconcile the contrasting experiences between what occurred in the mosque and the vibrant diversity he encounters in the bustling city. Kureishi's mosque is "an alternative to the structural oppositions set up by the text [and] is revealed, only to be left unexplored through a failure of imagination as much as through ignorance".²³⁷ With Shahid's attempt at situating Islamism beyond its reactionary stereotypes, Kureishi plays with Islam and Islamism within the assumed oppositional space of sex and secularity and gives Shahid a space to voice his rage at cultural and religious racism and fight against his snobby Pakistani sister-in-law Zulma, who thinks Islam is "for the peasants".²³⁸ The Rushdie Affair and the mention of terrorist attacks in London during the early 1990s are examined in this context to emphasize

²³⁶ Hanif Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 131–132.

²³⁷ Hanif Kureishi, "Novelist Hanif Kureishi on David Bowie's "RebelRebel". *Wall Street Journal*, 17 March 2015. accessed- 23rd Dec, 2021, https://www.wsj.com/articles/novelist-hanif-kureishi-on-david-bowies-rebel-rebel-1426600595?reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink

²³⁸ *Ibid.* 133.

the relevance and timeliness of the text. The ethical and moral self-fashioning of the Islamist group paradoxically pops up as a reiterative textual marker of an identity mask that co-exists with many others, often as fragile and parochial as the ones that supplant or oppose it. A more comprehensive understanding of the text can be attained by employing a contrapuntal reading that examines two cross-dressing scenes within the novel. In one scene, Riaz, the leader of the fundamentalist group, dresses Shahid in a white salwar kameez, representing the ethnic and devout attire of South Asians. In another scene, Shahid's lover, Deedee, dresses him in feminine underwear, applies makeup to his face, and plays Madonna's popular 1991 hit-single "Vogue," which was associated with the vibrant dancing style of New York's gay club scene and was used for promotional purposes by Madonna. This second cross-dressing is an undermining conjuration of the first one. The novel engages with the quest for identity as epitomized by these alternative dressing codes and in doing so seemingly treads the path of didacticism and morality—generic literary traits that prompted Mark Stein to describe the novel as “glib” and “flippant” in his analysis of the text in *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*:

Shahid is placed neatly between two opposing forces, Deedee's secular individualism and Riaz's fanaticism. This strict dichotomous structure is reminiscent of a morality play which underscores the didactic nature of Kureishi's novel. Over a large part of the novel, the protagonist remains skeptical of both positions. His quest to resolve these conflicting attractions can be seen as a novelistic device to develop an understanding for the youth who turn towards Muslim 'fundamentalism'. Yet the extremity of the two poles casts a doubt on the sincerity of Kureishi's attempts to understand the nature of 'fundamentalism'. There is glibness, a flippancy to the Black Album that makes it a funny text but one that cannot be taken entirely seriously.²³⁹

²³⁹ Mark Stein, *Black British Literature*, 124.

Shahid becomes involved in the act of burning *The Satanic Verses*, a book that had become a symbol of blasphemy, while he still hankers after the uninhibited liberal lifestyle that Deedee personifies. “‘This isn’t right’, Shahid says to someone beside him. ‘What’s happening to our community?’ The student replies, ‘What you worried about? It only a book.’ They have burnt the book. The event has been a little lame but it is what they wishes and it is done”.²⁴⁰ Shahid ponders over the usefulness of book-burning and the issues surrounding literary censorship (freedom of expression):

He couldn’t begin to tell the sane from the mad, wrong from right, good from bad. Where would one start? None of this would lead to the good. But what did? Who knew? What would make them right? Everything was in motion; nothing could be stopped. The world was swirling, its compasses spinning. History was unwinding in his head into chaos, and he was tumbling through space.²⁴¹

Chad has drawn a difference between himself and British culture by burning the book. This shows a subdued aggression in the interpretation of cultural belonging. Chad was adopted by a white couple and his position in normative British society is highlighted as someone who feels the pangs and trauma of being adopted by a passively racist mother. His Other-ing in British culture is akin to that of a fanatic son who feels alienated from his parents and the culture that brought him up. Kureishi depicts the coercive social mechanisms that lead the second-generation Muslim immigrants in the West to become more overtly religious than their parents in terms of visible, social performatives. Tariq Modood in *Multicultural Politics* finds “cultural racism” to be the form of prejudice that exclude other ethnic minorities. According to Shahid’s perspective, the evolving boundaries of Britain encompass certain South-Asian and African-Caribbean values that can be culturally assimilated, while excluding

²⁴⁰ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 226.

²⁴¹ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 220.

those who are considered culturally "different" and resistant to assimilation, such as Asians, Arabs, and non-white Muslims. Modood further argues that South Asian Muslims in Britain are a "socially deprived and racially harassed group." They are segregated and alienated from the mainstream contours of the cosmopolitan culture. Muslims are often perceived as posing a "radical assault" on British cultural values, viewed as a potential threat to the nation-state, and considered adversaries to the cohesive systems of societal values. The Islamic protests against Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* provided an important rallying point and a kind of cultural justification for the prevalent anti-Muslim prejudice. Modood asserts that discourses that consider Muslims as a problem or a threat are "not confined to an extreme fringe, popular prejudice or the right wing ... they can be implicit or explicit in both elite and progressive discourses."²⁴² Suffering from a second-generation identity crisis, Shahid is confronted by his roommate, Chad, who is "lost in translation"²⁴³ to pick up an alternative choice—the radical fundamentalism led by Riaz's group to combat cultural exclusion, summed up by the self-assertive war cry, "No more Paki. Me a Muslim."²⁴⁴

In *The Black Album*, Kureishi delves into the reasons behind the increasing embrace of Islam among young British Asians of the second generation during the late 1980s. Hanif Kureishi, in an article, describes *The Black Album* as a narrative on the "state of Britain" even beyond its immediate historical context, and, thus, has a ring of topical contemporaneity to it.

He says:

²⁴² Modood and Werbner, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, 81.
Modood and Werbner, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, 82

²⁴³ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 107.

²⁴⁴ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 128.

With the 20th anniversary of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie approaching, and since *The Black Album* is set in 1988/9 and concentrates on a small group of religious extremists, we thought my pre-7/7 novel might shed some light on some of the things that have happened since.²⁴⁵

According to Kureishi, the perception of immigrant identity among second-generation British Muslims experienced a shift after the fatwa. Before the fatwa, Muslims with origins in the Indian subcontinent would mainly define themselves as South Asians, Indians, or Pakistanis. However, as Claire Chambers suggests, a “lexical evolution” of Muslim identity emerged during the period of the fatwa, which influenced Kureishi to write “The Black Album.”¹⁵ Anshuman Mondal addresses the controversy in his book *Islam and Controversy: The Politics of Free Speech After Rushdie*. He writes:

Khomeini’s fatwa must be read not as a signifier of Islam’s putative medieval barbarism, as secular liberals have been wont to do, but rather as a counter-offensive gesture that reveals, in its outlandish intransigence towards Western secular-liberalism’s normative enterprise, alternative ways of reading human experience, history and moral value that exceed the paradigms of Western secular thought. The fatwa is only one among a multiplicity of such subaltern possibilities, but its presence as a fissure in dominant regimes of secular representation renders visible that which normally remains invisible because while such regimes of representation constitute western discourse as universal through their exclusion and/or domestication of “otherness”, the fatwa’s moral and legal outrageousness as well as its unequivocal endorsement of violence performed a resistance to secular universalism that could be

²⁴⁵ Hanif Kureishi, “Turning the Black Album into a Stage Play”, 2009.

neither ignored nor assimilated. Indeed, this may be why Khomeini transgressed the due process and juridical proprieties of Islamic as well as western secular law.²⁴⁶

The controversy surrounding *The Satanic Verses* not only zoomed in on to the fatwa, but also it was not simply “manufactured” by Islamists. Leaders and activists mobilized people to the protests and generated some possible “synthetic outrage”.²⁴⁷ People such as Zaki Badawi, Ziauddin Sardar, and Ali Mazrui did not participate in the protests and such protests did little to highlight the representativeness of an entire community. Kenan Malik in *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Aftermath* argues that the “argument against offensive speech is the modern secularized version of the old idea of blasphemy, reinventing the sacred for a godless age.”²⁴⁸ This offensiveness can be taken rather as a performance of the power of the discourses within which racism/Islamophobia emanate. In *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler claims that words find their offensiveness and abusiveness through the repetitive performance of power that makes them wheels of that performativity.²⁴⁹ Wounding words are powerful enough to hurt as they have events of violence behind them.. Demeaning and oppressive stereotypes are employed to denigrate and subjugate, constituting performative elements within a dominant discourse of sovereign power that unilaterally defines the boundaries of permissible speech. A certain categorizing of language and speech registers form the part of an elaborate statist ploy to culturally and racially “otherize” and subordinate certain sections of the population, the entire practice being synonymous to Agamben’s notion of the state-conditioned “states of exception”. The use of racist discourse solidifies the dominance of one

²⁴⁶ Anshuman Mondal, *Islam and Controversy*, 18.

²⁴⁷ Kenan Malik contends this in *From Fatwa to Jihad*

²⁴⁸ Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, 156.

²⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 5–27.

group over racial minorities, and the reinstatement of such hierarchical structures is merely a repetitive act of performance. Kureishi depicts young British Muslim individuals like Shahid, Riaz, Chad, and Farhat (nicknamed Hat) to highlight a generational contrast between the more passive mindset of the older generation and the devoutly religious attitude of the younger generation. These young characters express that secularization and Islamization should not be seen as mutually exclusive choices; rather, they are the “two sides of the same coin, two dimensions of the same phenomenon.”²⁵⁰ Anshuman Mondal, in his book *Young British Muslim Voices*, which records the faith and non-faith experience of young British Muslims in the present-day climate, opines:

The young Muslims to whom I spoke all narrated their personal histories in ways which emphasised a desire for self-empowerment. This motif is common to those who have turned self-consciously towards Islam and those who have turned self-consciously towards Islam and those who have followed the ‘secular approach’... Most people interpret ... rebellious behaviours in terms of the clash between secular, individualist—British?—values and Islamic values, but if we look beyond that we can see that these rebellions encompass a more fundamental desire to assert one’s authority the face of the disempowerment they feel within the parental home.²⁵¹

They react to their parents’ “culture” by becoming more religious and by using Islam as a “bulwark”. Mondal further comments:

These young Muslims do not feel that it is Islam that has disempowered them; instead, they believe it is their parents’ “culture” and the restrictions it imposes on their

²⁵⁰ Claire Chambers and Caroline Herbert, *Imagining Muslims in South Asia and the Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2017), 37.

²⁵¹ Anshuman Mondal, *Young British Muslim Voices* (Oxford: Greenwood, 2008), 22.

individual and social development.... Precisely because Islam was the ground on which the elders established their patriarchal authority, younger Muslims have sought to challenge them on this ground.... It is a way of authorizing their personal life choices because it is justified through Islam and not against it.²⁵²

Shahid and Chad in the novel have understood that the key factor to their identity is the question of “belonging”—a trade-off between community and individuality. Tahira confronts and combats exclusion as “a man on the street ripped her scarf off and shouted, ‘This is England, not Arabia.’”²⁵³. Shahid's emphasis on the freedom of individual imagination, in contrast to the collective mindset promoted by Riaz's group, is what creates a rift between him and the group. Zulma, Shahid’s sister-in-law, also echoes the same when she says: “[T]hey’ll slaughter us soon for thinking”²⁵⁴ and establishes an irreconcilable contrast between belief and thought, religion and literature, as well as piety and imagination. The apologia regarding the ethicality of the public burning of *The Satanic Verses* are summed up, thus, by Shahid and Riaz:

“A free imagination,” Shahid said, “ranges over many natures. A free imagination, looking into itself, illuminates others.”“We are discussing here the free and unbridled imagination of men who live apart from the people,” Riaz said. “And these corrupt, disrespectful natures, wallowing in their own juices, must be caged as if they were dangerous carnivores. Do we want more wild lions and rapists stalking our

²⁵² Mondal, *Young British Muslim Voices*, 26–27.

²⁵³ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 104.

²⁵⁴ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 189.

streets?”...“They [writers] make us think. What is there to think? Sorry? Must we prefer this indulgence to the profound and satisfying comforts of religion?”²⁵⁵

Shahid oscillates between two contradictory positions, between Deedee, on the one hand, and Riaz and the Islamists, on the other. He ponders: “How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world.”²⁵⁶ Shahid’s post-Enlightenment, secular liberalism brings out a long cherished debate that leans towards a liberal position and presents a conditional hospitality towards its irreducible, radical “others”. Shahid’s “innumerable ways of being in the world” is a kind of trajectory that merely validates and conditions certain a priori modes of being in the world like “one system or creed”. This penchant for prevalent secular statements in which “diversity” is well-rooted becomes an oft-trodden hegemonic register that modern and postmodern western liberals consent to or endlessly eulogize. Understanding each other might transform rancour into mutual comprehension and productive exchange and dialogues. Turning towards a religious extremity and seeking refuge in deep religiosity and monolithic faith-systems is partly a response towards a sense of cultural alienation on the part of the people who feel rejected and segregated from their wider familial or socio-cultural milieu. These “young Muslims not only possess plural identities; these identities are radically unstable because they continually have to negotiate swirling cross-currents of influence, the attractions and repulsions of several sets of cultural values and ideas.”²⁵⁷ They find themselves at the centre of such “intense cultural anxieties [that they] must feel particularly

²⁵⁵ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 183–184.

²⁵⁶ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 274.

²⁵⁷ Mondal, *Young British Muslim Voices*, 74.

vulnerable to the contradictory pressures of our times”.²⁵⁸The chronic cultural and ideological instability bequeathed to society, eventually postulated limits on *ijtihad* or free interpretation that lay at the root of the Reformation in the Judeo-Christian Western world and, thus, eventually led to the infamous “closing of the doors of *ijtihad*”²⁵⁹ in the twelfth century CE.

Freedom of interpretation is the *modus vivendi* for moderate reformers such as Chad, one of the most radical Islamist characters, who while defending the principles of restraint regarding Shahid’s libertine inclination to rave music and the excesses of drugs, drink, and sex, says -“A man is more advanced, surely, if he conquers himself, rather than submits to every desire?”²⁶⁰ Salman Rushdie “In Good Faith” states “that understanding is possible, and can be achieved without the suppression of the principle of free speech. What it requires is a moment of good-will; a moment in which we may all accept that the other parties are acting, have acted, in good faith”.²⁶¹ In this context, Rushdie not only maintains his personal motivations but also recognizes the sincerity of his adversaries, seeking to transform the landscape of oppositional identity politics by acknowledging and appreciating each other’s “good will”. Deedee Osgood, Shahid’s lecturer, educator, and a disillusioned socialist, tries to fathom a sense of belonging as she gradually realizes that her liberal embracing of postmodernism’s cultural relativism is no match for the monolithically informed religious convictions of Riaz and his group. Her husband, Andrew Brownlow, who is a professor of History, also displays signs of his identity gradually disintegrating into meaninglessness as his socialist utopia collides with Thatcherite reality to make him confess that “everything I believed has turned into shit. There we were, right up to the end of the seventies, arguing about society

²⁵⁸ Mondal, *Young British Muslim Voices*, 74.

²⁵⁹ Mondal, *Young British Muslim Voices*, 74.

²⁶⁰ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 129.

²⁶¹ Salman Rushdie, ‘In Good Faith’, 395.

after the revolution, the nature of the dialectic, the meaning of history. And all the while, as we debated in our journals, it was being taken from us”.²⁶² Brownlow has lost his “direction home”²⁶³ and sense of purpose just like Deedee and eventually they fail to define their Englishness in terms of the earlier constatives. The crisis of disintegration and the slow dissemination of the definitive contours that defined Englishness is evident when Deedee in a conversation with Shahid admits the sheer futility of her political beliefs. She says:

There was a period, in the mid-seventies, when we imagined history was moving our way. Gays, blacks, women, were asserting and organizing themselves. Less than ten years later, after the Falklands, CND and the miner’s strike, even I could see the movement was in a contrary direction. Thatcher had concentrated the struggle. But she’d worn everyone down. Where did we go from here?²⁶⁴

The materialistic ethos of the Thatcherite 1980s, a time of moral and financial fiasco, also lures Shahid’s arrogant brother, Chili, into a downward spiral of squalor and dependency. Rehana Ahmed contends that Kureishi’s oeuvre “spans the transition from a Thatcherite monoculturalism to a liberal multiculturalism and the backlash against multiculturalism of the post-9/11 years.”²⁶⁵ The act of book burning symbolizes a demand for the rights of a relatively small minority to take precedence over the collectively agreed-upon rights of the entire community. As Riaz's group escalates their violent resistance, they gradually lose the moral authority initially attributed to them due to the belief that Islam offers a genuine and adaptable alternative to the flawed multiculturalism prevalent in mainstream Western

²⁶² Kureishi, *The Black Album*,243.

²⁶³ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 244.

²⁶⁴ Kureishi, *The Black Album*,116.

²⁶⁵ Rehana Ahmed, *Writing British Muslims*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015),95.

society. The compliance of Islam, especially in the context of migrant Muslims in Europe, is interrelated with the misinterpreted concepts of *da'wah* and jihad. Riaz and his group portray the dynamics of “recognition” with the subsequent representations of young British Muslims to register the shift in harnessing religio-political identity unlike the principle of *tawhid* as discussed by Tariq Ramadan in his book *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*. According to Ramadan, the crux of integration is the faith and oneness of God—the principle of *tawhid* that urges Muslims to assimilate in diverse environments. To quote Ramadan:

Islam is not a culture. Whether we like it or not, the essence of Islam is religious. The central principle of *tawhid*, which we have often referred to, the foundations of faith and practice, the general guidance we find in the scriptural sources, leave no room for doubt about the reality of this. To speak of Islam is first of all to speak of faith, spirituality, and ethics, which together make up a conception of humankind and of life. This is what it is first and fore-most, but that is not all it is. Being aware of the existence of different methodologies in worship and social affairs, ... makes it possible for us better to understand the Islamic universe in its relation to culture.²⁶⁶

Hanif Kureishi's novel, *The Black Album*, situates the emergence of Islamism within the wider dynamics of identity politics, which are frequently simplified and labeled as "multiculturalism" in Western liberal society. In one of his essays, “Loose Tongues”, Kureishi argues that:

The virtue and risk of real multiculturalism is that we could find that our values are, ultimately, irreconcilable with those of others. From that point of view everything gets worse. There is more internal and social noise and confusion, and more questions

²⁶⁶ Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 214.

about how things get decided, and by whom. If the idea of truth itself is questioned, the nature of the law itself is altered.²⁶⁷

Hanif Kureishi explores the notion that individuals may find it challenging to reconcile their beliefs with those of others, as the inherent clashes between civilizations are unavoidable. This concept is linked to the concepts of "noise" and "confusion," as well as the redemptive potential of literature³⁸. However, Rehana Ahmed challenges the common perception of Kureishi as someone who deconstructs essentialized cultural notions operating through "us" and "them" dichotomies. Instead, she argues that "a polarisation between a cross-cultural liberal protagonist and a monocultural, illiberal 'other' informs much of his work"³⁹ In his early essays, Kureishi emphasizes the importance of recognizing oneself as an individual within the world and rejects the idea of a single voice representing a whole group. Paradoxically, in his *Collected Essays*, when addressing the perceived threat of monocultural fundamentalism, Kureishi adopts a pluralistic language and emphasizes his own version of a unified collective. In *The Black Album*, Kureishi delves into the realms of sex, drugs, and youth culture, particularly focusing on music that deliberately challenges established power structures, aiming to subvert them. . Shahid's tutor, Deedee Osgood, to whom he is attracted, represents the lure of the libertine lifestyle and ideology with its insistence upon individualism and a moral relativism that upholds sensuality over the responsibilities and the barrenness of a moral life. Kureishi deciphers the forbidden, the sacred, and the un-speakable in art. According to him, "The person who doesn't want to hear his own words is prisoner, prison and the law. Real dictators in the world are a picture, too, of dictators within

²⁶⁷ Kureishi, *Collected Essays*,347.

individuals, of certain kinds of minds.”²⁶⁸The duty of an artist is to listen to the words that emanate outside the censorship regime of sovereign power. The idea of an artist imagined thus, offers a way to erase silence, disrupt dictatorship, and deconstruct the affective fields of sovereign power. The idea of the artist as a public intellectual is here synonymous with the Saidean idea of the Tiresias figure who does not tread the path of legitimized parlance and speaks truth to the power regimes without being wary of its consequences. Thus, the idea of the civil society imagined in the postcolonial imaginary is intricately linked to the artist figure as an embodiment of the excitable realm of the speech-act.

In Kureishi's *Essays*, there is an evident tension between the longing for uninhibited artistic expression and the need to safeguard one's cultural identity from being constrained by stereotypes. Previously, Shahid existed as an "invisible" individual driven solely by a desire to belong. To attain visibility, he is compelled to select between two seemingly incompatible subjectivities: that of the "Islamic fundamentalist" and that of the "liberal fundamentalist." The novel portrays Islamists in a monolithic manner, which contributes to and reinforces prevailing prejudices held by the dominant culture regarding Islamic fundamentalists. On the contrary, the representation of liberal fundamentalists, earlier in the novel, eventually takes us to a flip side that is almost the same. Kureishi adheres to the dealing of contradictory subjectivities to make apparent the “fundamentalist” identity in an exchange of identity. Chad, previously engaged in activities such as pimping, drug dealing, and being a fervent enthusiast of pop music, undergoes a transformation where he renounces and opposes his past subjectivities to embrace an Islamic fundamentalist identity. His detachment and “withdrawal” from the musical world are not merely painful; his efforts to constantly

²⁶⁸ Hanif Kureishi, “Loose Tongues and Liberty,” *The Guardian*, June 7, 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jun/07/hayfestival2003.hayfestival>, accessed 24th Dec, 2021.

“police” himself against his pleasure appears to be absurd and farcical as well. Unquestioning loyalty towards the monolithic strand of Islam and the constant policing of emotions and pleasure are the basics of Riaz’s Muslim brotherhood. They also engage themselves in stereotyped activities of book-burning and petrol bombing like programmed automatons. Chad acts as if “someone had activated a motor in his stomach”²⁶⁹ and Riaz gobbles as though “he were fuelling a machine”.²⁷⁰ On the other hand, the highest form of liberal sensualism in the form of Deedee Osgood churns out a life of sexual experimentation, terrible fantasies, drugs, and a social party-life that is showcased as vapid with loneliness and something that dangerously veers towards physical self-destruction. Professor Brownlow, Deedee’s husband, who started stuttering since the collapse of communism, is a Marxist-Leninist at heart. He is also ravaged by his adherence to one subjective position and is seen as a machine-like intellectual who “thumps himself on the head as if to repair a connection”.²⁷¹ He finds that liberals “working themselves up into a pompous lather” are not advocating for literary freedom; instead, they are simply aligning themselves with their own disadvantaged social class, disregarding the larger cause of the “the Asian working class”.²⁷² Shahid wavers between these two opposing positions. Islam attracts Shahid “because it seems to constitute a solid, authoritative foundation for living in a late capitalist society lacking in moral substance and spiritual direction.”²⁷³ Shahid’s problem is that when he is with his Islamic friends, their story obliges him, but when he walks out, he finds the world to be “more subtle and

²⁶⁹ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 12.

²⁷⁰ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 5.

²⁷¹ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 31.

²⁷² Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 215.

²⁷³ Frederick Holmes, “The Postcolonial Subject Divided between East and West: Kureishi’s *The Black Album* as an Intertext of Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*”, *Papers on Language & Literature* 37, no. 3 (2001): 299.

inexplicable”.²⁷⁴ All the characters—Marxists and Islamists—are essentialist stereotypes as they move under the clichéd and vulnerable pattern of a monolithic caricatured identity. Shahid is an exception as he swings between two identity poles refusing to fit smugly into either of them: “One day he could feel passionately one thing, the next the opposite.”²⁷⁵

Kureishi's exploration of binary oppositions and conflicting subject positions, specifically the Islamic and liberal fundamentalist poles, resonates with Jacques Derrida's notion of the trace, where the encounter with the Other is significant and metaphysical principles of contradiction are challenged by the emergence of a pure concept ("the one"). Throughout the novel, there are numerous references to bombs, explosions, and massacres, contributing to a language that intersects with the theme of terrorism. Deedee Osgood's portrayal is particularly pivotal in this context. On her first date with Shahid, she drops “a bomb on her tongue”²⁷⁶ and induces him. At a later point, they find themselves at a silver warehouse, resembling a prison yard, encircled by barbed wire, guarded by sentries, and monitored by security cameras. Within this setting, some children attempt to scale the fence, reminiscent of the plight of refugees. After spending some time in this “inferno”, amid “scream[s] of pleasure”, they arrive at an “end-of-decade” house party where “big men” search “Shahid, putting their hands down his trousers”.²⁷⁷ In this place, two bodies are lying on the floor “as if they had been massacred”.²⁷⁸ Self-destruction, terrorism, and violence, the clichéd cultural representations of Muslim fundamentalism, are extensively used to describe

²⁷⁴ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 133.

²⁷⁵ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 147.

²⁷⁶ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 57.

²⁷⁷ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 59.

²⁷⁸ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 63.

Osgood's liberal-fundamentalist lifestyle. Derrida's "the trace" embodies the text with these binaries. Riaz establishes a reciprocal bond with those in his vicinity, perceiving a connection between the defense of the local Bangladeshi family and the larger global conflict between Islam and the West. He identifies with this struggle by drawing parallels between the plight of the local community and the suffering endured by Muslims in Palestine, Afghanistan, and Kashmir.²⁷⁹ Kylie Moore-Gilbert finds "the rise of 'fundamentalism' in the contemporary era to be a reaction against the geopolitical threat to 'local' cultural tradition which the homogenising tendencies of globalisation represent".²⁸⁰ If so, then Kureishi, in a stereotypical manner, has misinterpreted the potential that globalization has bestowed on "fundamentalist" Islam over the "local". Throughout much of his written works, he has portrayed Islam as being associated with the unsophisticated and uninformed. Riaz, as a self-proclaimed defender of the Muslim community, organizes a public exhibition of vegetables to unite downtrodden Muslims and asks Shahid: "Are you not with your people? Look at them, they are from villages, half-literate and not wanted here. All day they suffer poverty and abuse. Don't we, in this land of so-called free expression, have to give them a voice? Aren't we the fortunate ones, after all?"²⁸¹ He intends to create an opportunist reactionary ideology through a programme of intolerance and violence. Rehana Ahmed, while speaking on Kureishi's short fiction of the late 1990s, contends that Kureishi has "moved away from the issues of race and ethnicity that are dominant in his early novels and screenplays" and suggests that his characters look for "autonomy from categories of ethnicity and from the traditional nuclear family" and "tends towards an individualist rebellion that actually operates comfortably

²⁷⁹ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 82.

²⁸⁰ Kylie Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 5.

²⁸¹ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 173.

within the limits of contemporary liberal multiculturalism and hegemonic social formations".²⁸²

Kureishi employs a juxtaposition of Shahid's encounters with spiritual and sexual gratification to highlight the interplay between religious and "fundamentalist" liberalism, blurring the boundaries between seemingly opposing forces. Shahid is so self-conscious regarding his ignorance about Islamic history and Muslim rituals that he thinks that "[it] will place him in a no man's land" when "every one was insisting on their identity" and "coming out as a man, woman, gay, black, Jew".²⁸³ He listens to his friend Hat's conjectures about the precise rituals of an ideal Muslim prayer. Unsatisfied with it, Shahid seeks to begin prayer in his own secular way:

While praying, Shahid had little notion of what to think, of what the cerebral concomitant to the actions should be ... so, on his knees, he celebrated to himself the substantiality of the world, the fact of existence, the inexplicable phenomenon of life, art, humour and love itself—in murmured language, itself another sacred miracle. He accompanied this awe and wonder with suitable music, the "Ode of Joy", from Beethoven's Ninth, for in-stance, which he hummed inaudibly.²⁸⁴

Shahid's exploration of spiritual submission may appear perplexing, as traditionally such actions would be accompanied by the recitation of specific Quranic verses that exalt the universe, the essence of existence, the wondrous tapestry of life, love, spiritual fulfilment, justice, and mortality, all expressed through the Arabic language. Riaz believes that Shahid is

²⁸² Rehana Ahmed, "Occluding Race in Selected Short Fiction by Hanif Kureishi", *Wasifiri* 58 (Summer 2009b): 27–34.

²⁸³ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 92.

²⁸⁴ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 92.

their prized possession and asks him not to think critically and to submit his being to God; whereas Deedee wants Shahid to “leave them to God”²⁸⁵ if he wishes to surrender himself to her. Her ownership to Shahid is noticeable when she “stamps him with love” in a drug-inducing intoxication.²⁸⁶ After “the fantasy Deedee masturbates to” and Shahid kicking off the “illusions he’s been subject to! What torrents of drug-inspired debris he had allowed to stream through his head! What banal fantasies he believed were visions!”²⁸⁷ he seeks to achieve Islamic conviction and devour religion like pills are “grasped” to “follow the prescriptions and be patient”.²⁸⁸ Shahid is given a salwar kameez by the brothers and Deedee, on the other hand, asks him to wear makeup and walk naked. Shahid’s body, a locus of contesting ideologies and performatives, is another example of the trace.

We see that “a bomb had exploded on the main course of Victoria Station”²⁸⁹ and “the platform of Baker Street was Arcadia itself”.²⁹⁰ Like Shahid’s body, the tubes are, also, portrayed as spaces that open up for contestation between the polarized forms of fundamentalisms (Riaz’s rendition of Muslim fundamentalism and Osgood’s ways of liberal fundamentalism). The successive nature of these events competes not only for supremacy but also for their self-saturation within these different subject positions. Through these instances of the trace, Kureishi subverts dominant culture’s inference of fundamentalism. It is true that secular liberalism is being institutionalized with a grain of a fundamentalist quintessence at

²⁸⁵ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 160.

²⁸⁶ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 130.

²⁸⁷ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 130.

²⁸⁸ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 96.

²⁸⁹ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 101.

²⁹⁰ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 124.

its core and the absent-presence of liberal fundamentalism is unmasking its prevalent hegemony in the structure. Deedee is attracted to literature, intellectual life, love, and sex. She discusses the “history of struggle” through a discussion of racism in class. In the wake of the controversy around *The Satanic Verses*, she brings the book to class for a debate, while Shahid’s friends set it on fire. Shahid thinks that literature coerces us to think and, on the other hand, Riaz asks should they “prefer this indulgence to the profound and satisfying comforts of religion?”²⁹¹ It is a dilemma for Shahid. His sister-in-law, Zulma, easily expresses this dilemma: “They will slaughter us soon for thinking. Have you stopped thinking, Shahid?”²⁹² During an interview with Colin Mac Cabe, Kureishi discussed the allure of fundamentalism among certain second-generation Asian youths, attributing it to their pursuit of purity:

It’s to say we’re not really living in England at all. We’re going to keep everything that’s English, everything that’s capitalist, everything that’s white, everything that’s corrupt, it’s going to be outside. And everything that’s good and pure and Islamic, it’s going to be in here, with these people. And you can see that mix-ing, you know, was terrifying, just as racists find mixing terrifying. But of course it’s inevitable.²⁹³

This is re-established by Kureishi in his essay “The Carnival of Culture”, in which he urges liberals to fulfil their “human duty to inform them (young Muslims) that there is more than one book in the world”.²⁹⁴ In this regard, Bobby Sayyid speaks about the totalizing visions of religious fundamentalism in *A Fundamental Fear*. He thinks that Western intellectual and

²⁹¹ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 184.

²⁹² Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 189.

²⁹³ Colin MacCabe, “Hanif Kureishi on London”, *Critical Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1999): 50.

²⁹⁴ Hanif Kureishi, *The Word and the Bomb* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 100.

literary conflict with Islamism hardly move beyond “cultural essentialism and particularism”. “Accounts of Islamism”, he observes, are mainly controlled by two fundamentalist symbols: “book burners” and “suicide bombers”.²⁹⁵ Rehana Ahmed finds “Kureishi’s liberal antipathy towards monoculturalism ‘from below’” in his writings. She observes his dissent towards Asian Muslim “fundamentalism,” which aligns with Slavoj Žižek’s argument that late-capitalist liberal democracy generates a recurring tension between the inclusive post-ideological universalist liberal tolerance and the particularist nature of “new fundamentalisms.”²⁹⁶ She also adds that for Kureishi, the homogenizing discourses that reiterate the image of the Asian Muslim “fundamentalist” become the vantage grounds that retroactively prepare the counter identity of the heterogenous liberal individual. The novelist’s depictions, however, offer little insight into the mechanisms through which this puritanical group manages to keep the woke liberal protagonist under its control for an extended period. Shahid recollects a conversation with Hat and Riaz concerning transgressions and corresponding punishments:

Hat had stated that homosexuals should be beheaded, though first they should be offered the option of marriage. Riaz had become interested and said that God would burn homosexuals forever in hell, scorching their flesh in a furnace before replacing their skin as new, and repeating this throughout eternity ... Riaz’s hatred had been so cool, so certain. Shahid had wanted to mention it to Deedee but was nervous that it

²⁹⁵ S. Bobby, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books, 1997), 15.

²⁹⁶ Ahmed, “Occluding Race in Selected Short Fiction by Hanif Kureishi”, 27–34.

might distract her. Was Riaz not, though, his friend? If only Shahid could understand where such ideas came from.²⁹⁷

The presence of barbaric, homophobic, and extremist beliefs implies the existence of a disturbing and unfathomable alternative: the repressed “cool hatred” that is far more manipulate and destructive. . In “homogenizes the Muslim community, [and] concealing its broad diversity of faith and practice”,²⁹⁸ Kureishi identifies the potential fallout of fundamentalist violence, and sees the limits of white liberal multiculturalism amidst tensions bred by intolerance and extremity. Anshuman Mondal in *Young British Muslim Voices* finds that the “doubleness of experience” is the most unsettling thing that these young people encounter. Continually, they have to negotiate the swirling crosscurrents of influence—the attractions and repulsions of several sets of cultural values and ideas. These people find themselves at the centre of intense cultural anxieties and are particularly vulnerable to the contradictory pressure of our times. These tensions are heightened by the numerous forms of social, cultural, and economic exclusions that they experience. For the sociologist, Tariq Modood, this new guise of “otherization” is predominantly cultural, and this cultural racism stands on cultural differences rather than skin colour—“on the ‘natural’ preference of human beings for their own cultural group and on the incompatibility between different cultures”.²⁹⁹ This subtle and understated identity politics does not overtly assert the status quo but presents itself through a subtle interplay of likeness and differences. In many ways, these subject groups may be displaying a sense of identity deeply convenient for the globalized neo-capitalist world we inhabit by steering a system between an “insipid consumer

²⁹⁷ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 119.

²⁹⁸ Ranasinha, *Hanif Kureishi*, 89.

²⁹⁹ Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics*, 27.

cosmopolitanism on the one hand and rigid local chauvinism on the other”, and, thus, be in a convenient position to mediate and dictate terms to the global, the national, and the local at the same time.³⁰⁰ Beneath the appearance of moderation, there is always lurking the pull of extremism. The world views of the British Muslim youth from older generations were immersed in the “*biradari* style social networks”, whereas young Muslims began to develop their own networks that “transcend the insular and divisive fiefdoms of the *biradaris*, and they are beginning to forge alliances with one another across sectarian, geographical and social divisions, passing ideas and inspiration along a chain of innovation”.³⁰¹ This may be treated as a prologue to a path-breaking British or European version of modern Islam, comfortable with itself and others in their progressively dissimilar and mobile society. Multiple identities encompass our cultural, religious, and ethnic identities. It would be futile to ask people if s/he is a man/woman first and an Indian/Pakistani/British second. This “flat” sense of identity is a mirror image of those fanatic totalitarians who consider that Islam should take precedence over everything else. It shows the degree or extent to which flat notions of culture and identity have been internalized as “common sense” by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This new condition calls for a reconsideration of the dominant ideology that permeates Islamic thought and has its sources in an era when Islam was “a political entity and empire”.³⁰²

In *The Black Album*, Kureishi highlights the intolerance of British Muslims and either denounces them as infidels within or enforces them into some form of cultural assimilation. The spectre of racism and fundamentalist violence in the guise of Manichaeic dichotomies

³⁰⁰ Mondal, *Young British Muslim Voices*, 118.

³⁰¹ Mondal, *Young British Muslim Voices*, 106.

³⁰² Mondal, *Young British Muslim Voices*, 107.

are new realities that need to be confronted with an effective and radically new multicultural policy towards the marginalized others. The trajectory of the narrative ultimately fails to gesture towards an opening that could transcend all the disparate selves to arrive at a non-identitarian, syncretic space that refuses any polarizing identity markers: Shahid “believed everything; he believed nothing”.³⁰³ Kureishi falls short of envisioning a religious worldview that goes beyond the Islamist social activists such as Riaz and Chad, who could have negotiated between Shahid and his tutor Deedee in the pull of the different dialectic differences that emanate in their everyday lived experiences and life choices. The tension thus created is between the presence and absence of music, literature, and the emerging fields of identity that open up creative spaces within the text for the transition from ethnicity to revivalist identities within the framework of conditionally hospitable multiculturalism. Kureishi interprets the transition from ethnicity to religious revivalism as a form of identity marker, emphasizing that race, religion, and ethnicity are no longer concerns for him within the liberal context of Western multiculturalism.. He confirms a clash between the “strong belief in art as a survival strategy for the Asian British character”⁷⁵ Shahid and the residual Islamto put an end to the instinctive assertion of ancestral religion. On the other hand, Nadeem Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil*³⁰⁴ is an important text that sheds light on the scars of history, the negotiation of cultural identity within the neoliberal milieu, and the different forms of terror post-9/11 in the geopolitically volatile nation-state of Afghanistan. The novel details war-torn Afghanistan, bringing together different characters with almost incompatible worldviews at the old house (formerly a surgical clinic and perfume factory) in the town of

³⁰³ Kureishi, *The Black Album*, 147.

³⁰⁴ Nadeem Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 25. All page references are to this edition.

Usha. The group comprises individuals with diverse backgrounds: Lara, a Russian caring for her brother Benedikt, a former soldier expelled from the Soviet Army during his time in Afghanistan; David, an American who experienced the loss of his brother in Vietnam; Casa, a warrior-jihadi who was orphaned and trained in the ways of a Talibani Bihzad from a young age in a madrasah; and a young Afghan schoolteacher.. The group is accompanied by two doctors—the saintly Marcus, an elderly Englishman who has converted to Islam; his wife, Qatrina; and their daughter Dunia, a self-assured, opinionated young woman who, much like her mother Qatrina, is critical of the patriarchal and feudal customs of Islam in Afghan culture and voices the claims of Afghani women for self-identity and education.

The disturbances in Afghanistan are traced back to Zia’s regime when the CIA was supported with weapons and money to intrude into Afghanistan’s internal politics in favour of the mujahideen fighting against the Soviets through Pakistan. Following the Afghan civil war and the subsequent rising tide of America’s control in Afghanistan from 2001 onwards, these characters find themselves in the midst of various troublesome personal experiences inflicted by the conflicting forces of history of which they become inextricable parts. Aslam sees Afghanistan at the crossroads of a historical breakthrough wherein it appeared to be an appropriate place to discuss the meeting of Islamic and Western cultures, the mingling of the “civilising missions”, and the “bringing of democracy”³⁰⁵ in a culture where “geology was fear instead of rock, where you breathed terror not air.”³⁰⁶ Taking place in post-9/11 Afghanistan, Aslam's novel, *The Wasted Vigil*, uncovers concealed histories of terror and explores the interdependent relationship between the CIA's involvement in the Afghan jihadi

³⁰⁵ “An Interview with Nadeem Aslam about *The Wasted*”, *Book Browse*,’ http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm?author_number=1149. (accessed 25th Dec, 2021.)

³⁰⁶ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 179.

wars and the 9/11 attacks in America. During the 1980s, the United States covertly purchased convoys of ten-ton trucks laden with automatic rifles, machine guns, and grenade launchers for Afghanistan. Impoverished individuals from humble backgrounds were selected to undergo training for jihadi warfare. Due to their vulnerable circumstances, they were easily manipulated and controlled, ultimately being thrust into a religiously motivated battle against Russia. These covert operations are depicted in the narrative to serve as an oblique reference to the handling of suicide bombers by Americans to discredit and blame the concept of Islam and jihad in particular. Mark Fisher in *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology, and Lost Futures* argues:

It has become increasingly clear that 1979–80 ...was a threshold moment—the time when the whole world (social democratic, Fordist, industrial) became obsolete, and the contours of a new world (neoliberal, consumerist, informatics) began to show themselves.³⁰⁷

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, the global importance of 1989 as a watershed moment beckoned a deep transformation in the critical contours surrounding liberalism, socialism, developmentalism and their “institutional forms that since the end of the Second World War had promised to transform the international world order into one that was relatively stable, the cold war notwithstanding”.³⁰⁸ This vantage-ground has been critically analysed by George Lawson, who finds that “both academics and policymakers tend to use 1989 and its surrogate frames (such as Cold War/post-Cold War) as the principal

³⁰⁷ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (London: Zero Books, 2014), 50.

³⁰⁸ Debjani Ganguly, *This Thing Called the World* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 11.

normative, analytical, and empirical shorthands for delineating past and present”.³⁰⁹ Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson, noted art historians, define contemporary art that appeared after 1989 in terms of a shifting space that responds to the “aesthetic change to the geopolitical changes of 1989”.³¹⁰ Amir Eshel contends the particularity and the relevance of literature written after 1989 “in the light of the debate about ‘the end of history’”.³¹¹ Aslam stitches together the Russian intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, the inflation of Talibani fundamentalism, the Taliban movement in the time of civil war, and the political exercise in the aftermath of 9/11. The rise of the Talibani regime that counters the Soviet invasion inflicts a deep personal scar on Marcus as he is made to witness the stoning of his wife Qatrina by the Talibans, who order her death since a female cleric performed their wedding rites. Marcus’s hand was also amputated by them. In *The Global 1989*, Richard Saull opines that “1989 is not the historical root of contemporary world politics tout court, at least not when viewed from the vantage point of the global South”.³¹² In Sudan, an Islamic government took shape, Palestine witnessed Hamas ascending to power, the Islamic Front transformed into a political party and emerged victorious in Algerian elections, and the Soviets were ousted from Afghanistan in 1989. In this regard, Saull says:

In two formerly communist countries, Afghanistan and South Yemen, grotesque forms of social regression, violence against women and corruption prevailed, as they did in

³⁰⁹ George Lawson, Chris Armbruster, and Michael Cox, *The Global 1989: Continuity and Change in World Politics*(New York:Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

³¹⁰ Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson, *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*(West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 2.

³¹¹ Amir Eshel, *Futurity: Contemporary Literature and the Quest for the Past* (Chicago:Chicago University Press, 2013),10.

³¹² Richard Saull, “One World, Many Cold Wars: 1989 in the Middle East”, in *The Global 1989*,ed. Lawson, Armbruster, and Cox(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 181.

combat-plagued Iraq, and, even more so, in Somalia. Meanwhile in West Africa, the formerly vanguard socialist state of Guinea-Bissau, the country that produced the outstanding revolutionary leader Amílcar Cabral, fell from 1989 increasingly under the control of corrupt military leaders, with the result that in 2008 it had become the main transit state for Colombian drugs en route to Europe.... In other words, one of the main legacies of the collapse of communism was the disappearance not only of social provision and a rough commitment to social equality, but of the basic order-providing state. Any balance sheet of the “failure” of communism must, therefore, be matched by acknowledgment of the “failure” of its replacement.³¹³

Aslam’s novel, *The Wasted Vigil*, highlights the importance of the long year of 1989 as the gloomy entrance to a post-9/11 existence with the epistemological and genealogical substance in its contradictory logic of the present. The Ugandan academic Mahmood Mamdani, in his book, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror*, traces the roots of the post-9/11 situation in terms of the histories of Ronald Reagan’s association with Zia’s regime, the CIA’s Operation Cyclone, the secret operation, the debris of socialism, and the endless ghost wars in the East. He goes on to claim that the armed conflicts and socio-historical analyses of the same by western liberal academia are involved in perpetually essentializing “culture talk” that eventually bolsters and resort to violence as a political mechanism in the global political environment with impunity.³¹⁴ Incidents like that on 9/11, rather than being components of the “clash of civilization” thesis, are the primary reason for the socio-political milieu that bolsters a violent reactionary regimentation against the logic of neo-imperial western violence. He also propounds that “[t]he Cold War came to

³¹³ Saull, “One World, Many Cold Wars”, 132.

³¹⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 5.

an end with the subduing of one protagonist, the Soviet Union. Humanity is now left with a challenge: how to subdue and hold accountable the awesome power that the United States built up during the Cold War”.³¹⁵

The house of the English doctor, Marcus, is a postcolonial cosmopolitan meeting space for different people belonging to several nationalities affected by the tragic fallout of wars and is the hub of many personal memories and collective histories that never found an outlet or representational form in the collective history of the nation-state. This space is frequented by Afghans, Americans, and Russian people with their traumatic pasts as they come together under one roof as a family urging the readers to look into the mirrors that reflect the realities of the war games that the different power regimes relentlessly indulge in. In a similar vein to Upstone’s examination of post-space, this analysis explores the concept of productive chaos and fluidity as a transformative spatiality that reshapes the conventional boundaries of public observation.³¹⁶ It is a kind of “contact zone” that Edward Said refers to as “overlapping territories[and] intertwined histories”³¹⁷ that are committed to curing, healing, and sanctifying the senses as if they were a clinic, perfume factory, and or the walls of a historical mural that puts together disparate entities belonging to different spatio-temporal or ontological zones David, a former CIA agent, encounters Zameen during his travels between Afghanistan and Pakistan and develops a romantic connection with her. Following her untimely demise, he finds solace in the company of Bihzat, the sole keeper of memories of Zameen. Their shared grief brings David and Marcus closer together. Another visitor is Casa, a young Afghan, who was apparently a jihadi, but was later wounded and

³¹⁵ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 5.

³¹⁶ Sara Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009),15.

³¹⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993),3.

eventually taken in by the doctor. This domestic space within a neo-imperialist context exhibits a zone of conflict as the characters deal with the ambivalence and complexities of their hybrid identities with the contradictory presence of both promise and terror. While discussing Homi Bhabha and the formation of subjectivity, Jopi Nyman speaks about this hybrid identity that is portrayed metaphorically in the novel by the statue of Buddha and a landmine.³¹⁸ Marcus, by keeping the Buddha statue in the house, which “the Koran itself says that the race of *djinns* belonging to Solomon had decorated his cave with statues”,³¹⁹ displays his cultivated religious taste. His tolerant and pluralistic self suffers a plethora of horrible and traumatic experiences as he has lost his wife, daughter, and a grandson and, also, one of his hands has been amputated by Qatrina under the order of the Taliban. Qatrina had arranged a woman to preside over their wedding as she could find nothing in the Quran that forbade this. The marriage is now considered an inexcusable exercise in adultery. The Afghans used to preserve Buddhist paintings in many of the region’s caves, just like Marcus, who himself makes an effort to cover the murals with mud to save them from the hate of the Taliban. However, the bullets of the Taliban destroy the murals to puzzle-sized bits and pieces that ironically symbolize a metonymic portrayal of the present-day Afghanistani community at large—something akin to what Nadia Butt calls “a mosaic of interconnected places”.³²⁰ Aslam pictures this fragmentation as:

This country was one of the greatest tragedies of the age. Torn to pieces by the many hands of war, by the various hatreds and failings of the world. Two million deaths

³¹⁸ Jopi Nyman, *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 70.

³¹⁹ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 229.

³²⁰ Nadia Butt, “Inventing or Recalling the Contact Zones? Transcultural Spaces in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*”, *Postcolonial Text* 4, no. 3 ():6, 2008.

over the past quarter-century. Several of the lovers on the walls were on their own because of the obliterating impact of the bullets—nothing but a gash or a terrible ripping away where the corresponding man or woman used to be. A shredded limb, a lost eye.³²¹

These damages, though irreparable, afford Marcus a sense of beauty that is pervasive in the wounding forms where some absences are more absolute than others. Marcus and Katrina serve the promise of cultural *métissage* with diverse histories of the past and present. His version of secularism and faith brings shape to the national space that is flexible and open enough to the idea of religion. In the novel, Buddhism is represented as a peaceful and inclusive religion. Until the tenth century, Afghanistan bore the traces of a Buddhist past with all its ninety-nine names as well. These are referred to as “hidden histories” in an unreliable ground by Jopi Nyman since it is degenerated with the bodies of the local cleric’s murdered wives, a photo and cassette, and a landmine.³²² Marcus is a Muslim who drinks alcohol and resists bigoted decrees only to find shelter in absolutes. He assumes that purity is a myth and that the tales on which we base our identity can and do traverse different spaces and realms. His in-betweenness and liminality are what Bhabha calls the “Third Space of enunciation”,³²³ the liminal space that escapes the threshold of binarized oppositional identity kernels. His entering into the “Third Space” generates a new sense of unhomeliness, reminiscent of the Freudian term for the uncanny, *das Unheimliche*—“a state of extraterritorial and cross-cultural initiations”.³²⁴ It is the difference through which he begins to destabilize Taliban

³²¹ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 11.

³²² Nyman, *Home, Identity, and Mobility*, 68.

³²³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 37.

³²⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 9.

authority with his fluid evocations of a counter-discourse of resistance that connote dissidence and dissent in “interrogating the earth and the landscape” as a contact zone so abundantly watered by tears.³²⁵ His structure was constructed during the final years of the nineteenth century by a skilled calligrapher and painter of advanced age. “He belonged to what was almost the final generation of Muslim artists to be trained in the style of the incomparable Bihzad [...] Beginning on the ground floor, each of the first five rooms was dedicated to one of the five senses”.³²⁶

Qatrina and Marcus start a perfume factory with the hope of building job opportunities for the women of Usha and providing them with an independent means of livelihood. While digging the ground for the factory, they discover the head of a fifteen-foot-long Buddha, “a face from another time”.³²⁷ In a state of complete mental deterioration, Qatrina frantically secures their extensive collection of books to the ceiling as a desperate measure to protect them from destruction by the Taliban rulers. It was the only solution that came to her mind, to keep the books safe and out of harm's reach. She also saves a book of Bihzad, the fifteenth-century Persian miniaturist painted with a brush that ended in a single hair picked from a squirrel's throat only to recover it from the flames. Marcus's olfactory sense is so avid that he can discern a word written with colourless perfume on a sheet of paper and Qatrina paints bottles like an artist¹¹⁹ and sketches an array of all of the ninety-nine names of Allah as they are brought into being in the Quran. However, “the Taliban rulers do not know how to deal with the pictures—each bore one of Allah's names in Arabic calligraphy, the Compassionate One [etc.] – but the words were surrounded by...animals...

³²⁵ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,296.

³²⁶ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,10.

³²⁷ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,17.

and humans. They wanted to tear out these details but couldn't because the ...curves of the name took up the entire rectangle".³²⁸ Marcus is considered an infidel, and his wife, Qatrina, is announced to be an adulteress by the Taliban after thirty-nine years of their conversion and marriage. Their marriage is deemed invalid since it was performed by a woman. Qatrina faces public stoning in the square as punishment for her actions. Subsequently, she is forced to wear a burka, lying on the ground while a man tightly knots the hem and drags her away, treating her as if she were a mere bundle. The man grins with satisfaction at his own cunning, just like the spectators who observe the scene. Blood seeps through the punctured eye-grille of the embroidered burka. This scene conjures the images of a fundamentalist framework of narrow, parochial identity politics where identity is seen as primary and pure³²⁹ and human destiny is determined by self-proclaimed representatives of God rather than by human beings themselves.³³⁰ At this juncture of the narrative of cultural reproduction, Arjun Appadurai suggests that the subject matter of cultural studies can be understood as the relationship between the word and the world. "I understand these two terms in their widest sense, so that *word* can encompass all forms of textualized expression and *world* can mean anything from the means of production and the organization of life-worlds to the globalized relations of cultural reproduction"³³¹ In a political condition of turmoil, Marcus and Qatrina develop the perfume factory into an underground school for the local children, wherein the meaning of an underground space bears a sinister significance. Qatrina's sketch of ninety-nine names is also

³²⁸ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 242.

³²⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 155.

³³⁰ Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 190.

³³¹ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 51.

stolen. The cultural trauma and the sense of loss they entail in the face of deterritorialization is akin to what Appadurai says “is now at the core of a variety of global fundamentalisms,”³³² and requires both description and explanation of the practice of “Culture Talk”. According to Mamdani, Muslims and Islam “made” culture at the birth of their history, but in the present-day situation, they merely “conform” to culture. He opines:

According to some, our [Muslim] culture seems to have no history, no politics, and no debates, so that *all* Muslims are just plain bad. According to others, there is a history, a politics, even debates, and there *are* good Muslims and bad Muslims. In both versions, history seems to have petrified into a lifeless custom of an antique people who inhabit antique lands. Or could it be that culture here stands for habit, for some kind of instinctive activity with rules that are inscribed in early founding texts, usually religious, and mummified in early artefacts?³³³

Mamdani voices his concerns about the political and social consequences of comprehending Muslims and their religion within the framework of a Manichean social and political separative structure that distinguishes between good and bad Muslims. He goes on to speak about the internal aporia of “Culture Talk” that finds rejection in the concept that political and ideological actions can be acquired from cultural (religious/traditional) practices and behaviours. He says:

... could it be that a person who takes his or her religion literally is a potential terrorist? And that someone who thinks of a religious text as metaphorical or figurative is better suited to civic life and the tolerance it calls for? How, one may ask,

³³² Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 38.

³³³ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 18.

does the literal reading of sacred texts translate into hijacking, murder and terrorism?³³⁴

Mamdani further argues that contemporary acts labeled as terrorism are not solely derived from a doctrinal or fanatical perspective, but rather stem from a modern political movement aligned with Western powers. At times, Marcus ponders whether educated individuals like the Egyptian pilot Muhammad Atta and his Al-Qaeda associate possess a deeper understanding of belief and identity, allowing for nuance in their worldview. His wife's creativity with iconographic conundrums that shows understandings of Allah as in the Quranic verse of *ayatulkursi* that glorifies his presence in all living creatures on this universe is the problem of culture as the profane within the sacred scriptural frames. Both of them perform curation, creation, and dissemination.

The novelist in the epigraph puts a passage from the fifteenth-century Persian poet Daulat Shah of Herat, which also attests to faith in art's ability to build bridges in seemingly incompatible spaces: "And the poet in his solitude/turned towards the warlord a corner of his mind/and gradually came to look upon him/and held a converse with him."³³⁵ In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said argues that culture to Matthew Arnold is "a concept that includes a refining and elevating element", which "palliates, if it does not altogether neutralize, the ravages of a...brutalizing ...existence".³³⁶ But in early twenty-first-century Afghanistan, Aslam shows that separation, amputation, and beheading are the forms of violence that "adds colour to Adam's story" by extrapolating the monotone of Islam with the taxonomy of

³³⁴ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 20.

³³⁵ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 10.

³³⁶ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xiii.

fundamentalism.³³⁷ In his book *Understanding Muslim Identity: Rethinking Fundamentalism*, Gabriele Marranci argues that the discourse surrounding fundamentalism has primarily centered around the causes and origins of the phenomenon itself, rather than delving into the underlying reasons why individuals adopt specific patterns of ideas and practices that are often categorized as "fundamentalism." This attempt to answer mainly the "what" question while leaving the "why" aside has produced a rather taxonomic understanding of "fundamentalism".³³⁸ Casa and his junior Bihzad, the two young jihadi hard-line Islamists, intimidate the civilians of Usha, a town in Nangarhar Province in south-western Afghanistan, by their outrageous behaviour. Usha's American-funded school is bombed and Casa spreads a threatening and cautionary *shabnama*, a night letter, among the local inmates. Their brainwashing and radicalization is formatted by some suppressed memory, decontextualized Quranic references, anecdotes in madrasahs and training camps with Talibani leaders whose opinions saturated and parochialized their cogitative fields and consciousnesses:

Cyanide can be extracted from apricots, Casa knows. He had distilled it at a jihad training camp, injected it into the bodies of creatures. The memory comes to him as he walks past a flowering tree at the edge of a street in Jalalabad city centre, the flowers still not finished emptying themselves of scent this late in the afternoon.³³⁹... Because no true Muslim should shrink from killing in cold blood, his jihad training had included slitting the throats of sheep and horses while reciting the verse from the holy Koran which gives permission to massacre prisoners of war.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,256.

³³⁸ Gabriele Marranci, *Understanding Muslim Identity: Rethinking Fundamentalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009),26.

³³⁹ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,121.

³⁴⁰ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,123.

Bihzad, who thinks that his life is not his own, is a war victim and epitomizes an honest, ignorant martyr. He is willing to suffer for Islam and Allah and he visualizes that his heart is clamped in someone's fist. On the other hand, Casa trains Bihzad for his natural and suicidal bombing mission in an absolute and martial like manner citing Quranic verses. He is sincere in creating alarm among non-believers with the narratives of his bombing and "martyrdom". He believes that he is very close to Allah as he encourages terror and authorizes bloodshed by proving his mettle. Casa, being part of a transnational militant class, finds himself on the outskirts of Afghan society, engaging in activities such as reading weapons manuals, acquiring skills in passport forgery, and improving his English by watching Western news channels reporting on terror attacks. He does not know his village of origin but is armed with the knowledge of the modern science of warfare:

In the laboratories of the camps, stocked with labeled drums of various acids, acetones, cellulose, wood composite and aluminum powder, he had learned to mix methyl nitrate, had hit a small drop of it with a hammer to see it shatter the hammer. He blew up a car with a sack of fertilizer and ammonium nitrate fuel oil, the burning chassis travelling in an arc through the air to land a hundred yards away. He crumbled a boulder with twenty pounds of U.S.-made C-4, and, for comparison, others with C-1, C-2, and C-3. And also with Czech Semtex. He knew the Americans were trying to get back from the Afghans the Semtex they had supplied for use in the Soviet jihad, so dangerous was the substance.³⁴¹

During his stay in the house of Marcus, Casa is aware of the heady concoction of dissimilar people around him.. Despite the purity of his thoughts, he contemplates the enormity of the

³⁴¹ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,90.

sin he may be committing by simply gazing upon Lara's face. Not astonishingly, Casa is amazed at what he learns in his state of seclusion from the house, the paintings, and the books.. Marcus encounters a series of details about Casa that leave him perplexed, often questioning his own knowledge about Islam and other religions. Casa, on the other hand, discovers a sense of purpose in his isolation and begins to cultivate a deeper understanding of history and culture through the captivating books and images he encounters. Despite their depiction of animals and humans, which goes against Allah's wishes, Casa finds them to be among the most exquisite things he has ever laid eyes upon. Here, to him, the world is more complicated, less ordered than the clerics led him to believe. With some newfound curiousness and attraction, he tries to write about himself, but his pen only moves across the blank pages evoking “phantom words... a silent cry”.¹⁴⁸ Nadeem Aslam’s reference to “violence”, “terrorism”, and “jihad” highlight the violent resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism during the 1970s. Faisal Devji, a noted historian, who specializes in the study of Islam, opines in his book *Landscapes of the Jihad* that "Jihad" represents an intensified form of globalism where local and regional elements are considered insignificant or irrelevant. Devji further states that jihadism and Islamic fundamentalism are not the same. He argues:

Unlike fundamentalism, the jihad is not concerned with political parties, revolutions or the founding of ideological states. For someone like Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who comes from a fundamentalist background in the Muslim Brotherhood, struggles in particular countries are important for two reasons: because, like the Taliban’s Afghanistan, they provide a base for jihad more generally, as well as for rousing Muslims internationally. In other words the particular sites of these struggles are

themselves unimportant, their territories being subordinated to a larger and even metaphysical struggle for which they have become merely instrumental.³⁴²

He contends that this understanding of a unitary vision of the world, where the freedom of self is undermined, is a clash between fundamentalism and traditionalism. He goes on to say that “jihad destroys traditional forms and genealogies of Islamic authority, recycling their fragments in democratic ways” as it dismantles “the juridical authority that had for centuries been located in a clerical class known as *ulama*”.³⁴³ The orphaned jihadist fighter, Casa’s, continuous reference to the verses of the Quran and apocryphal stories of the prophet is “devoid of nuances” and he executes his mission through fear and violence only to achieve Islamic hegemony as “at the very core of him was the belief that human beings had little to offer beyond cruelty and danger”.³⁴⁴ He also questions post-9/11 rhetoric by saying: “These days they keep saying, Why do Muslims become suicide bombers? They must be animals, there are no human explanations for their actions.”³⁴⁵

Religious fanaticism has been a primary cause of strife since the late 1980s with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union. However, this fundamentalism is a kind of model that the post-Enlightenment disagreed with earlier. European Enlightenment is associated, first, with the advancement of Western culture. The underlying cause of fundamentalism becomes apparent when we understand the significance attributed to fundamentalist actions by the religious beliefs that fuel them. It represents a primal response to the rationalization of society, modernity, economy, and politics, which are defining features

³⁴² Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad* (London: Hurst & Company, 2005), 27.

³⁴³ Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 112.

³⁴⁴ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 356.

³⁴⁵ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 357.

of a modern state. According to Stephen Schwartz in his book *The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Sa'ud from Tradition to Terror*, the primary catalyst for such fundamentalist actions is Wahhabism, a puritanical form of Islam established by Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab in the early 18th century. Ibn Abdul-Wahhab gave a clarion call to return to the earlier originary tradition, the purest form of Islam.³⁴⁶ Schwartz believes that this version of Islam attacked the more liberal form of Islam—Sufism, that pervaded the Balkans, Turkey, Central Asia, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The major violence, he argues, in the world is influenced by groups such as Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations.³⁴⁷ It is worth mentioning the influence of certain Islamic ideologues, including Mawlana Abul Ala Mawdudi, Hassan Al-Banna, and Sayyid Qutb, who sought to address Western-inspired nationalism and establish a new political order rooted in Islam. The most influential of modern Sunni theorists in the Arab world, Sayyid Qutb, known for the concept of *jahiliyya*, the age of ignorance before the coming of Islam, in his prison writings justified the killing of President Anwar Sadat in October 1981, the attacks on the Egyptian and other Muslim governments, on Western tourists, and the incident of 9/11. His perception of Islam was “Kierkegaardian” in the sense that he ethically sanctioned a violent reactionary response to the perceived crimes of geopolitical injustices, economic, racial, and religious biases, and “the deification of man”. He adhered to a strict letter of the text in his myopic and rather parochial interpretations of the Quran. Qutb, in his last book, *Signposts along the Road*, sets the tone of a revolutionary Islamic vanguard and sanctions the need to impeach western modernity and its ideological and liberal remnants. Qutb and other fundamentalist Islamist ideologues presented a moral repudiation of the post-Enlightenment political theories—Marxism, liberalism, and socialist

³⁴⁶ Stephen Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 66–125.

³⁴⁷ Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam*, 66–125.

secularism that seek to eliminate religious authority from the political arena and the public domain of policy-making.³⁴⁸ On the other hand, Samir Amin, in his book *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion, and Democracy—A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism*, convincingly explains some of the ideological distortions and historical and moral travesties that accompany this reactionary rhetoric. He says:

It is not the fundamentalist ideology with religious pretensions that is in the driver's seat and imposes its logic on the real holders of power, i.e., capital and its servants in the state. It is capital alone that makes all the decisions that suit it, and then mobilizes this ideology to its service.³⁴⁹

While Europe made a transition to industrial capitalism in the post-Enlightenment era, the Arabs still held on to an archaic, unchanging world order—a geopolity that was to be relegated to the peripheries of the global empire of capitalist modernity. While wealth and entrepreneurship moved to the West, the Arab-Islamic world stood ensnared in a medieval version of thought and economy that it refused to transcend for a long time. Saadia Toor, in her book *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan*, speaks about the dialectic of culture and politics since 1947, and examines how a left-leaning radical environment engulfed the subcontinent with the aim of shaping the new nation.³⁵⁰ Aslam sheds light on the history of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, revealing how the Soviet army incorporated chemical weapons into their warfare strategy as a means to instil fear and suppress the Afghan population. He writes: “One year soon after the Soviet Army invaded,

³⁴⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fil-Tariq (Signposts along the Road)* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1991).

³⁴⁹ Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, trans. Russell Moore and James Membrez (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 49.

³⁵⁰ Saadia Toor, *The State of Islam* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

the air ... turned yellow, thick billows of the color arriving on the breeze, falling from the sky, every heart fearful at the sight because there had been reports of attacks with chemical weapons”.³⁵¹ The description of the secret chemical attack brilliantly attests to the trepidation and horror which escalates into the public domain following its discovery. With the release of chemical shells, “the air turned yellow [with] thick billows of the color arriving on the breeze, falling from the sky”. It also empowers the Soviets to steer “the rough, mountainous and difficult terrain of Afghanistan [and to terrorize] the civilian population that is also resisting, if only passively, the occupation of their country.” Terrorizing the environment and humans in silent predation with the weaponized chemical, as shown by Aslam, provides a reference to the pathos and pains of warfare as a young victim of the chemical attack is treated by an Afghan doctor: “A patient was brought to the house ..., the victim of a Soviet chemical weapon ... his body already rotting when he was discovered in a field an hour after the attack, his fingers still looped with the rosary he had been holding. He must have been in unimaginable pain”.³⁵² The entire area has transformed into a war-torn zone, where the presence of enigmatic butterflies and airborne Soviet cluster mines poses a grave danger, especially to unsuspecting children who may be tragically affected upon contact:

The Soviets had designed them especially for use in the war. Made of green plastic and shaped like a butterfly, with a wing to allow them to spin to earth slowly. Things designed to attract children. They fell from the air into houses and streets and the result was meant to encourage parents to vacate a village ... These villages harbored guerillas ... The butterflies would blow off a foot or a hand and half a face, maiming rather than killing, though the long distance which had to be traversed to reach a

³⁵¹ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,314.

³⁵² Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,13.

medical facility would ensure that the victim died of blood loss, gangrene or simple shock.³⁵³

With the emergence of environmental weaponization “at the end of 2001, American soldiers ceremoniously flew out to attack Afghanistan, the U.S. secretary of defense told them they had been ‘commissioned by history’”.³⁵⁴ Earlier in the novel, Lara, a Russian woman who leaves her home and takes pains to travel to Afghanistan in search of her lost brother, suspects that she is close to finding valuable information regarding her brother’s death as she overhears a group of Afghan men mention his name. Her brother was torn to pieces by Afghan warriors in the game of *buzkashi*, a wild game wherein a carcass of a goat is generally the trophy the players on horseback brutally battle for. The parallel nature of fundamentalist activities, the potent threats, the challenges of the Taliban rule, and the transnational extremist forces acquire a crisis of its own within the systematic variables in this economy of war. M. Scott Phillips argues:

The euphoria over the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first Bush administration’s declaration of the “New World Order,” and the emergence of what Benjamin Barber has referred to as “McWorld” seem naïve now, in the context of post-9/11 events, the recent collapse of the global economic bubble, the renewed hostility toward American economic and political hegemony, and the advent of a serious Islamist challenge to political and social liberalism.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 254.

³⁵⁴ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 27.

³⁵⁵ M. Scott Phillips, “The Failure of History: Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul* and the Apocalyptic Context,” *Modern Drama* 47, no.1(Spring 2004):7.

Aslam, in *The Blind Man's Garden*, says, "History is the third parent"³⁵⁶ and in *The Wasted Vigil*, he portrays history as a burial site replete with the undying traumatic memories of the Afghanistan wars—a trans-spatio-temporal space that shall forever haunt the living. Aslam, with the help of the post-9/11 rhetoric of the war on terror, seeks to trace the story of socialist Afghanistan that Ananya Jahanara Kabir calls "post-amnesias"³⁵⁷—the unified obliteration of the vision of Afghan socialism, an idea that was strengthened around 1965 but was ruined by the 1990s. Aslam's portrayal of a palimpsest of mnemonic traces in *The Wasted Vigil* testifies to past events in a multidirectional, disseminated way, that Michael Rothberg defines as "something that, while concerned with the past, happens in the present; and second, that memory is a form of work, working through, labor, or action".³⁵⁸ Alla Ivanchikova, in her book, *Imagining Afghanistan: Global Fiction and Film of the 9/11 Wars*, says, "Aslam's text is a novelistic enactment of a nonidentitarian memory ecosystem—a form of memory that cuts across multiple social groups as well as across time periods, rendering simultaneous the present and the recent past".³⁵⁹ It delves into narratives of grief, the shared experiences of pain, and the collective sense of victimization. Lara's brother, a Russian soldier who was killed during the Soviet-Afghan war, has a haunting connection to Zameen, who is Marcus's daughter and becomes David Town's romantic partner after being sexually assaulted and impregnated by Lara's brother. Later, Zameen's child finds a stepfather in David Town, who happens to be an American. Their "traumatic kinship"³⁶⁰, rooted in shared trauma,

³⁵⁶ Nadeem Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden* (New Delhi: Random House, 2013), 5.

³⁵⁷ Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013).

³⁵⁸ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.

³⁵⁹ Alla Ivanchikova, *Imagining Afghanistan* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2019), 113.

³⁶⁰ Ivanchikova, *Imagining Afghanistan*, 113.

serves as an allegory for the complex history of the Soviet invasion, coupled with American backing of the anti-Soviet jihad, which intertwines within the Afghan backdrop as a manifestation of “interimperial rivalry.”³⁶¹ David, scarred by the memory of his brother’s death in Vietnam, had joined the CIA as a true believer in the war against communism. While seeking to unearth Zameen’s murder, he had been following his earlier ideological motivations, and yet the influence of Marcus, Lara, Casa, and others in this “space above the narrow confines of a singular culture”³⁶¹ allows him to be more open-minded than the other Americans in the region. He, though a target for the jihadi group, visits and also finds Marcus in his twenty-year-long search for Bihzad, Zameen’s son. Being an American, he is a soft object for the jihadi group, of which Casa is a member. Bihzad would later go on to execute a bombing to wipe away the foreign school that would add another feather to the jihadi’s cap. The survivors’ diverse groups are interlaced by this traumatic experience that can be traced back to his father’s murder in 1934. David was present in New York in 1993, when Yousaf Ramzi bombed the World Trade Center in which seven people were killed and that incident left him fundamentally inconsolable as he realized that the enemy had infiltrated American territory.³⁶² He learned from that visit that the CIA had allowed Zameen to die at the hands of a local warlord, who was now a US ally. However, ironically, the jihadi Casa emerges as David’s special protégé. Both of them form a birch bark canoe, a cultural heritage from the Native Americans. David is conscious about the fact that Casa is no day labourer as he claims himself to be and Casa protects himself from the accusation that he is a jihadi. David finds that one of Casa’s eyes had been burned out with a blowtorch at the time of the CIA interrogation session by James Palatine, an alter-ego to David who declines David’s idea of

³⁶¹ Butt, “Inventing or Recalling the Contact Zones?”, 4.

³⁶² Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 148.

taking two cultures together: “I am just searching for our country’s enemies, David. It’s nothing personal against this man ... It’s not between him and me. It’s between them and us.”³⁶³ James Palatine defends the binary of “them and us” including the torture and unholy alliances between the CIA and local warmongers. James, who symbolizes the US-led war on terror, portrays himself as defending himself on behalf of his homeland against the rampaging monolithic Islam: “Al Qaeda hiding in the mouth of the Golden Eagle.... They want to do to the Statue of Liberty and Mount Rushmore what they did to the Buddhas of Bamiyan.”³⁶⁴ Casa remains “a blank, his background evacuated and his personality a void that has been filled in by others with nefarious ends in mind”.³⁶⁵ Cara Cilano, in her book *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State*, argues that Casa is an “absence”, and “an existential cipher and a product of history”.³⁶⁶ The novelist says:

He doesn’t even know his own name, doesn’t even know how he ended up in the orphanages and madrasas. A nameless child becomes a ghost, he had been told once, because no one without a name can get a firm enough foothold in the next world. It roams the world, making itself visible to the living in order to be addressed in some way—The Long-haired One, The One who has Green Eyes—but humans run away from ghosts and won’t address them.³⁶⁷

Aslam’s presentation of history with memory traces wars—ancient and modern—from the early settlers’ conflict with Native Americans in North America and in Waziristan in the

³⁶³ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 304–305.

³⁶⁴ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 380–381.

³⁶⁵ Peter Morey, *Islamophobia and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 354.

³⁶⁶ Cara Cilano, *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English* (London: Routledge, 2013), 28.

³⁶⁷ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 334.

1930s to the Vietnam war. Here, in David words, the very idea of a palimpsest is set into motion: “A different war—but maybe at some level it was the same war. Just as tomorrow’s wars might be begotten by today’s war and a continuation of them.”³⁶⁸ Both David and Casa are professionals indulging in war and terror. By portraying them, Aslam poses Mahmood Mamdani’s argument that “[t]he source of privatized and globalized terrorism in today’s world, the international jihadis are the true ideological children of Reagan’s crusade against the ‘evil empire’”.³⁶⁹ As a product of war, Casa also symbolizes the haunting legacies of the past, the “amputation of memory through forced displacement”.³⁷⁰ As he strolls along the street, the thought occurs to him that he could fashion explosives using various items from the cart and the shops surrounding him. The novelist ultimately develops the text, *The Wasted Vigil*, as a fabric concerned with “*How stories travel—what mouths and minds they end up in*”.³⁷¹

Aslam delineates the multiple facets of the war in Afghanistan within the backdrop of a personal historiography of the different characters in the novel and offers us a palimpsest of experiences and identitarian kernels that refuse any easy categorization or straight-jacketed historical contextualization. The “fellowship of wounds”³⁷² and “ethnographic salvage”³⁷³ of cultures posit Aslam’s text in revealing how literature, according to Amitava Kumar, succeeds in “local or national [or, indeed, international] realities of dominance, suppression,

³⁶⁸ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 368.

³⁶⁹ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 177.

³⁷⁰ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 116.

³⁷¹ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 25.

³⁷² Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 10.

³⁷³ James Clifford quoted in Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), 157.

oppression and exploitation in a global context”.³⁷⁴ Through the quotidian forms of cultural history and stereotypes of Afghanistan imagined and manufactured, the novelist also attempts at what Madeline Clements argues is the “re-cultivation of Afghanistan’s spiritual and aesthetic connections” with “emotional release and spiritual solace to salve the traumatised and corrupted psyches of civilians and militants caught in the crossfire of international forces on the thresholds of their Afghan homes”.³⁷⁵ Aslam engages with a differential and deeply personal historical archive and gestures towards an uneasy and yet ethically desirable, transnational reconciliation process by attesting to a palimpsest of personal historiographies and past memories from diverse lenses, with an ambition of building “the kinship of wounds”.³⁷⁶ From Casa’s “joyless Islamism”,³⁷⁷ Lara’s assertion of Islam as a faith-system that “does not believe in the study of science”,³⁷⁸ to Marcus’s “house of readers”,³⁷⁹ the text moves back and forth between seemingly incompatible ideological kernels to finally reveal the kinship of personal grief and trauma that ties them all. For Aslam, “novel is a democracy”³⁸⁰ and it declares “art and literature over indoctrination”.³⁸¹ The French philosopher, Alain Badiou, while commenting on the problematics of the “Je Suis Charlie” protests in France following the Charlie Hebdo massacre in France in 2015, points at the

³⁷⁴ Quoted in D’haen, *Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (London: Routledge, 2012.), 34.

³⁷⁵ Madeline Clements, *Writing Islam from a South Asian Muslim Perspective* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 106.

³⁷⁶ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 318.

³⁷⁷ Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011),139.

³⁷⁸ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,26.

³⁷⁹ Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*,87.

³⁸⁰ Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions*,142.

³⁸¹ Morey,*Islamophobia*,355.

reiterative pattern of global identity politics that preempt and foreclose any attempts at reaching the point of a radical revolutionary breakthrough in the geopolitical order. He says:

The general plot of this story is the West—homeland of the dominant, civilised capitalism—clashing with “Islamism”—the reference point of bloody terrorism. Appearing against this backdrop we have, on the one hand, murderous armed gangs or individuals with stockpiles of their own, which they wave around in order to force everyone to honour the corpse of some deity; on the other hand, savage international military expeditions mounted in the name of human rights and democracy, which destroy entire states.³⁸²

Derrida’s call for a society premised upon “reasonable reason” rather than one or the other form of secularism leads us to contemplate the role of religion in the contemporary world. Rationality untempered by religion would inevitably lead to a form of “designification” that Derrida refers to as an aberration upon humanity that has been erected upon the Abrahamic ethics. It is in this regard that Islam provides an important point of resistance to the monolithic “secularization of politics” symptomatic in the western world. Both Hanif Kureishi in *The Black Album* and Nadeem Aslam in *The Wasted Vigil* indicate the necessity of adopting a more individualized, inclusive, and non-essentialist perspective when addressing the complexities of Muslim identity politics in the pre- and post-9/11 geopolitical landscape. The main thematic that unites both texts is the kernel of radical alienation that the major characters face in identifying with a priori preemptive categories that tread the paths of either fundamentalist Islam or the hegemonic currency of western liberalism. These two novels critique the binarized, saturating categories that Badiou refers to as symptomatic of

³⁸² Alain Badiou, “The Red Flag and the Tricolore,” *Verso*, February 03, 2015, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1833-the-red-flag-and-the-tricolore-by-alain-badiou>, (accessed 29th Dec, 2021)

the political and ontological stranglehold that plagues the current geopolitical order and its self-fashioning as either/or in terms of identity realms. The palimpsest of alienating emotions and the kinship of grief that unites both texts further punctuates the reiterative peddling of global cosmopolitanism as the only redemptive space that can dissolve the status quo and gesture towards a more inclusive form of hospitality. Both *The Black Album* and *The Wasted Vigil* seem to suggest that a more deeply personalized historiography—one that subscribes neither to the narratives of the modern nation-state or the Islamic revivalist pre-modern collective—might provide us with a glimpse of the fractured histories, silent mnemonic spaces, and uncategorizable identity kernels that form the psychic and political lives of the Islamic subjects both at home and in alien migratory lands.

Chapter Three

Gender, Religion, and Religious Faith in Qaisra Shahraz and Leila Aboulela's Select Novels

The following chapter discusses Qaisra Shahraz's novel, *The Holy Woman* (2001), its sequel, *Typhoon* (2003) along with Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015) to further look into problematics and polemics that surround the post-9/11 scenario and the peculiar sense of precarity and ambivalence that was experienced by different sections of the Muslim immigrant population in Britain. Both Qaisra Shahraz and Leila Aboulela are British Muslim women writing their fiction by depicting, especially Muslim women, their society, and religious faiths in a post-9/11 scenario. Though Qaisra Shahraz explores aspects of race, gender, and cultural divides in her select novels to bring out the politico-cultural connotations and problematics associated with clothing, female modesty, and multiple identities, Leila Aboulela is different in depicting her protagonist, who keeps or finds religious faith spiritually in strengthening the sense of piety, and in building an interconnectedness between the performance of religious actions and the creation of a self. The problem of clothing in association with female subjectivity is highlighted in the novel, *The Holy Woman*, whereas issues of gender, society, and religion are problematized in Shahraz's other novel, *Typhoon*. The questioning of agency, religiosity, and gender are different in both.

The novels of Shahraz and Aboulela have been selected and explored by keeping in mind that they are quite different in attitudes towards their representations of women and men and social adherence through piety and God consciousness. In doing so, I have also discussed thoroughly the Sufi aspect of *The Kindness of Enemies* through history in diagnosing the Sufi faith that Leila Aboulela discusses in her novel, which highlights spirituality and materialistic

modernity and faith and present-day substantiality. The devotional and religious aspects of history, historical estrangement, and alienation of Sufi spirituality, unlike modern historiography, in building the past and the present have been explored extensively to contemplate the issues through a transmaterialist historiography and a differential critical lens.

Muslim women as fictional characters did not appear prominently in literature written in English until fairly recently. After 9/11, however, Muslim women writers have themselves produced literature that addresses the issue of postcolonial Muslim female identity. The new mode of writing that these novelists take up manifests the fluidity of contemporary Muslim women's identity as represented by themselves, its active evolving state, and thus the structural imperatives and genealogy of its hybridity. Qaisra Shahraz is a popular Pakistan-born British screenwriter, educationalist, and novelist. She enjoys an important position among contemporary writers writing in English. Shahraz's literary sensibility is intricately intertwined with the social fabric, particularly regarding the pressing issue of women's rights and customs such as forced marriage, celibacy, hijab, sexual violence, divorce, inheritance, and childbearing within the postcolonial rural setting of Pakistan. Through her work, Shahraz vividly portrays the experiences and challenges faced by Pakistani women in this specific context shaped by the legacies of colonialism. It also brings to the fore the narrative of the feudal master working as a surrogate to the deceased colonizer and eventually evolving into the indigenous colonial bourgeois. She brings out the tensions between a liberal idea of individual subjectivity and devotional attachment to community, culture, and faith, and how the autobiographical form shapes and is reshaped by these tensions.

Her novel, *The Holy Woman*³⁸³ portrays Muslim women in terms of what Homi Bhabha has described as the “transmission of culture”. He writes in one of his essays, “Culture’s In-Between”: “This ‘part’ culture, this partial culture is the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures—at once the impossibility of culture’s containedness and the boundary between. It is indeed something like culture’s ‘in-between’ baffling, simultaneously alike and different”.³⁸⁴ In *The Holy Woman*, Shahraz offers a depiction of the feudal class, showcasing their preoccupation with preserving their wealth and property on their own terms. This class is willing to manipulate and undermine family and marriage institutions to align with their vested interests. The marriage of daughters is the biggest concern in this feudal set-up, where it is important to know that only arranged marriages are permitted, and that there is no room for individual choices. Shahraz delves into the intermingling of normative boundaries, examining the complex intersections between the secular and the sacred, culture and politics, and family and ideological imperatives. She particularly emphasizes the overlapping dynamics of religion, representation, recognition, and secularism, allowing for a nuanced distinction between Islam as a religion and Islam as a cultural phenomenon. She examines spatial, communitarian, corporeal, and narrational paradigms that discuss the home, the prison, and the asylum as homologous sites of female disempowerment only to transcend confined spaces of women’s embodied experiences. *The Holy Woman* hinges on a Sindhi tradition of Shahzadi Ibadat (Muslim nun)³⁸⁵ in the name of religion and clannish pride. Zarri Bano, a career-oriented Sindhi girl of Pakistan, is forced to

³⁸³ Qaisra Shahraz, *The Holy Woman* (London: Arcadia Books, 2001), 5. All page references are to this edition.

³⁸⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, “Culture’s In-Between”, in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage, 1996), 54.

³⁸⁵ By becoming a Holy Woman, the status of a married woman is denied to Zarri Bano. She has to remain a spinster throughout her life only to harbour family adherence to an outdated practice of *Shahzadi Ibadat*.

renounce love and adopt the ritualistic practice of marrying the Quran. The novel opens in a dramatic manner. Zarri appears at a *mela* (a fair in the Indian subcontinent) in Chiragpur without covering her head, forsaking the centuries-old social norm of wearing a *dupatta* (a long scarf). When her brother Jafar implores her to maintain the *izzat* (honour), she retorts, “So what if my dupatta fell down for a few seconds? Have you never seen hair before?”³⁸⁶ It seems that Zarri Bano has violated the codes of female propriety by appearing bareheaded at the mela, which was considered “an all-male set of activities”.³⁸⁷ In such a feudal class, marriage remains a matter of central concern. The patriarchs are satisfied that their daughter would retain their class status in their marriage. About her plan for marriage, she holds a strong-willed view: “I’m not a fish to be angled at, caught and trapped.... I’m a free woman. I’ll decide if I want this or any other man”.³⁸⁸ The death of Jafar, her brother, in an accident, twists the course of the narrative. Zarri Bano becomes a holy woman for the interest of her family propriety in the absence of a male heir. The acceptance of her new position as a holy woman establishes an ironic relationship within her Sindhi society. Though she loves Sikander wholeheartedly, she abandons his plea that she is falling prey to her family’s meaningless traditions:

Sikander Sahib, again you presume too much. I know a great deal about human behaviour, and I have studied it, as you say, I know what I’m doing. Please do not insult my intelligence. Education I may have in abundance, a member of the women’s APWA movement I may be, and I’ve debated on and supported women’s issues— but ... I’m still a microcosm of my clan ... our family, behaviour, social etiquette is

³⁸⁶ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 5.

³⁸⁷ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 4.

³⁸⁸ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 7.

dictated by a code of ethics peculiar to my clan—that you, as an outsider from another social group cannot begin to understand.³⁸⁹

Zarri lays bare her heart before her close guide, Nighat Sultana:

I woke up one morning, Sister Nighat, to find my identity stripped off me and learned that somebody else, my father held it in his hands and that he was going to shape it for me ... we are all in the same *pingra*—a bird cage to which our fathers and elders hold the key.... For our *izzat*'s and our family's honour, like other women, I became a coward and a victim rolled into one, by suppressing and sacrificing my own needs for the sake of my family.³⁹⁰

The social structure of differences in gender creates some private places as women's, and other public places as men's, and that those fabrics serve to bolster the power structures of gendered identity in Sindhi society. The act of symbolizing the present involves a process of redefining, reconfiguring, and reinterpreting something to sustain its relevance, often presented as a past that goes beyond conventional historical memory. Instead, this past is strategically utilized as a means of demonstrating authority and dominance through the artifice of the archaic. Nighat denies the barbaric practice as “this is against our Islam. Our Shariah, our courts, both secular and Muslim, would have made a case for you against your family”.³⁹¹ If we view it from Quranic perspectives, then the whole thing can be clarified clearly: “He who kills a soul unless it be for punishment in murder or for spreading mischief on earth shall be as if he had slain all mankind; and he who saves a life shall be as if he had

³⁸⁹ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 137–138.

³⁹⁰ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 192.

³⁹¹ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 191.

given life to all mankind.”³⁹² Here, Sindhi culture, thus, becomes a space where meanings are assumed, contested, distorted, and revived in an unending manner. Zarri comprehends that secularism and religiosity are not diametrically opposed concepts, recognizing that she has the autonomy to construct her own interpretation of faith while existing within a secular framework. According to Fatima Mernissi's book *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, the control and regulation of female sexuality within Muslim society can be understood as a manifestation of fear. The power that is associated with the female body is negotiated. The gendering of the sexes is reinforced by manipulating the text of the Holy Quran. Mernissi argues: “Not only the sacred texts have always been manipulated, but the manipulation of them is the structural characteristics of the practice of power in Muslim societies. Since all power, from seventh century on, was only legitimated by religion, political forces and economic interests pushed for the fabrication of false traditions.”³⁹³ The calculus of pollution and purity is also the important aspect that determines basic relationships in that society. When examining women's lives, the notions of purity and pollution take on an additional layer of complexity as they become intrinsically linked to their sexuality and fertility. Zarri's decision to wear the veil as a tool to heal the patriarchy becomes the agency, by virtue of which she can function without male hegemony and become a full-fledged individual. She breaks the myth of the veil in a press conference before Jane Foster, the journalist, in London:

Once my whole life was devoted to looking good, and presenting a glamorous smart image to the public world. Now I am content with simple burqa. I do not dress to

³⁹² *The Holy Quran*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah: King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex, 1934), 5:32.

³⁹³ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 9.

please others and in deference to them. Thank you for your question, Sister Jane. The veil has always perplexed and tantalized the Western world, both men and women alike. It is a disconcerting phenomenon for them as much now as it ever was. Westerners have always misunderstood the reason why women wear it. To add insult to injury, they see it as a symbol of male oppression—a widely accepted stereotyped myth. They think that women are forced to wear it by their men folk.³⁹⁴

As a veiled woman, Zarri finds herself situated between the dichotomy of reason and religion. This positioning challenges the established notions of Orientalism and paternalism, as highlighted by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in her renowned *Turkish Embassy Letters*. Montagu argued that veiled women are, in fact, the epitome of freedom, questioning prevailing assumptions and stereotypes. She opines: “This perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery.”³⁹⁵ She subverts the stereotyped claims of irrationality of veiling through the image of Turkish women. Zarri can be considered an Islamic feminist because the concept of “holy women” has no basis in Islam,³⁹⁶ and the veil can be perceived as an instrument of women’s agency as it allows women to negotiate the conventions of patriarchal tradition to achieve what they want, assist their independence, and value and find their own identity. The “cage” that restricts female

³⁹⁴ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 284.

³⁹⁵ Robert Halsband, ed., *The Complete Letters of lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–67), 328–329.

³⁹⁶ The idea of a cloistered nun in Islam subverts the religious teachings that advocate marriage as an important institution for a healthy society and the sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH). The Quran says in chapter no. 57, verse no. 27 that “[...] it is against Monasticism”. The Prophet (PBUH) said: “There is no Monasticism”. It is mentioned in *Sahih Bukhari*, vol. 7, in the Book of *Nikah*, Ch. No. 3, H. No. 4: “O young people, whoever has the means to get married, should get married”. Sufis believed Rabi’a was a saint. But, as a Sufi, Rabi’a was focused on the inner path, called *Tariqa* rather than conformity to Islamic law. Sufis focused on *Tariqa* (inner path) and Shariah (outer path) where the outer path leads to the inner path with the goal of union with God. Sufis believed Rabi’a was a saint. This contrast with Islamic tradition is especially seen when Islamic theologians denounced saints, including Rabi’a, and any worship given to them. This mystical movement of Sufism was in contrast with Islam.

interference in the public space is now restructured as a “platform for action” that enables Muslim women to recast it as an emblem of resistance.³⁹⁷

In Pakistan, there are two significant factions within feminist discourse: secular feminism and modern Islamic feminism. Modern Islamic feminists, including Amina Wadud, Riffat Hassan, and Asma Barlas, have made valuable contributions to scholarship by seeking to challenge patriarchy within the Quran. They emphasize the significance of employing *ijtihad*, independent reasoning, to delve deeper into women's rights and to reinterpret Islamic perspectives. This particular brand of feminism primarily caters to the lower, middle, and upper-middle classes of society, who often turn to religion for guidance and seek to address women-centric issues within an Islamic framework. Popular feminists maintain that veiling is a structure of patriarchal domination and oppression, and not wearing it is a badge of liberation and agency over female bodies and sexuality. After 7/7 and 9/11, though these dresses are seen as a visible marker of feminine self, it also draws the parallel between colonial powers and their colonized subjects provoking a general discourse of Muslim women. The style of clothing is different for women of different countries, classes, regions and cultures. In Pakistan and India, women wear the *shalwar kameez* matched with a *dupatta* draped around the shoulders; in Afghanistan women are dressed under a burqa; in Jordan there are knee-length skirts; and in Iran women are seen in *chador*.

Frantz Fanon, in *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, while speaking about the anticolonial strategy with reference to the Battle of Algiers, argues that it is “[r]emoved and reassumed again and again, the veil has been manipulated, transformed into a technique of

³⁹⁷ Miriam Cooke, “Roundtable Discussion: Religion, Gender, and the Muslim Woman”, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24, no.1 (Spring 2008): 91–118.

camouflage, into a means of struggle”.³⁹⁸ It was an effective symbol of anti-imperialist protection in the colonial period. Fanon continues to say that “[the hijabed] woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself”.³⁹⁹ The rulers in the colonial period find its assertion in the postcolonial period with neo-orientalist discourses as they wage a war against Muslim women’s dress code. For some women, according to Emma Tarlo in *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith*, wearing the hijab is an approach that engages with “an aspirational post-ethnic global Islamic community”,⁴⁰⁰ outdoing ethnic and global demarcations Zarri Bano discovers the significance of the "language of clothes"¹⁹ as an unconventional means of navigating and comprehending the unfamiliar world surrounding her. Through this exploration, she embarks on a transformative journey towards a new identity as a holy woman. This journey involves engaging with the practice of *haqbakhshawana*, a cultural tradition that enforces celibacy on women to safeguard family property from being inherited by male outsiders. Zarri’s ceremonial veiling, therefore, unveils the interpellation of identity and subjectivity for her own self and becomes a “visibly Muslim” woman.⁴⁰¹ Zarri’s decision to adhere to wearing the hijab, a sartorial practice even in her husband’s house, interrogates her position, who wanders around freely, unperturbed by domestic confines and homely duties with equal rights.

³⁹⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, trans. H. Chevalier (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965), 61.

³⁹⁹ Fanon, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, 44.

⁴⁰⁰ Emma Tarlo, “Landscapes of Attraction and Rejection: South Asian Aesthetics in Islamic Fashion in London,” in *Islamic Fashion and Anti-Fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America*, ed. Emma Tarlo and Annelies Moors (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 81.

⁴⁰¹ Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 6.

According to Tariq Rehman, shame as well as honour is associated with the bodies of women. He cites numerous words that revolves around women's behaviour such as chastity, modesty, virginity, and piety, only to connote dishonour with it.⁴⁰² Her dressed body is an avenue for the expression of identity and exercise of agency to redefine prevalent cultural meanings and the dominant social understandings of dress through moral discourses that signal a social difference. Leila Ahmed's *A Quiet Revolution* and Emma Tarlo's *Visibly Muslim* are two critical books that also provide a nuanced understanding of numerous discourses on veiling. Ahmed provides a insightful analysis of the reemergence of the veil in both the Arab world and America, suggesting that the hijab primarily serves as a symbol of Islamism rather than solely representing piety and holiness. According to Ahmed, the trend of wearing the hijab was in 1950s and 1960s, and it surfaced again and came to vogue as the Muslim Brotherhood, which was founded in Egypt by Hassan Al-Banna in 1928, made a planned campaign by aligning the hijab with Islamism and its cautionary associations. To Ahmed, a Muslim woman in a hijab is a "disturbing sight".⁴⁰³ Like Fatima Mernissi, Ahmed also represents veiling in *A Quiet Revolution* in a stereotypical manner whereas in her previous book, *Women and Gender in Islam*,⁴⁰⁴ she is critical of the colonial effort to make the veil and Islam non-progressive.

Contrary to Leila Ahmed's position on the hijab, Emma Tarlo finds that "visibly Muslim dress practices cannot be reduced simply to ideas of religious community, politics or ethnic group but involve complex aesthetic, ethical, social and political choices made in the

⁴⁰² Tariq Rehman, *Language Ideology and Power* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁰³ Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 3.

⁴⁰⁴ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

context of cosmopolitan homeworld which offer a variety of possibilities”.⁴⁰⁵ Tarlo’s arguments on the veil contradicts Ahmed’s assertion that the veil’s reappearance is a consequence of the Muslim Brotherhood’s threatening Islamism that is “informed by a long legacy of Orientalist images and texts”.⁴⁰⁶ On the other hand, she finds that “one consequence of early twentieth century attempts to suppress ‘the veil’ was its later emergence as a powerful symbol of authenticity and resistance in many parts of the world”⁴⁰⁷ and “far from signalling a challenge or threat to western values, British Islamic fashions are evidence of the emergence of new cosmopolitan material forms born out of the British Muslim cultural experience”.⁴⁰⁸ For Anouar Majid, in Fatima Mernissi’s writings, “Islam is depicted as fundamentally antihistorical and antifeminist.”⁴⁰⁹ Mernissi expresses strong criticism towards the practice of veiling, perceiving its resurgence as an attempt to relegate “to be marginal, and above all subordinate”⁴¹⁰ since “the enigma of the hijab ... hides the feminine and crushes its will at the risk of denying its existence”.⁴¹¹ Myfanwy Franks brings in Mernissi to show that there are two types of separation that are found through veiling in Islam.⁴¹² The primary one is the architectural dissociation that finds its source in the Quran⁴¹³ that says

⁴⁰⁵ Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim*, 13.

⁴⁰⁶ Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim*, 3.

⁴⁰⁷ Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim*, 4.

⁴⁰⁸ Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim*, 15.

⁴⁰⁹ Anouar Majid, “The Politics of Feminism in Islam,” in *Gender, Politics and Islam*, ed. Therese Saliba, Carolyn Allen, and Judith A. Howard (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 61.

⁴¹⁰ Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Inquiry*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), 24.

⁴¹¹ Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 1992), 119.

⁴¹² My fanway Franks, *Women and Revivalism in the West* (UK: Palgrave publishers, 2001), 128-29.

⁴¹³ *The Holy Quran*, 33: 53.

about the distinction between the public and private spheres, as well as the differentiation in interactions between the Prophet and His wives versus His associates. These distinctions are evident in the verses pertaining to clothing and decorum:⁴¹⁴ “And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornments only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms”. The Quran enjoins both women and men to practice modesty, which includes the instruction to lower their gaze.⁴¹⁵ A woman in an Islamic society uses hijab as a way to transcend the public world of men. For Mernissi, veiling women is “veiling resistance”.⁴¹⁶

According to Myfanwy Franks, Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud find the act of veiling based on “cultural practices” unconnected to Islam or relating to the Prophet’s wives.⁴¹⁷ In one episode of the novel, Zarri Bano’s cousin and her sister insist that she dance at her sister’s wedding, “come on, forget your holy self for once. Give us back the old Zarri Bano just for one evening”.⁴¹⁸ She discards her veil only to bring her old self: “The *Shahzadi Ibadat* was soon forgotten as her body remembered how to weave magic in movement and rhythm. The rhythmic clapping spurred her on. She responded to the tune, smiling and dimpling down at the women. Rising and dipping with ever more elegant movements of her body, finally reaching a crescendo to the sad music”.⁴¹⁹ She dances in the private sphere of women, unveiling herself being unaware of the fact that Sikandar is following her from a far

⁴¹⁴ *The Holy Quran*, 24: 31.

⁴¹⁵ *The Holy Quran*, 24: 30–32.

⁴¹⁶ Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 85.

⁴¹⁷ Franks, *Women and Revivalism*, 130.

⁴¹⁸ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 248.

⁴¹⁹ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 248.

corner in the dim light. Sikandar's male gaze symbolically "watched" and silently "observes" Zarri Bano in a patriarchal feudal structure throughout the novel. In "The Cultural Articulation of Patriarchy," Farida Shaheed discusses how male interpretations of Islam have often been used to justify and reinforce patriarchal dominance. She suggests that women's participation in fields such as education and medicine is sometimes seen as a means to uphold the principles of purdah, or seclusion.⁴²⁰ She says that in Pakistan, "The selective implementation of Islam has been responsible for the entrenchment of an all-pervasive patriarchal system of inequality and subjugation".⁴²¹

Ideology is defined by Žižek as not a "false consciousness", defined as "an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived this reality itself which is already to be conceived as 'ideological' ... a formation whose very consistency implies a certain no knowledge on the part of the subject".⁴²² Žižek suggests that the subject is not aware of "their social reality itself, their activity, is guided by an illusion, by a fetishistic inversion. What they overlook, what they misrecognize, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their social activity. They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know".⁴²³ The keeping of the veil and the burqa is the definitive point of "transferral identification"⁴²⁴ since no "woman look[s] lovely in this garment" and Zarri "loathes this clothe". It "burns" her "body".⁴²⁵

⁴²⁰ Farida Shaheed, "The Cultural Articulation of Patriarchy," in *Finding Our Way: Readings on Women in Pakistan*, ed. Fareeha Zafar (Pakistan: ASR Publications, 1991), 148.

⁴²¹ Shaheed, "The Cultural Articulation", 140.

⁴²² Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 21.

⁴²³ Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 32.

⁴²⁴ Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 39.

⁴²⁵ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 144.

According to Žižek, true obedience exists only when it is an “external one” and not influenced by one's personal desires or beliefs. He contrasts this with “obedience out of conviction”, in which the subject chooses to obey based on their faith in the benevolence of the ruler. In this scenario, the subject exercises their agency as a rational being and makes a conscious choice to comply.⁴²⁶

During the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq in the early 1980s, the condition of women in Pakistan was under the religious extremist forces on both political and social levels. Here, Muhammad Asim Siddiqui pertinently opines, “Almost all Pakistani novelists have dealt with the feudal class in their works. The feudal class also knows how to use religion to its advantage, even when religion does not have a very strong basis in the lives of people it has been used by the feudal class to maintain its power and position.”⁴²⁷ Muneeza Shamsie, too, portrays the concern:

Earlier in the 1960s, the martial law of Ayub Khan defied orthodoxy to promulgate 1961 Family Laws Ordinance, drawn up by Pakistani women activists, with clauses that discouraged polygamy, regulated divorce procedures and introduced a minimum marriageable age for women. However, the martial law of Zia-ul-Haq held these in abeyance, and in 1979 he introduced the Hudood Ordinance which does not differentiate between rape and adultery in order to Islamise society. New blasphemy

⁴²⁶ Žizek, *The Sublime Object*, 37.

⁴²⁷ Muhammad Asim Siddiqui, “The Political or the Social?: Qaisra Shahraz and the Present Pakistani Writings in English,” in *The Holy and the Unholy: Critical Essays on Qaisra Shahraz's Fiction*, ed. A. R Kidwai and M.A. Siddiqui (New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 2011), 186.

laws came into being; both were used to victimise the weakest and the most vulnerable women and minorities.⁴²⁸

Under General Zia's martial rule in Pakistan, certain ideological mechanisms were employed to reintroduce the dichotomy of purity and impurity, particularly in relation to the symbolic and physical female body. The modus operandi of his power was to reconstruct the country's national identity in nationalist politics where "Zia attempted to secure his power through the propagation of an explicitly misogynist ideology and by proclaiming a mission to revitalise society by correcting the immorality of women".⁴²⁹ Shahraz's novel unfolds against the backdrop of Zia's regime, with the marriage between Zarri Bano and the Quran serving as a platform for challenging and reshaping rural patriarchal norms and practices. It is clear that Zarri Bano's "sacrificial gesture signifies nothing beyond the preservation of land, the ritual struggles to reify itself ideologically. At this point, gendered identity across various spectrums, not just the religiously cultivated, becomes vulnerable to questioning, threatening to collapse under the weight of its own contingencies."⁴³⁰ Her "ceremonial veiling therefore unveils the material conditions underpinning the interpellation of identity and subjectivity for women such as herself".⁴³¹ Zarri begs to her father as she deals her fate too:

I want to be a normal woman, Father, and live a normal life! I want to get married. I am not a very religious person, as you know. I am a twentieth century, modern, educated woman. I am not living in the Mughal period—a pawn in a game of male

⁴²⁸ Muneeza Shamsie, *And The World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2005), xiii.

⁴²⁹ Sadia Toor, *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (London: Pluto, 2011), 160.

⁴³⁰ Abu-Bakar Ali, "Agency, Gender, Nationalism, and the Romantic Imaginary in Pakistan," in *The Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing*, ed. Aroosa Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 232.

⁴³¹ Abu-Bakar Ali, "Agency, Gender, Nationalism", 232.

chess. Don't you see, Father, I have hardly ever prayed in my life nor opened the Holy Quran on a regular basis.⁴³²

Her unravelling to the process of normalization with a sartorial practice rendering her visibility to the religious commitment is a prejudiced obsession in ideological lines where dress narrative “emerges as a cultural site” and “identity is visibly inscribed, constructed, monitored, negotiated or creatively reinvented”.⁴³³ Here, the dress is a cultural negotiator that approves Zarri to revive in imagined and sometimes transgressive ways to simulate an identity established in the rural district of Sindhi aesthetics. The narrative significantly highlights the influence of both class and gender divisions, particularly in how the female body and its attire become symbolic representations of cultural values. The role of clothing goes beyond mere adornment, as it becomes a performative tool for signaling inclusion or exclusion, as well as a means of expressing one's sense of belonging or non-belonging. Zarri Bano's preoccupation with her sartorial choices underscores the inherent conflict between gender and identity faced by Pakistani women, who find themselves constrained by their material circumstances and societal expectations. The implication of her religion is “reduced to the symbolic, unable to escape that for which it is a mere patina—which is ultimately the preservation of land and wealth through the enclosure of the female body”.⁴³⁴

Identifying as Muslim provides individuals with a sense of belonging to a specific group, offering a feeling of continuity and security amidst cultural debates. This sense of community is integral to individual identity, and the veil serves as a means for women to

⁴³² Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 90.

⁴³³ Noemí Pereira-Ares, *Fashion, Dress and Identity in South Asian Diaspora Narratives: From the Eighteenth Century to Monica Ali* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 196.

⁴³⁴ Abu-Bakar Ali, “Agency, Gender, Nationalism”, 233.

express this "dual" sense of belonging and articulate their unique position. The community is a choice of belonging and not a cultural heritage. Culture and community comprise the way through which an individual feels self-worth, self-respect, and cultural equality. Several theories have been identified to examine community as subject/agents and the basic meanings in the study of the community have also been a slippery, complex, and multifaceted trope covering a wide range of social phenomena. The community is a major being in which the self is conceptualized. In the public sphere, the articulation of religious rhetoric should not find a split without a secularizing translation of religious overtones. The resurgence of religion is happening in a secularized world; it is even a symbol of it because it carries secularization within itself. Zarri has to make a way between sacred and secular dichotomies. Feminists engaging with the concept of freedom are tasked with interrogating and challenging societal constructs that shape the roles of men and women. This entails examining the cultural, institutional, and relational customs, practices, and gestures that influence gender dynamics. A feminist perspective can shed light on the understanding that women's lack of freedom does not stem from Islam itself, but rather from the interpretations and instrumentalization of Islam by men to serve patriarchal interests. Similarly, just as Western men have utilized value systems such as liberal capitalism and Christianity to reinforce the gendered status quo, a critical feminist lens can expose these power dynamics. Mary Wollstonecraft effectively challenges the notion of Eastern inferiority to the West by rejecting stereotypical depictions such as veiling and the burqa in her introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She says that in the books written by Western men, "in the true style of Mahometanism, [women] are treated as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as a part of the human species, when improvable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction which raises men above the brute creation, and puts a natural spectre in a feeble

hand”.⁴³⁵ Thus, women are beguiled in this East/West binary—veiled is seen as religious and unveiled as reason.

Zarri Bano begins a new life. Her own sister, Ruby gets engaged to Sikander. The news comes as a shock to her: “A paralysis of some sort attacked her body; depriving her of all feeling and sensation ... the quivering voice belied the words drawn out from the depths of her being”.⁴³⁶ She confesses to her mother of her suffering: “How I fooled myself! I thought I had killed and buried the old Zarri Bano behind the folds of this burqa, this black shroud—but she lives, Mother. She lives! Oh, Allah pak have mercy! ... Tell me, Mother, how I can kill this woman inside me, still passionately in love with this man.”⁴³⁷ To uphold the familial status in the eyes of people, feudal patriarchs of Sind resort to the education of women. Zarri studies at Karachi University and subsequently pursues doctoral studies at Al-Azhar University, Cairo. Firdaus, the housekeeper Fatima’s daughter, comes to Chiragpur to work as deputy headmistress at a school. Nahmana, Fatima’s niece, becomes an entrepreneur. The intricate situation of feudal women in relation to the contrasting notions of public and private space challenges the simplistic portrayal of women in the Third World, particularly Asian and Muslim women. This complexity undermines monolithic images and reveals that women occupy positions of both subordination and power. It also critiques prevailing narratives that confine women to domestic roles by highlighting the parallels between home and institutions like psychiatric asylums or prisons. In doing so, the emphasis is placed on individual agency and the transformative potential of higher education as a means of

⁴³⁵ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Penguin Random House, 2004), 80.

⁴³⁶ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 264.

⁴³⁷ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 267.

empowerment. It becomes a platform from which women can express their thoughts and feelings freely.

Zarri's father, Habib Khan, becomes conscious of ruining his daughter's life to maintain the status quo. He understands his daughter only when he goes to holy pilgrimage, Hajj: "I have to ask your forgiveness, for I cannot go on this holy pilgrimage without doing that ... I have sinned against you ... what we did was wrong. I do not know how to turn the clock back. My dear daughter, I would give anything to have the old Zarri Bano back again."⁴³⁸ Ironically, the news of the deaths of Habib Khan and Ruby from a stampede in Hajj paves the way for the marriage of Zarri and Sikander Hassan. Zrizi's observations are significant in understanding Shahraz's writings, which "invite a complex post-colonial and post-harem critical perspective on women's predicaments in the Arab-Islamic sphere as a whole".⁴³⁹ Shahraz's commitment to feminism prompts a crucial reevaluation of sexual politics and women's role in challenging various domains of male dominance. Through this process, she aims to contribute to the construction of a modern Muslim society that embraces gender equality and democracy. Zarri Bano, despite being a victim of feudalism, becomes a symbol of what Zarri calls a "post-colonial and post-harem world of Muslim woman"⁴⁴⁰ and positions herself within a feminist framework, she actively engages in recentering marginalized perspectives and courageously speaking truth to power. In this context, women's spaces can be understood through a Foucauldian lens as heterotopias⁶⁰, which are spaces of deviation and crisis.

⁴³⁸ Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, 326.

⁴³⁹ Kidwai and Siddiqui, *The Holy and the Unholy*, xlix.

⁴⁴⁰ Kidwai and Siddiqui, *The Holy and the Unholy*, xlix.

Qaisra Shahraz's second novel, *Typhoon*,⁴⁴¹ a sequel to *The Holy Woman*, is a cultural narrative of sin and forgiveness. The novel hinges on the implications of two central events of the span of 20 years. The first one is the discovery of a man in the arms of a strange woman by his own wife in the dead of night; and the second is the public trial and tribulations of alleged adulterers, who prove to be a married couple separated but not divorced. The village head Baba Siraj Din releases the cruellest verdict of his life: that Haroon must divorce Naghmana,⁴⁴² his alleged first wife (an educated urban woman, condemned for a crime of adultery) so that he can be restored to his present wife, Gulshan. Haroon utters *talaq* thrice to divorce Naghmana. This incident begets panic among the villagers, who are haunted by the decision in a society where polygamy is allowed.⁴⁴³ Here, Baba emotionally coerces Haroon to pronounce triple *talaq* to save the honour of Chiragpur.

If *The Holy Woman* deals with/debates the growing concern for hijab and the institution of marriage, *Typhoon* addresses the issue of triple *talaq*, as well as fatwa-related issues that engulf Muslim lives in the subcontinent. Of the several genres of *fiqh* (the theory or philosophy of Islamic law and jurisprudence based on the teachings of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet) only the Hanafites allow triple *talaq* at one go, while all others maintain three separate *talaqs* with some suitable gaps in between. Even the Hanafites do not regard divorce under compulsion/threat. Baba's wife Zulaikha cannot digest the whole incident about forced divorced. She asks her husband: "Then why did you have her publicly divorced? Her husband didn't want to divorce her. Siraj Din, what power, what authority, I

⁴⁴¹ Qaisra Shahraz, *Typhoon* (London: Arcadia Books, 2002). All page references are to this edition.

⁴⁴² Except a few, all the characters have been carried over from the first book albeit with past and present alternating in vivid detail.

⁴⁴³ Only to earn respect in the domestic sphere and to raise awareness of the cultural determination of moral values, Baba Siraj Din announced a hegemonistic diktat that was free from "a public shaming". It is assumed that he "usurped *Allah pak's* authority" and made this power and authority an invisible institution.

ask you, did you have to demand, to force a husband to divorce a beloved wife? For that is what you did, isn't it? Have you usurped our Allah pak's authority?"⁴⁴⁴ What does the Quran prescribe about polygamy? A few verses are cited extensively to establish legitimacy of tolerating (thus not advocating) polygamy: "... marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one".⁴⁴⁵ Islam permits divorce of a couple in case of marital discord when both sides fail to reconcile them. Baba Siraj Din shuns the idea of polygamy by delivering his verdict. He says to Naghmana, "you are both passionate women and could not have shared Haroon", and to Haroon he says, "the two women couldn't have survived together. You would have been pulled between them, my son. It is not an easy life having two partners".⁴⁴⁶

Qaisra Shahraz, here, portrays the common misconceptions about polygamy in Muslim societies. No one can interfere with or enforce a loving married couple to divorce. Baba Siraj Din actually tries to free Chiragpur from this "evil" woman. It is evident in the words of the novelist:

Siraj Din's mind was suddenly assailed by the image of the young woman stepping out of the car, with her smart sunglasses, her loose curtain of glossy hair draped behind her shoulders and her confident greeting. They had no "whores" in the village. His blood surged to a boil. I knew she was trouble the moment I saw her, he ground out to himself.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.227.

⁴⁴⁵ *The Holy Quran*, 4: 3.

⁴⁴⁶ Shahraz, *Typhoon*, 176.

⁴⁴⁷ Shahraz, *Typhoon*, 110.

Villagers with their stereotypical mindset look down upon an urban, fashionable, cosmopolitan, and university-educated young girl who “flaunts her shameful body in front of everyone, with just a flimsy rope of a *dupatta* draped around her neck, and no other covering whatsoever”.⁴⁴⁸ Siraj Din seeks guidance and moral support from his wife Zulaikha on the kind of judgement that is very serious in nature. Zulaikha says:

You must consult the Imam in the other village. This sort of matter deserves careful deliberation, thought and action ... You cannot afford to take a wrong step. People’s lives are at stake in this matter. A wrong decision, my dear husband, will have a lasting and devastating effect on all concerned. You must deal with this matter with intelligence, sensitivity and care. And above all, let your head rule, but not your heart.⁴⁴⁹

This is the first time Siraj Din has consulted his wife in the 40 years of their marriage. Thinking of the household and home as a private and feminine space, Zulaikha believes or is made to understand that it is their responsibility to afford the comfort and the warmth of safety for their families. For this homely belonging, unhomely homes and fidelity to purdah, they either long for home or suffer domestic violence and home confinement played by their male dominators who are usually their most affectionate companions. Their designated status as insiders endows them with a particular potency to challenge but also, alternatively, to reproduce and confirm the existential dilemma in the home embedded in gender hierarchy. Voices that had hitherto been ignored and silenced trace the ideological ambivalences on the

⁴⁴⁸ Shahraz, *Typhoon*, 113.

⁴⁴⁹ Shahraz, *Typhoon*, 127–128.

borders of the categories of class, culture, tradition, and religion to reproduce and confirm such discourses.

Zulaikha's agency has little to offer in the epistemological process between verisimilitude and the real, between presence and isolation. Claiming their presence within the context of male patriarchal South Asian culture and marking a return of voices silenced by that culture are mapped thoroughly by the novelist. On the first night of their marriage, Zulaikha had unlocked her heart that she should be treated with equality and respect: "Allah pak is my master! You are a human being, only a mortal—like me. Treat me with respect and equality. We are a cloak, a garment, unto one another, and complementing one another. You do not have any special power over me, Siraj Din, just because you are a man."⁴⁵⁰ In this context, identity is undergoing a dynamic process of change and transformation, as it is shaped by multiple discourses and practices. Within this framework, a space is formed that goes beyond the confines of the traditional, exclusionary canon, utilizing various cultural objects and interpretations of the postcolonial experience to create a more inclusive and diverse narrative.

The portrayal of religious communities and popular customs in our contemporary era shapes our understanding of the age we live in. My argument is that Zulaikha's depiction of a simplistic binary between seemingly rational and progressive secularism on one side and antiquated theology and restrictive religious communities on the other is actually explored through the body. The body is depicted as a symbol that can represent both religiosity and secularism. Consequently, the body serves as a platform through which Zulaikha and other female characters navigate and embody the intersection of their heritage and contemporary

⁴⁵⁰ Shahraz, *Typhoon*, 125.

identity, allowing them to situate themselves within different discursive spaces. Shahraz emphasizes the importance of equitable treatment and mutual respect between spouses within Islamic marital life. In a 1940 essay entitled “The Position of Woman in Islam”, Iqbalunnisa Hussain observes that “Islam is the one of the religions of the world that has given equal rights to woman in material matters. A woman can earn her living or she can earn to help her husband financially”.⁴⁵¹

Similarly, the sublime concept of marriage in Islam is overtly spelt out by Sabra in her expostulation with Kaniz (an autocratic Chaudharani, molested and deflowered at the age of 16) in these words: “Marriage is a wonderful thing—how can you be so afraid of it or debase it in such terms, a relationship blessed by Allah pak? ... It is a wonderful gift of Him to mankind ... Marriage is about love, friendship, companionship, trust, consideration—not just sleeping together ”.⁴⁵² The opposition of Kaniz, another female character, to remarriage of widows is anti-Shariah: an ignorant notion, as Sabra states on another occasion: “Our faith encourages women to remarry”, which echoes words in the Quran about widow marriage: “... there is no blame/on you if they dispose/of themselves in just a manner”.⁴⁵³ She protests, “Why [do] women suffer the pangs of loneliness just because of female modesty and their children’s sake?”⁴⁵⁴ Culture is fundamentally rooted in what is inherently believable and logical, shaping the way individuals are organized to have unwavering faith in its reliability. It is normally accepted by the anti-essentialists that gender is the result of the normative behaviour exhibited towards women and men by religion and culture. For instance, Judith

⁴⁵¹ Iqbalunnisa Hussain, *Changing India: A Muslim Woman Speaks* (Bangalore: Hosali Press, 1940), 37.

⁴⁵² Shahraz, *Typhoon*, 206–207.

⁴⁵³ *The Holy Quran*, 2:234.

⁴⁵⁴ Shahraz, *Typhoon*, 283–284.

Butler's idea of gender performativity furthers the argument against any a priori role-playings assigned to women premised upon the ideological constatives of heteronormative reproductivity. Patriarchy and cismativity that relegates women to certain duties and obligatory roles like reproduction and mothering are thus critiqued through the critical premise that anything that supposedly constructs woman's nature and their functionality in society is neither biological nor theologically ordained by god—they are merely social constructs and cultural performatives. Throughout history, the narratives of culture and religion have often depicted women as subordinate to men. While religious and traditional customs and practices can be intellectually distinguished from one another, they consistently intersect and influence each other. This dynamic is evident in Shahraz's novel, where patriarchy and misogyny, particularly in rural Pakistan, are legitimized under the guise of religion and tradition.

In most parts of South Asia, female sexuality is controlled by male domains of power. Power is exercised rather than possessed. In these societies, Foucault contends that power was centralized and coordinated by a sovereign authority who enjoyed absolute control over the population through intimidation or open demonstration of violence.⁴⁵⁵ Stuart Hall characterizes representation as “an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things”.⁴⁵⁶ Hall highlights the significance of representation in the generation of meaning, mentioning three primary ways in which language represents meaning: the reflexive way, where language is believed to "reflect the

⁴⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777–95.

⁴⁵⁶ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (The Open-University: Sage, 1997), 15.

true meaning as it already exists in the world”;⁴⁵⁷ the intentional approach, which revolves around the author or speaker and acknowledges that “it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language”;⁴⁵⁷ and the constructionist approach, to which “neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language. In the discursive approach to representation, the other variant of the constructionist approach, influenced by Michel Foucault, meaning is ‘constructed within discourse’”.⁴⁵⁸ Foucault defines discourse as “an entity of sequences of signs in that they are enouncements”.⁴⁵⁹ The issue of identity in our contemporary world, where cultural clashes are an everyday reality for many individuals, has been a significant area of exploration within cultural studies and postcolonial criticism. Hall establishes a strong connection between representation and identity, asserting that “identities are ... formed within, not outside representation.”⁴⁶⁰ Our identities are shaped to some extent by our social environments, yet individuals also possess agency in interpreting and defining their own identities. Religious identity can be positioned as one of the various identities that individuals embody, alongside their sexual, national, racial, and ethnic class identities. Therefore, both the religious and social aspects of Muslim identity are partially, though not entirely, constructed through discourse. Jasmine Zine, in her exploration of Muslim identity, navigates the delicate balance between discursive and essentialist perspectives on identity and argues:

⁴⁵⁷ Hall, *Representation*, 25.

⁴⁵⁸ Hall, *Representation*, 44.

⁴⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Tavistock, 1972), 141.

⁴⁶⁰ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs ‘Identity’?,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996), 4.

While it is necessary to avoid the dangers of religious fundamentalism and narrow and rigid formulations of Islamic identification, we can at the same time, argue for locating the basis for an Islamic identity within the framework of spiritual beliefs and practices. This perspective does not detract from acknowledging epistemological diversity within the Islamic tradition, yet does locate Islamic identity within its spiritual grounding ... I believe that it is possible to honour the diversity of the ways in which Islam is practiced and lived without divesting the notion of Islamic identity from its grounding in a broad spiritual framework.⁴⁶¹

Put simply, our individual and collective identities are shaped by the way we position ourselves in relation to practices, influencing how we construct our identities in the present. The assumed rationality and progressiveness of a secular lifestyle come into question as Zulaikha grapples with her inability to control her own body. In his work *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha discusses how identity is not imposed externally but is self-created through the image one forms of oneself. Bhabha suggests that cultural identities cannot be fixed as predetermined, unchangeable, or timeless cultural traits that define the process of ethnic identity formation. Instead, he proposes that the negotiation of cultural identity involves a continual exchange of cultural characteristics that generate mutual recognition and representation of cultural differences. As Bhabha puts it: “the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre given identity... it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image.”⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ Jasmine Zine, “De-constructing Islamic Identity: Engaging Multiple Discourses,” in *Diasporic Ruptures: Globality, Migrancy and Expressions of Identity*, ed. Asgharzadeh, Lawson, and Oka (Rotterdam: Sense, 2007), 116.

⁴⁶² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 45.

Both of Shahraz's works explore the themes of family and domestic life, examining how traditionalism and domestic structures are either upheld or challenged within South Asian families following migration. In both texts, we witness individuals and families grappling with the complexities of identity formation, and the significant influence of their cultural and personal histories in shaping their sense of belonging. These characters make conscious decisions to abide by a set of behavioral norms that align with Pakistani cultural and religious traditions. Shahraz interrogates in her both the novels what Haideh Moghissi asks, that is, to dissect "Islam as faith", "Islam as the ideology of a movement in opposition, and Islam as a ruling system, that is Islamic fundamentalism".⁴⁶³ In Shahraz's novels, women's religious dress hinges on the concept of agency,⁴⁶⁴ and these women subvert patriarchal religious power structures from within, and they do not need saving from religion.⁴⁶⁵ In the narratives, Muslim women's identity is viewed as many sided, always evolving, partly constructed by ideologies and finally with its socio-economic component having a dialogic nature. Shahraz, thus, depicts all the different aspects of Muslim women who unceasingly question their belonging, and their fragmented history to reengineer identities through hegemonistic discourses. The identities of Muslim women in Pakistani society are manufactured in a complex sociocultural matrix and produced with an aim to regulate subjects by reforming them and, by so doing, making them conform to their fractured realities that they live day in and day out. Shahraz advocates for a shift away from a blame-centered approach and instead proposes the development of a transcultural and non-

⁴⁶³ Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999), vii.

⁴⁶⁴ Sirma Bilge, "Beyond Subordination Vs. Resistance: An Intersectional Approach to the Agency of Veiled Muslim Women," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31, no. 1 (2010): 10–27.

⁴⁶⁵ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 1999).

coercive identity that embraces and respects differences. This perspective is seen as essential for navigating a world that is becoming increasingly fragmented due to the aggressive assertion of fixed and rigid identities. Shahraz emphasizes the importance of acknowledging that gender identity is not inherently predetermined or biologically fixed, but rather constructed through social stereotypes that serve to exert control and exert dominance. Her feminist approach demands a revision of sexual politics and the involvement of women in decimating several spaces of masculine hegemony and housing up a modern and gender-democratic Muslim society within the dynamics of the politics of recognition. In her narrative, Shahraz explores the tensions that arise from the interplay between individual intentionality and the communal obligations tied to culture and faith. These tensions become evident as the characters navigate between the realms of a liberal individualistic lifestyle and their commitments to family and community. The story highlights the delicate balance between expressing oneself as an individual and speaking on behalf of a collective, capturing the complexities that arise from these intertwined dynamics.

In *The Holy Woman*, separate mechanisms of faith, sacredness, secularism, religion, and recognition are meshed together to explore the middle path of such variegated binaries with heterogeneous spaces and to establish a flexible belief system with a “third space” connecting the two, in which interplay between religion and secularism is apparent and obvious. Contemporary trends in religious studies have shifted towards viewing "Islam" as a collection of discursive practices rather than a fixed religious or cultural signifier. Muslims are no longer solely defined by their racial, social, or economic characteristics in relation to mainstream society, nor are they solely defined by their religious beliefs. Instead, their faith is often viewed through the lens of violence and cultural deficiency. This novel embraces a

post-secular worldview that incorporates religion into critical discussions of identity politics and cultural policies. Islamic symbols and practices, such as the wearing of the hijab by women and the performance of obligatory prayers, are integrated into the fabric of the novel with empathy. Shahraz challenges the tendency of secularism to dismiss religious subjectivity as outdated or irrelevant, and instead emphasizes the importance of recognizing and understanding Islamic identity within a broader framework, beyond the discourse of violence. On the other hand, Leila Aboulela approaches these problems of religious subjectivity, faith, and gendered Islamic discourses under the garb of historicity and Sufi perspectives in narrating the incidents in her novel, *The Kindness of Enemies*.

Leila Aboulela, a Sudanese-born British-Muslim woman writer, gained recognition for her debut novel *The Translator*, with Britain's Muslim News announcing that it is "the first halal ... novel written in English" since it puts faith in the formation of the life and times of the protagonist.⁴⁶⁶ Her "halal" credentials with Sudanese culture are also prominent in her other novels, namely *Minaret*, *Lyrics Alley*, *The Kindness of Enemies*, and *Bird Summons*. Belief and faith form the central aspects of her work, with the writer exploring and delving into their intricate mechanisms.. Aboulela is "concerned to probe the ethical dilemmas faced by Muslims all over the world, and provides gradated descriptions of members of the transnational Islamic *ummah*".⁴⁶⁷ Drawing from her Sudanese and Egyptian heritage, the writer skilfully addresses the challenges of cultural clashes and the experiences of migrants, seeking to reconcile them with a life guided by Islamic faith within the expansive realm of fiction. In her fifth work of fiction, titled *The Kindness of Enemies*, the narrative unfolds

⁴⁶⁶ Sadia Abbas, *At Freedom's Limit: Islam and the Postcolonial Predicament* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 87.

⁴⁶⁷ Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 100.

across two interconnected storylines—one set in twenty-first-century Scotland and Sudan, and the other taking place during the Caucasian War of the early to mid-nineteenth century—creating a parallel narrative structure. The 2015 novel recounts the complexity of the threads of Sufi faith, nationality, gender, jihad, and history with the historical figure of Sufi Imam Shamil, the lion of Dagestan, the nineteenth-century prominent warrior who fought to save his people and their traditions against the invading forces of Tsarist Russia in the Caucasian War. The novel *The Kindness of Enemies*, akin to her previous works *The Translator* and *Minaret*, delves into the journey of a female protagonist navigating her Islamic heritage while facing the complexities of the Western world within the context of a diasporic experience.

Natasha Wilson, a lecturer residing in Scotland, embarks on a research journey at a Scottish university, delving into the life of Imam Shamil. With her unique lineage tracing back to Sudanese and Russian parents, Natasha finds herself reconnecting with her cultural heritage as she travels from Scotland to Khartoum. Determined to practice her faith on her own terms, she returns to Scotland, where the narrative unfolds across various perspectives. The story intertwines Natasha's experiences with those of a ransomed boy in exile, a captured Georgian princess, and a charismatic leader of a rebellion against imperialist Russia during the nineteenth century. Throughout the novel, Aboulela explores the history of Islam through the lenses of Jihad and Sufism, both in the past and the present. The subsequent section of the narrative transports us to the year 1839, when Shamil's eldest son, Jamaleldin, becomes a hostage in the clutches of the Russian army. Jamaleldin is nursed and raised to cultivate his taste for music, theatre, dance, and a luxurious life, which are prohibited in his father's province. Natasha Wilson, the female protagonist in *The Kindness of Enemies*, moves to Scotland to accept her stepfather's surname “–Hussein” and working “too hard to fit in” to

“inhabiting the present”.⁴⁶⁸ Her student Oz (Osama) Raja, who happens to be the descendent of Imam Shamil, invites her to his home, and his mother Malak Raja takes her to their living room wall where hangs the historical scimitar of Imam Shamil they inherited.⁴⁶⁹ Malak Raja, an actress “had been one of Macbeth’s witches on stage; she was an auntie in Bombay Barista, a mother in the BBC’s new Conan the Barbarian”.⁴⁷⁰ She also played the role of a “wife of a beleaguered Iranian ambassador in Spooks and the voice of a viper in a Disney cartoon.”⁴⁷¹

In *The Kindness of Enemies*, Natasha’s journey of delving into Imam Shamil’s life brings her closer to his descendants, uncovering a captivating narrative. The novel intricately weaves together the historical context of Sufism and its resistance against colonization, entwined with the story of Sufi Imam Shamil. Aboulela adeptly explores the enduring tension between spirituality and materialistic modernity, while also juxtaposing faith with the complexities of the contemporary world. Shamil’s “Jihad as resistance”⁴⁷² on a peaceful spiritual plane is equipped to stand against “Russian imperial expansion and insurrection”⁴⁷³ in the Caucasus following the Russian victory during the period of 1797–1871. The historical timelines begin with the Caucasus region where Imam Shamil in 1839 fights against the Russians who advance towards Akhulgo.⁴⁷⁴ It results in the defeat of Shamil’s army and the

⁴⁶⁸ Leila Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies* (Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016), 6. All page references are to this edition.

⁴⁶⁹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 4.

⁴⁷⁰ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 4.

⁴⁷¹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 4.

⁴⁷² Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 5.

⁴⁷³ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 5.

⁴⁷⁴ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 17.

death of Shamil's second wife Djawarat and his baby child, and the abduction of Shamil's eldest son Jamaleldin by the Russian soldiers. Princess Anna and her family find themselves abducted and confined to Shamil's harem in *The Kindness of Enemies*.⁴⁷⁵ Their captivity serves as a bargaining chip for the release of Jamaleldin, who has been held captive by the Tsar since a young age. The intricate web of events unfolds as their fates become intertwined in a complex exchange of prisoners.⁴⁷⁶ Jamaledin's rearing up in the court of the Tsar and his eventual love affair with a Russian girl, Daria, make him oblivious about his native language and Islamic upbringing he went through before the age of eight. Being a Russian knight in the "uniform" of a "young officer in the Imperial Escort",⁴⁷⁷ he is interested in fighting in the Caucasus against his father and is "awaiting the tsar's consent"⁴⁷⁸ that would pave the way to his marriage to Daria Semyonovich. The Tsar turns his request down as he attempts to present the converted Jamaleldin for "the peace process" for the people of Caucasus.⁴⁷⁹

Following the fall of Akhulgo, Imam Shamil and a small group of survivors,⁴⁸⁰ including his Sufi instructor Jamal el-Din, his wife Fatima, and his son Ghazi, make their way to Dargo. Despite his unsuccessful attempts to free his captive son, Imam Shamil's men infiltrate Tsinondali and take Princess Anna of Georgia, her son Alexander,⁴⁸¹ and her baby Lydia hostage, along with Madame Drancy, Alexander's French governess. They are brought

⁴⁷⁵ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 110.

⁴⁷⁶ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 122.

⁴⁷⁷ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 122.

⁴⁷⁸ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 53.

⁴⁷⁹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 29.

⁴⁸⁰ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 56.

⁴⁸¹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 86–89.

to Shamil's residence and become acquainted with his wives: Chuanat, an Armenian captive who develops feelings for Shamil, Zeidat, whom Shamil married for her father and teacher, Jamal el-Din, and Ameena, a lady from Bavaria.⁴⁸² Eventually, an agreement is reached between the two parties, resulting in the release of Anna, Alexander, and Madame Drancy to Russia, while the Russians release Jamaleldin back to the Caucasus.⁴⁸³ After returning to France, Madame Drancy composes a book that presents “Shamil a far higher character than anyone ever had done”⁴⁸⁴ and also pictures the description of the harem and Imam’s people; on the other hand, Jamaleldin, finding it difficult to live in his newfound home, falls ill and dies of “contagious” tuberculosis.⁴⁸⁵ The kidnapping of the Princess tarnishes Shamil's reputation in Britain, and in 1859, after over three decades of resistance, the Russians finally gain control over the Caucasus. Imam and his army fall short of saving the Caucasus and he gives in to the Tsar in Gunaib in the mountains, only for the sake of his fellow people. The siege of Gunaib lasts for two weeks.⁴⁸⁶ He, at last, lives with his family members namely Chuanat, Zeidat, his son Ghazi and Muhammad-Sheffi, Ghazi’s wife and baby, and his daughters and their husbands in Kaluga before he is allowed a safe passage to go for Haj. After some 10 years of exile, Shamil is finally permitted to go for Haj and before going to Makkah, he orders to his family members to “forgive” the Russians.⁴⁸⁷ The subsequent death

⁴⁸² Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 180.

⁴⁸³ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 238–241.

⁴⁸⁴ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 267.

⁴⁸⁵ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 270.

⁴⁸⁶ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 293.

⁴⁸⁷ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 318.

of Shamil in Medina finds a parallel with Ghazi's arrival at Makkah and the receiving of the news of the incident from a dervish at the holy place.⁴⁸⁸

In three parts of the novel—Natasha's description of the present, voicing of the past by an unknown narrator, and the description of the past by Ghazi at the end at Makkah, Aboulela throws some light on the devotional and religious aspect of history that heralds the design of the historical estrangement and alienation of Sufi spirituality unlike modern historiography that sees reason in the formulation of the past and present. Aboulela showcases the representation of secular historiography in connection to postcolonial and religious histories with Natasha who finds reason and logical justifications for the Caucasian resistance. Natasha, being the westernized Russian-Sudanese historian, finds it hard to fit in her diasporic identity, as she says: "I worked too hard to fit in. To be here and now. That's how I wanted to appear—topical, relevant, and despite my research interest, inhabiting the present ... Better like this, not even Muslim by name".⁴⁸⁹ The transformation of Natasha Hussein to Natasha Wilson brings the present and contemporary West in a problematic relationship with Islam. She finds that "History could be milked for this cause or that ... projecting onto it our modern convictions and anxieties."⁴⁹⁰ Natasha's secular approach to studying the life of Imam Shamil, the leader in the Murid War of 1830–1859, between the Russian Empire and the tribes of the Caucasus Mountains, demonstrates her objective research in the creation of postcolonial history. For the young extremist Oz, Shamil's uncompromising jihad against the Tsarist imperial forces using the tools of jihad and military violence serves as inspiration, while her mother Malak is drawn to Shamil's Sufi practices

⁴⁸⁸ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 318.

⁴⁸⁹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 6.

⁴⁹⁰ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 41.

and holds the Wahabis and Salafists responsible for acts of terrorism.⁴⁹¹ The ideological conflict between mother and son is evident as Malak opines: “Ever since 9/11, jihad has become synonymous with terrorism ... Jihad is an internal and spiritual struggle”.⁴⁹² She continues to contend that “[j]ihad is for upholding the values of Allah; it’s not for scoring political points, it’s not for land, it’s not for rights, it’s not for autonomy”.⁴⁹³

In the novel, the foundation of Imam Shamil's resistance lies in his spiritual convictions. According to Oz, many fighters against European Imperialism are Sufis, with Imam Shamil serving as a prominent example. Although he leads a Sufi order, his mother insists that every battle Shamil engaged in was purely defensive in nature. He was protecting his villages against Russian attack. And surrender to the Russians would have meant the end of their traditional way of life, the end of Islam in Dagestan ... This type of jihad is different from the horrible crimes of al-Qaeda.”⁴⁹⁴ As Malak reprimands him about the crimes of al-Qaeda that do not symbolize real jihad, Oz argues that jihad is simply “for getting us power over our enemies. Jihad is not something we should be ashamed of.”⁴⁹⁵ His fascination with jihad as a form of warfare intensifies as he delves into historical interpretations of the concept. However, his academic pursuit leads to his arrest when he downloads the al-Qaeda training manual from the US Justice Department website, despite claiming that it was solely for scholarly purposes.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹¹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 8.

⁴⁹² Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 8.

⁴⁹³ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 10.

⁴⁹⁴ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 9.

⁴⁹⁵ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 10.

⁴⁹⁶ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 101.

When Jamal el-Din visits Shamil in his captivity, Shamil asks his Sufi teacher: “what went wrong. Almost overnight I lost control. One day I commanded thousands, the next day I was on the run and even then my wagons were robbed on the way. Something happened, something changed.”⁴⁹⁷ His teacher prays for Shamil all through the decades for his success against the Russians. His teacher chastises him for being “arrogant” during that time of war and rebukes him for believing that his naibs are strong and the tactics are excellent. His defeat is a result of arrogance, which is why his teacher stops praying for his success. His arrogance is a sin that cannot destroy his ego. He leans forward and kisses the hand of his teacher:

He had asked the question and received the answer. Let the Russians think what they wanted to think. Let them understand in their own logic, in their own language how he resisted them for decades and why, almost overnight, he fell. But he had his own answer now, to hold to himself. Without spiritual support, nature took its course. Without blessings, without miracles, one and one made two and an object thrown up in the air fell down; a man could not see in the dark, fire burned and bodies needed food. Without blessing, without miracles, the physical laws of the world govern supreme and those strong in numbers and ammunition sooner or later must defeat the weak.⁴⁹⁸

For Aboulela, this spiritual struggle—jihad is a military response to a cultural and military colonization with the techniques of historical rewriting to investigate into the lives of British Muslims, while postcolonial aspect finds the Muslim subject as Other under surveillance and

⁴⁹⁷ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 306.

⁴⁹⁸ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 306.

perpetual suspicion. Aboulela's Caucasus has been a "contested ground—the site of religious strife, imperial conquest, wars of national liberation, revolutions, ethnic cleansing, banditry kidnapping, financial skullduggery, and sheer madness, but equally the locus of profitable cultural interaction, extraordinary intellectual creativity, deeply felt patriotism, family loyalty, heroic persistence, and nobility of soul".⁴⁹⁹ Nicolai N. Petro, in his "Islam and Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus: From Antagonism to Partnership", finds that the first

intervention was the Byzantine Empire, which brought Christianity to the Georgians, Armenians, and Albanians (part of present day Azerbaijan and Dagestan) in the southern part of Caucasus ... As the Byzantine Empire declined, the region eventually fell under the influence of the Persian and then the Ottoman Empires. By the seventeenth century most of the peoples of the Northern Caucasus had converted to Islam, though a few, like the Ossetians, remain predominantly Christian.⁵⁰⁰

Petro also argues that Muslims from the Middle East came to Dagestan and Azerbaijan in the eighth century, but Islam was not fully practiced until the seventeenth century. According to certain historians, the comprehensive adoption of Islam by the mountain people of the Caucasus can be attributed to the strictness of Russian policies. The historical narrative of Islam in the region is closely intertwined with that of the Russian Orthodox Church.⁵⁰¹

In his book *Russia's Islamic Threat*, Gordon M. Hahn explores Imam Shamil's endeavor to unite his people in the Muslim tribes of the Northern Caucasus against Russian

⁴⁹⁹ Thomas Sanders, Ernest Tucker and Gary Hamburg, *Russian–Muslim Confrontation in the Caucasus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.

⁵⁰⁰ Nicolai N. Petro, "Islam and Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus: From Antagonism to Partnership," in *The Fire Below: How the Caucasus Shaped Russia*, ed. Robert Bruce Ware (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 229.

⁵⁰¹ Petro, "Islam and Orthodox Christianity", 228.

imperial expansion in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁰² Hahn argues that poverty in the Muslim domains of the North Caucasus contributes to the vulnerability of Muslims, whose identity is "deeply intertwined with Islam as a symbol of the 'otherness' to Christian Orthodox Russians."⁵⁰³ In the North Caucasus, Islam is influenced by pagan rituals—the practice of multi-deism and the veneration of saints—which is sometimes "frowned upon" in certain parts of the Muslim world as it deviates from Prophet Muhammad's "insistence on monotheism."⁵⁰⁴ Russia launched a movement of "advancing the frontier line" and "extending their homogenizing legal and administrative codes to [the] peripheral regions."⁵⁰⁵ Grant Bruce, in *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus*, puts the picture clearly by showing how Shamil surrenders "his twelve-year-old son, Jamalu'd-din, to an education and military future in St. Petersburg" and to get him "back by means of exchange fifteen years later" and how Shamil risks "his own reputation by kidnapping two prominent Georgian princesses in return".⁵⁰⁶ Kidnapping princesses "cost him considerable standing among compatriots, who considered such desperate acts beneath him."⁵⁰⁷

The female characters in the novel undergo real challenges faced by Muslims living in a land under constant threat, leading to a cross-cultural experience between an imperial aggressor and rural communities. Aboulela skillfully portrays transcultural and transnational

⁵⁰² Gordon M. Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 31.

⁵⁰³ Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat*, 31.

⁵⁰⁴ Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat*, 99.

⁵⁰⁵ Firouzeh Mostashari, *On the Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 2.

⁵⁰⁶ Bruce Grant, *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus* (London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 37.

⁵⁰⁷ Grant, *The Captive and the Gift*, 37–38.

encounters through the interactions between David, representing Russian imperialism, and Anna, representing her Georgian identity. David convinces Anna to “move to Petersburg”.⁵⁰⁸ But she has “chosen the edge of civilisation”, and therefore, Anna “must accept its hazards.”⁵⁰⁹ David goes on to argue that “Peace for one, prosperity too. Modern roads, sanitation, education, enlightened thinking. Everything that is uncouth and reprehensible to be replaced by what is civilised and rational.... You can’t live in the past, Anna, you can’t be like them”.⁵¹⁰ His future and his children’s future is Russia. Anna wants “simplicity and closeness to the peasants” and that she works hard and does not “indulge herself in luxuries”.⁵¹¹ Here, David’s imperialist views stand in contrast with the uncouth and uncivilized Muslim tribes of the Caucasus, with his supposedly enlightened rituals and traditions with a hint towards a “clash of civilization”.⁵¹² The cultural clash thus played out panders to a particular neo-orientalist gaze that relentlessly harks back to the same hackneyed binaries that divide the geopolity in terms of a superior European Enlightenment “self” and its supposed cultural “others”. The neo-colonialist “uncanny” is thus inseparable from the Eurocentric modernist self that discerns in these “other” spaces and people a remnant of that unfinished project that either needs dissolution or cultural co-option.

Jamaleldin’s upbringing in the Imperial Escort is almost “[e]xhausted from the assault of newness; of space, sounds and smells betraying him, food not being food and speech not

⁵⁰⁸ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 50.

⁵⁰⁹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 50.

⁵¹⁰ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 51.

⁵¹¹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 51.

⁵¹² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, London, Toronto and Sydney: Simon Schuster Paperbacks, 1996).

being speech.”⁵¹³ He is raised in a strange and unfamiliar ambience that demands his captor’s attention... His recollections of his homeland, Akhulgo, are incredibly vivid, evoking sensory experiences such as the scent of his father's beard and the imagery of the misty air that lingers in the memories of the lofty peaks, preserving a connection to the past. He is not interested in his family’s present, a present he cannot access. Nor would Jameleldin bite the hand that fed him. He values his captor Emperor Nicholas’s values, as he is a “link between the two sides, he would carry peace and modernity to the highlands”.⁵¹⁵ He never questions it or doubts Greater Russia’s goal, as it is to him an abstract attainment under traumatic cultural encounters.

His cultural memories of the Caucasus and the Avar language appear to him as “ghosts of his previous life”, which disturb him “like a squirrel hidden in the breast pocket of his jacket, threatening to wriggle out, not particularly to escape but to cause the greatest of social embarrassments”.⁵¹⁶ His heart jumps up at Arabic words, all the Avar phrases in his mind, as if an elderly man speaking to him at the sight of the old king: “Praise be to Allah. Observe how a mighty king with endless riches and power over people’s lives is helpless before the ravages of Time”.⁵¹⁷ He is not allowed to maintain his own cultural and religious identity, as the Emperor Nicholas wishes to disturb the religious adherence of Jameleldin by allowing Russian women en masse to his taste. They have corrupted his soul and taken away

⁵¹³ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 54.

⁵¹⁴ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 56.

⁵¹⁵ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 56.

⁵¹⁶ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 57.

⁵¹⁷ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 57.

his religion.⁵¹⁸ Nicholas, rather, forces Jameleldin to marry from his own kind—“a tribal chief’s daughter”, or “an emir’s”, which would further enhance his “acceptance among the highlanders”.⁵¹⁹

The cultural memories of the Caucasus stand in sharp contrast with the Russian court and cultures he lives in. His effort of acculturation is a struggle for spiritual resistance essential to promise the survival of his Sufi spirituality. The two baffling Russian officers perceiving Jameleldin with his yearning “towards the steady ground under their feet and their one dimensional vision”⁵²⁰ drift away to give him the wide berth he deserved as he is an Other. Jameleldin wishes to be them, and he is tired of this wanting.. Imam Shamil governs his domain in a manner resembling a spiritual utopia, forsaking material distractions such as "music" and "wine,"⁵²¹ enforcing a form of "specific deprivation" across his territories to toughen his men for “battle”.⁵²² Shamil believes that indulging in entertainment would weaken his people. Similarly, Jameleldin's spirituality, akin to his father's, shapes and guides his thoughts and recollections while he resides in the Tsar's court. Metaphorically, Aboulela is captivated by the contemporary spiritual struggles that are overshadowed by physical resistance and the influences of secular modernity, reflecting her religious perspective on history. She interprets Shamil’s surrender as an allegory of spiritual resilience. Shamil’s spiritual retreat against Russian soldiers speaks volumes of his Sufi sense of peace as Aboulela advocates in the novel:

⁵¹⁸ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 59–63.

⁵¹⁹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 59.

⁵²⁰ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 127.

⁵²¹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 262.

⁵²² Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 262.

He spent longer hours there, reciting the Qur'an in a place where it had not been heard before, kneeling down on a piece of earth that had never been pressed by the forehead of a believer. There was a sense of peace in this. To be told don't fight any more, you have done enough, stand aside, stand aside and worship. That was how he interpreted his defeat in Gunaib. It was a command from the Almighty to stand aside and worship because the years were running out.⁵²³

Aboulela's idealization of the past with a mystical rationale for the defeat represents Shamil as a cultural captive of the modern empire. Shamil renounces earthly pleasure and pleasurable gifts like a gold tea tray that appears to him from the Tsar and from other dignitaries, only to seduce him and to dismantle his Sufi beliefs. To liberate the present from materialistic fervour, Imam Shamil longs for a religious utopia in seeking solace in the diurnal historical time that finds realistic attributions in the symbolic language of modernity. If we perceive modernity as the triumph of reason leading to the creation of an envisioned rational utopia, inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment, then Shamil's devotional Sufism establishes to understand the "meaning of the unity of inner experience which the Qur'an declares to be one of the three sources of knowledge, the other two being History and Nature".⁵²⁴

Certain Muslim intellectuals and mystics have explored the Prophet's acknowledgment of God within the context of time, perceiving a unity of ideals that impels him to immerse himself in the flow of history and construct a new world guided by those ideals. Shamil's Sufism aligns with this notion of "free thought and in alliance with

⁵²³ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 302.

⁵²⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (California: Stanford University Press Stanford, 2012),77.

Rationalism”, emphasizing the distinction between *zahir* and *blitin* (appearance and reality).⁵²⁵ His concept of "alternative modernity" encapsulates the unique interplay between tradition and modernity, highlighting the emergence of European dominance in shaping the modern world and the necessity of reevaluating the distinction between societal modernization and cultural modernity.⁵²⁶ The moment we say “alternative modernity”, then, we easily refer to the European centre and we are the marginal Other. So, the idea of modernity should be a composite one. Every society is modern in its own way. Western modernity is fraught with crisis, that is, the ceasing of meaning or meaning in the endless chain of signifiers. But Imam Shamil’s modernity is in *taqwa*—renewal of piety, God consciousness—a high state of heart, which motivates a person to perform righteous deeds that stand in sharp contrast with the renaissance, reformation, and individualism. We get a glimpse of this in *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche writes: “We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us.”⁵²⁷ We have abandoned all possibility of coming back, but Aboulela shows the rehabilitation in God consciousness and the renewal of piety with Imam Shamil. The significant element of Russian societal modernization, as envisioned by Enlightenment philosophers, pertains to tangible progress in the material aspects of life, encompassing economic and political spheres, technological innovations, and the advancement of specialized knowledge. However, this progress also brings forth the darker aspects of existential alienation and despair, as individuals grapple with a disenchanted world characterized by monotonous and purposeless routines is the

⁵²⁵ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 119.

⁵²⁶ Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities* (Durham and London: Duke University Press: 2001).

⁵²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 180.

Sisyphian world of repetition devoid of a subjectively meaningful telos ... It focuses affectively on the cultural patina of modernity as a spectacle of speed, novelty, and effervescence. It finds aesthetic pleasure and creative excitement in treading the surface and is unencumbered by the hermeneutic temptation of having to find meaning and unity hidden beneath surface experiences. The dark side suggests the absence of moral constraints in a world of appearances where the aesthetic pursuit can deteriorate from a disciplined Nietzschean self assertion against a seemingly meaningless and absurd world into narcissistic self-absorption and hedonism.⁵²⁸

Disrobing the spiritual power of its influences allows religious resistance posited either as non-violent retreat or terrorist aggression. Aboulela decolonizes the present with the spiritual struggle of Sufi postcolonial writing in a reflection of cultural restraint. Her short story “Days Rotate” also explores the spiritual past in rewriting Shamil’s story.⁵²⁹ Susan Watkins, in her “Future Shock: Rewriting the Apocalypse in Contemporary Women’s Fiction”, voices that forthcoming periods of time will be redeemed from the power of modernity with the impact of Sufism, resulting in the interest in non-Western cultural and spiritual forms. The relationships between the human and the esoteric, the mystical and the metaphysical, form a substitute to survive future apocalypse where “potent ethical and political possibilities emerge.”⁵³⁰ The metaphysical dimension of Sufism challenges the boundaries of modernity by raising questions about the rationality inherent in secular narratives and the limitations of a worldview confined to materiality. Henry Corbin speaks about Sufi time as “a

⁵²⁸ Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities*, 9.

⁵²⁹ Leila Aboulela, “Days Rotate”, in *Coloured Lights* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2001).

⁵³⁰ Susan Watkins, “Future Shock: Rewriting the Apocalypse in Contemporary Women’s Fiction,” *LIT Literature Interpretation Theory* 23, no. 2 (2012): 124.

discontinuous, qualitative, pure, psychic time, whose moments can be evaluated only according to their own measure, a measure which in every instance varies with their intensity”.⁵³¹ It is the time transcendently perceived by the Sufis where “the past remains present to the future, in which the future is already present to the past, just as the notes of a musical phrase, though played successively”⁵³² persist all together in the present. The understanding of the liberation of the past in the formation of the present and the future with transcendental time is to determine the relationship with the decolonization of historiography. Muhammad Iqbal provides an organic structure of time, which is

a deeper analysis of our conscious experience, is not a string of separate, reversible instants; it is an organic whole in which the past is not left behind, but is moving along with, and operating in, the present. And the future is given to it not as lying before, yet to be traversed; it is given only in the sense that it is present in its nature as an open possibility.⁵³³

The Quran portrays time as an organic entity, depicting it as *taqdir*, the concept of destiny. The restoration of the Imam to the spiritual ground of Sufism is a trajectory of historical reality with the manifestation of the present. To Iqbal it is “time freed from the net of causal sequence—the diagrammatic character which the logical understanding imposes on it. In one word, it is time as felt and not as thought and calculated.”⁵³⁴ He posits that the continuum of time, ranging from pure spirituality to materiality, can be divided into the past, present, and

⁵³¹ Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi* (UK: Princeton University Press, 1997), 35.

⁵³² Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 35–36.

⁵³³ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 40.

⁵³⁴ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 40.

future. Our conscious experience offers us a glimpse into the notion that reconciles the dichotomy of change and permanence, viewing time both as an organic whole or infinity, and as a series of individual moments.

The essence of acquiring spiritual knowledge lies in contemplating historical signs, which prevents it from being perceived as a collection of isolated events. In *The Vision of Islam*, Murata and Chittick also show that historical signs of civilizations that are fleeting and illusory can be found in “aqiba”, the ultimate end observing *taqwa*, the God consciousness.⁵³⁵ The Sufi structure of thought seeps into the fabric of Aboulela’s text in transcending postcolonial subjects, in altering material reality with an organized spirituality. In encountering neo-colonialist structures, Aboulela organizes the Sufi traditions of Sudan. When she is asked about the connection between Sufism to the textual traditions, she replies that she finds “them both together as being one.”⁵³⁶ In an interview, she shares a symbolic anecdote depicting a situation where a beautiful deceased woman and an ugly but living woman are presented to a king as potential companions, only to be rejected by him.⁵³⁷ Aboulela says that though the anecdote is “in a poor taste”, but it provides a solid message. She narrates:

The symbolism of the story is that the dead, beautiful woman represents the laws of the shariah, without the Sufism. Her perfection represents the form of the law but she is without life ... And the other gift, of the woman who’s alive but ugly, represents the people who do everything out of love for God, yet who have rejected the shariah. In that case, the heart is alive with love and goodness but the body is hideous because

⁵³⁵ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 260.

⁵³⁶ C. E Rashid, “Islamic Individualism and the Logic of the Narrative,” *Interventions* 14, no. 4 (2012): 620.

⁵³⁷ Rashid, “Islamic Individualism”, 620.

the outside form of the shariah has been rejected. So if Sufism is aligned with the inside, and the shariah with the outside, then as Muslims we have to put the two sides together.⁵³⁸

She traces the need of the “two sides” of religion in her works. Her Sufism is powerful and free from the practices of the ego. She says in her other novel, *The Translator*, “Knowledge is necessary, that’s true. But faith, it comes directly from Allah.”⁵³⁹ Her writing is a manifestation of spiritual epitomization with an entrance to mystical time and the incipient correspondence with a materialistic present. Aboulela’s novel “preaches to the converted by depicting models of community and individual behaviour that sustain the faithful.”⁵⁴⁰

In *The Kindness of Enemies*, Natasha is a secular lecturer who seeks faith. Her encounter with social and spiritual exclusion grounds her to face the secular principle. Leila Aboulela has chosen some lines from Hermann Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* as an epigraph to her novel: “... we have to grope our way through so much filth and rubbish in order to reach home! And we have no one to show us the way. Homesickness is our only guide.”⁵⁴¹ The idea in this epigraph resonates throughout the text of Aboulela with individualism and the secular aspect of agency. Natasha suffers from guilt for having a secret abortion as she admits that her “own failed romantic attachments seemed like an apt punishment, because although”⁵⁴² she “went through the motions, these casual relationships never felt right.”⁵⁴³ Her friends

⁵³⁸ Rashid, “Islamic Individualism”, 620.

⁵³⁹ Leila Aboulela, *The Translator* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2005), 191.

⁵⁴⁰ Wail S. Hassan, “Leila Aboulela and the Ideology of Muslim Immigrant Fiction,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 41, nos. 2–3 (2008): 309.

⁵⁴¹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 2.

⁵⁴² Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 72.

⁵⁴³ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 72.

encourage her not to think of this act of premarital sex and the sense of guilt: “But I was a Sudanese woman or at least, when I learnt the facts of life, I was preparing to be one. No matter how much I changed when I came to Britain, changed my behaviour and my thoughts, there would be layers of me, pockets, membranes and films that would carry these other values and that other guilt.”⁵⁴⁴ With the social segregation and her sense of guilt, Aboulela takes Natasha’s experience through the prism of religious spirituality and belongingness as an empowerment. She enjoys the opportunity of her freedom and individualism in Scotland, as after her abortion, she comes “from the hospital stunned and still bleeding”⁵⁴⁵ but she never discloses it to her family members for why she “stayed in bed for a whole weekend.”⁵⁴⁶

Aboulela draws this undercurrent of individualism, agency, and pre-wedlock pregnancy to show the protagonist’s alienated experiences of individualism and spiritualism through her journey of life. Her visit to the house of Malak and Oz and her travelling to Sudan are the portals of her fractured life that leave her in a displaced position. Coming to Scotland, she is invited by her student Oz and her mother to visit Dunnottar Castle and observe Malak’s Sufi journey in the United Kingdom. Malak also takes her to Orkney for some *zikr* (remembrance) on the beach, the discussion on Sufism that haunts her for days and nights. With the company of Malak, the teacher disguised as an actor Natasha excavates into the hidden truth behind the disguise that fights her weakness in changing her. She speaks her mind: “I might still not have reached home or settled where I belonged, but I was confident that there was a home, there, ahead of me. My homesickness wasn’t cured but it was, I was

⁵⁴⁴ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 139.

⁵⁴⁵ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 168.

⁵⁴⁶ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 168.

sure, propelling me in the right direction.”⁵⁴⁷ Her journey to Sudan and restoring some Russian books of her father, including Leo Tolstoy’s 1912 novel, *Hadji Murat*, is seen as a stimulus for Natasha in fetching her faith.⁵⁴⁸ To Aboulela, journey is a kind of metaphor in eliminating the impediments between physical and metaphysical in the knowledge of the human being. She opines in her piece, “Travel is Part of Faith” where speaks on home and Scotland: “One of the Sufis said, ‘Travel away from home and the difficulties will be a medicine for your ego’s badness, you will return softer and wiser.’”⁵⁴⁹ This journeying in Sufi terms establishes a connectivity between “home”, “enemy”, “material”, and “tolerance” in the development of life.

Travelling and the idea of home are important for Natasha as she spends her life of exile as portrayed by Aboulela. Natasha and Malak pray for their spirituality in spiritual places like Stonehenge and the castle, a part of religious history where Malak senses “a powerful presence.”⁵⁵⁰ Malak claims, “Centuries ago, people in this very spot worshipped as you were worshipping just now. They believed like you believed.” Natasha says, “And centuries ago, as Covenanter history teaches, they also waged wars, resisted, and rebelled around issues of faith.”⁵⁵¹ This castle, the locus of religious battle in Scotland, witnessed the amalgamation of spirituality with civilizational progress with the awakening of the secular state. In this Christian historical castle, she recites the Quran as the middle of a suburb is

⁵⁴⁷ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 314.

⁵⁴⁸ Tolstoy’s novella portrays Shamil in a negative way. He voices a sense of regret for the unfair treatment he received from Russia. The portrayal of Hadji Murat as a Muslim leader exploited by his seniors and forced to get justice by coming back to the Russians is more appropriate for the Russian military’s sense of success. Tolstoy’s narrative of Orientalist historiography bestows an impression on the understandings of Islam and Muslim individuals.

⁵⁴⁹ Leila Aboulela, “Travel is Part of Faith,” *Wasafiri* 15, no. 31 (2000): 41.

⁵⁵⁰ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 312.

⁵⁵¹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 313.

“artificial and depressing”⁵⁵² that she cannot bear. She says: “I don’t want anyone to hear me. The trees, the wind, the angels. That’s enough for me.”⁵⁵³

This aspect of all-inclusiveness in religion is enlightened by a Sufi ecological idea, a derivative of Ibn ‘Arabi’s notion of *wadatal-wujd*, that animals and objects are perceptive and animate. At the end of Natasha’s travel to Sudan, Safia, her stepmother, hires a lawyer and takes her to court to prove that Natasha is “no longer a Muslim”⁵⁵⁴ and deserves to be cut off from the inheritance from her husband’s property. Her faith and adherence to Islam is questioned in court to quash the charge of apostasy by her stepmother. In the court, she faces questions about her identity as her father’s daughter and her transition from Natasha Wilson to Natasha Hussein. She is also asked if she has ever been married to a non-Muslim. However, she refrains from openly declaring her commitment to Islam. Through the trial scene, Aboulela clearly brings out the domineering demeanour of faith. But Natasha defends herself by saying that “I did not come here today to fight over money or for the share of a house. I came so that I would not be an outcast, so that I would, even in a small way, faintly, marginally, tentatively, belong.”⁵⁵⁵ The novelist does not identify religion as a heritage; rather, she diagnoses the reciprocity of taboos with religion. Natasha defends her belonging strategically:

I said that I was not a good Muslim but I was not a bad person either. I said I had a brother that I wanted to keep in touch with. I said that I wanted to give up my share of

⁵⁵² Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 313.

⁵⁵³ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 313.

⁵⁵⁴ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 279.

⁵⁵⁵ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 290.

the inheritance to him. Apart from my father's Russian books and Russian keepsakes, I wanted nothing.⁵⁵⁶

Natasha leans to Sufism not only to atone for her sins but to seek solace as Malak advises her not to "[D]o it again... And don't even talk about it. Let it go. Many things in life are out of our control, but our egos insist that they are leaders."⁵⁵⁷ Natasha's embrace of Sufism and the surrender of her ego can be seen as a cathartic release from her feelings of guilt. The author aligns with Talal Asad's perspective on pain and suffering to explore Natasha's secular agency and its significance. Asad says in *Formations of the Secular*:

Physical pain and damage to the body are not celebrated in the central Sunni tradition of Islam, as they are for example among the early Christian martyrs-nor does pain have the same role in its religious discipline. But forms of suffering are nonetheless intrinsic to the kind of agent a devout Muslim aspires to be ... The devout Muslim seeks to cultivate virtue and repudiate vice by a constant awareness of his or her own earthly finitude, trying to achieve the state of equilibrium that the Qur'an calls *an-nafi al-mutma'inna* "the self at peace."⁵⁵⁸

Natasha's pain constitutes the epistemological status of her body as well as its moral potentialities in Sufism.

According to Geoffrey Nash, Aboulela's fiction does not engage in a direct confrontation with the dominant discourse. Instead, it can be seen as "an exercise in acculturation to globalisation conducted from within the territory of the dominant

⁵⁵⁶ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 290.

⁵⁵⁷ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 179.

⁵⁵⁸ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 91.

discourse(s).”⁵⁵⁹ Although not responding directly, the author's success lies in adopting a Muslim rhetoric through her fiction, offering a feminist perspective that challenges dominant historical and patriarchal narratives. The incident she addresses revolves around Anna's recollection of events, documented shortly after they occurred. After her journey from one male caregiver to another upon arriving in Russia, Princess Anna recounts her encounter with the editor of a magazine called *Kavkas*, who interviewed her about her experience of being captured and held as a prisoner⁵⁵⁷. During the novel's writing process, the author drew inspiration from a text titled *Captivity of Two Russian Princesses*, authored by E. A. Verderevsky and translated into English by H. S. Edwards. This story is narrated in the third person from Anna's perspective. However, Jersild criticized the book for its Orientalist portrayal of the kidnapping and Shamil's personality.⁵⁶⁰ The narrative provides a detailed description of how the attire worn by both the captors and captives played a significant role in coding their relationship. The captured princesses express their frustration with their dresses, which are described as being “more or less torn.”⁵⁶¹ For her lower social status, Madame Drancy suffers a worse fate; she is “exhausted, beaten, and almost without clothing”.⁵⁶² Anna is treated with less brutality as she is in “meagre clothing”.⁵⁶³ She is “overcome with shame” at the “costume she was obliged to wear” when Shamil tries to meet

⁵⁵⁹ Geoffrey Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 143.

⁵⁶⁰ Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 112.

⁵⁶¹ E. A. Verderevsky, *Captivity of Two Russian Princesses in the Caucasus*, trans. H. Sutherland Edwards (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1857), 38.

⁵⁶² Verderevsky, *Captivity*, 56.

⁵⁶³ Verderevsky, *Captivity*, 63.

with her.⁵⁶⁴ Subsequently, Anna is given a bag of clothes to choose from: “her hair was gathered up and confined by a bright-coloured cotton handkerchief. Her figure was enveloped in the dark silk blouse, over which she wore the katiba, which was made of crimson velvet.”⁵⁶⁵ Such kind of treatment from the captors finds him as brutal and disrespectful of notions of female decency. This is also described by Wendy Lucas Castro in “Stripped: Clothing and Identity in Colonial Captivity Narratives” that sees the significance of dress with a description of English captivity by Native Americans. She argues: “It literally stripped [the captives] of their social identity. Unclothed, they were neither English nor Indian: there were no visual markers of status, which derived from the social cues associated with clothing.”⁵⁶⁶ The act of dressing serves as a means to reinforce the power dynamics between the colonizing force and the dissenting communities, with attire becoming a marker of the captor's culture. Inferior/superior, powerful/powerless, and colonizer/colonized binaries are restructured with this (un)dressed culture in the formation of “social identity.”⁵⁶⁷

The novelist uses Anna’s first-person narrative technique in *The Kindness of Enemies* to highlight the captive women and their clothing practices. Female bodily suffering and violence are also portrayed precisely. After the death of her new-born baby, Lydia, during the burning and looting, Anna suffers from painful breasts and she lets “the milk seep into the burka she had been given to use as bedding.”⁵⁶⁸ She goes on to endure some complications in

⁵⁶⁴ Verderevsky, *Captivity*, 70.

⁵⁶⁵ Verderevsky, *Captivity*, 79.

⁵⁶⁶ Verderevsky, *Captivity*, 79.

⁵⁶⁷ Wendy Lucas Castro, “Stripped: Clothing and Identity in Colonial Captivity Narratives,” *Early American Studies* 6, no. 1 (2008): 107.

⁵⁶⁸ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 109.

menstruating in captivity.⁵⁶⁹ The novelist showcases the pain and suffering “women disproportionately suffer” as the consequences of war: “[W]omen’s bodies continue to serve as the battlefield on which male created aggressions are carried out.”⁵⁷⁰ In the midst of the intense violence during the war between Russia and the Caucasus, the women find themselves overwhelmed by the fear that their bodies might be exploited as weapons by the opposing side. While the male members actively engage in combat against the Muslim tribes, the women experience a different kind of struggle: “Young women, fearing rape, covered their faces with their veils and jumped into the river. In every trench, in every stone hut and cavern, women and children fought desperately with stones and kinjals.”⁵⁷¹ Their bodies that received the violence became a matter of shame. Their bodies are similar to that of commodity and rewards during war. After being a prisoner-of-war, Anna finds Madame Drancy is “being pulled and dragged between two men who were exchanging curses.”⁵⁷² One of them holds her right arm; the other hooks her left arm over his shoulder and is grabbing her by the waist. Zeidat warns Princess Anna, the captive:

If the money isn’t paid, if Shamil Imam doesn’t get his son back, he will hand you over as a gift to his favourite naib. You understand, Anna, what I mean by the word “gift”—of course, you are not a child. That is our custom. Already every day now one of his naibs approaches him with an offer to purchase you.⁵⁷³

⁵⁶⁹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 149.

⁵⁷⁰ Robin L. Riley, “Women and War: Militarism, Bodies, and the Practice of Gender,” *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 4 (2008): 1195.

⁵⁷¹ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 31.

⁵⁷² Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 86.

⁵⁷³ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 147.

Being captured is worse for these women than the penalty of death during war. Aboulela delves into the enduring anguish and constant fear of rape, all while avoiding a colonialist perspective that portrays the Muslim tribes as uncivilized. Instead, she recognizes that both the Russians and the Muslims of the Caucasus existed within patriarchal systems that commodified women's bodies, treating them as objects to be traded, sold, and exploited. Despite the constant threat of rape, the concepts of sexual purity and monogamy continue to hold significant importance. In one instance, Anna is directed to write to the Tsar, appealing for a ransom to be paid to Shamil. Simultaneously, she is instructed to write to her husband, assuring him that she will return "pure as the lilies, sheltered from all eyes like the gazelles of the desert." This highlights how a woman's worth is closely tied to her sexuality, and her value diminishes if she experiences violation or assault from another man, as it undermines her status as her husband's possession. Similarly, in a fit of anger, David asserts that if Shamil "makes my wife his slave then she is no longer my wife. She is not. I will renounce her."⁵⁷⁴ These examples vividly illustrate how a woman's worth is contingent upon her sexual integrity and how her violation or subjugation by another man diminishes her value in the eyes of her husband. Through her imaginative retelling of historical events, Aboulela breaks free from the constraints of nineteenth-century societal norms and offers a fresh female perspective. In the novel, Princess Anna is welcomed as "a guest" in Shamil's household,⁵⁷⁵ a departure from the conventional treatment of women during that time. In Shamil's province, women are typically required to wear burkas, and polygamy is permitted, seen as a means to establish collective morality.⁵⁷⁶ One character, Chuanat, exemplifies the significance of

⁵⁷⁴ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 227.

⁵⁷⁵ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 159.

⁵⁷⁶ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 150.

spirituality in her relationship with Shamil. She harbors a desire to become a nun in the Armenian Church, and the novelist hints at her agency by drawing parallels between her situation and the experiences of women in Christian monasteries. Chuanat finds a sense of blessing and fulfillment in being with Shamil, “in serving him.”⁵⁷⁷ The hierarchy that emerges in their relationship is primarily spiritual, with Chuanat viewing her husband as akin to a saint whose actions inspire and uplift her. The novelist subtly introduces the notion of a supportive patriarchy, where gender equality is not explicitly challenged but instead compensated through spiritual fulfillment and moral appreciation. According to Aboulela, this religiously-based patriarchy is depicted as "benevolent," "strong," and "nurturing to women."⁵⁸⁴ This concept aligns with the Islamic concept of *qiwamah*, which refers to the degree of authority men are granted over women according to Shariah law. In the novel, Aboulela presents characters like Malak, Natasha, and the wives of Shamil in an empowering manner that is rooted in spirituality, emphasizing the internal and private aspects of their agency. Her privatization of religious agency is firmly accused by Sadia Abbas. Sadia says:

The attributes that allow [Aboulela's] novels to be designated as Muslim and halal are thoroughly secular, by which I mean that they have little to say about divinity and bracket theological questions and the more troubling effects of religion on the world. In their chaste and narrow romantic focus, they make religion private. Secularism, it turns out, is constitutive of their halal goodness.⁵⁷⁸

Aboulela's storytelling tradition holds a sacred quality, bridging the gap between the secular and the religious in a manner that differs from Abbas' perspective on policy. Her approach to

⁵⁷⁷ Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies*, 151.

⁵⁷⁸ Sadia Abbas, “Leila Aboulela, Religion and the Challenge of the Novel,” *Contemporary Literature* 52, no. 3 (2011): 455.

exploring questions of religious and national identity exhibits a certain liberal exoticism, engaging in interdisciplinary inquiry within the framework of the Sufi paradigm, which resonates with postcolonial subjects. The depiction of gender relations in Aboulela's narrative is deeply rooted in historical, ideological, and social contexts. Through her historical storytelling, she directly addresses power dynamics and the evolving identities of individuals affected by aggressive colonial expansion. By juxtaposing the contemporary and the nineteenth century, Aboulela establishes significant and crucial connections between explicit forms of imperialist aggression and the current era of women's agency within the post-9/11 landscape. This highlights the tension that exists between Islamic educational institutions and secularism. The text by Aboulela also explores the recurring theme of tension between Sufism and Western modernity, as well as the clash between individualism and collectivity. This examination raises questions about how secular spirituality is constructed within the interdisciplinary critical discourse, particularly regarding the perception of a divide between the secular and the religious as indicators of a society's modernity. In their novels, Shahraz and Aboulela make interventions for texts that will give an insight into that most elusive space of Muslim subjectivity and tropes of faith and ideology with explicit ways of narration. Whilst the select novels of Shahraz form a subversive critical inquiry from within the limits of the patriarchal discursive framework that shapes a potential feminist agency, Aboulela builds a genuine attempt to narrate a particular mode of spiritual subjectivity with a certain degree of faith in the post-9/11 fictional world. Both of Shahraz's novels, as discussed, are a kind of simulacra of the discourses through which the Sindhi landscape of her past are restructured.. Aboulela's protagonists navigate their bodies within the ideological boundaries set by regional and national patriarchies, forging a connection between literary expression and the subversion of hegemonic cultural norms, thereby reclaiming agency. Simultaneously,

Aboulela employs a structuring of the religious narrative that incorporates a meaningful polyphony, amplifying the Sufi voice and historical reasoning to provide alternative perspectives and challenge prevailing prejudices within discourses surrounding religious faith and the secular narrative. This approach destabilizes established notions and opens up new possibilities for understanding and dialogue. The exploration of the feminist face of religion in intertwining the stereotypes of gender and religion delves into the misinterpretations, the division of reason versus religious faith, the semantic tools in penetrating the mysteries of Muslim women with a concern to the realization of cultural otherness, racism and cultural myopia. Though Shahraz endorses the evolution of veiled women and gendered Islamic religiosity in the presence of hegemonic voices to embody an aspect of resistance and to envisage the enabling of moderate Muslim women voices, Aboulela has been emollient enough in claiming the embattled Sufi modernity with a pervasive production of stereotypes, obscurantism, and spiritual anomie. Their embracing of such policy is best articulated in what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak finds in “strategic essentialism”, which categorizes the experiences of these women in rewriting and deconstructing the (in)visible imperial structure with “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest.”⁵⁷⁹ The novel gestures towards the ways in which women’s agency might be located in the ambivalent spaces and performatives that are normatively subsumed within a monolithic patriarchal understanding of liberty and emancipation. The aporetic spaces that emanate in these constant tussles thus subvert the smug contours of any easy mappings that hark back to any western, neo-liberal idea of emancipatory agency and fixate the “veil” in terms of regressive a priori connotations and associations.

⁵⁷⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography?,” in *The Spivak Reader*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (London: Routledge, 1996), 214.

Chapter Four

History, Economics, and the Transnational Imaginings in *The Map of Love* and *In the Light of What We Know*.

In this chapter I shall examine Zia Haider Rahman's 2014 novel *In the Light of What We Know* and Ahdaf Soueif's 1999 novel *The Map of Love* to unearth the relationship between finance, identity, transnationalism, and history and its bearings on the Muslim world. I also question the relationship between encyclopaedism, colonialism, genealogy, and culture-crossing in their treatment of the pursuit of knowledge, the economy, and paradigms of resistance. Rahman writes his novel much after 9/11 to showcase the symbiotic relationship between the financing of war and life, with multiple facets of knowledge and precarity. In contrast, Soueif actively challenges the dominance of cross-cultural relationships by writing in a manner that centres on personal and familial connections. She examines the past through the perspectives of imperial historiography and transnational cartography, aiming to gain insights into the complexities of the current era. Both novelists are placed in parallel to each other to bring out the distinctive differences in their attitudes towards the economic manoeuvrings of war, borders, and cultures, before and after the war on terror. Rahman and Soueif do not negotiate public manifestations of Islamic piety—instead, they dissect shared tropes and concerns in relation to translational cultural schizophrenia regarding the broad chronology of financial attributions, war, and imperial historiography. Rahman, in his novel, deciphers the genealogy of economics and knowledge, whereas Soueif examines the ontology of nationalism with reference to the preoccupations of empire and conflict in historical consciousness.

Zia Haider Rahman, a Bangladeshi-born British novelist and alumnus of the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, and Yale University, was an investment banker for Goldman Sachs, after which he worked as a human rights lawyer and was associated with Transparency International. Rahman's 2014 debut novel, *In the Light of What We Know*⁵⁸⁰—whose plot is rooted in 2008 and goes back to 1980–90—speaks about migration, nowhere-nation precariousness, warfare, class, mathematics, and global financial trading using metaphors of knowledge. In his fragmented monologue, the unnamed Pakistani bourgeois narrator chronicles the alienation, despair, and rage of his friend, Zafar, who comes from “a corner of that corner of the world—if a corner can have a corner”,⁵⁸¹ of rural Bangladesh. In the novel, two South Asian, Oxford-educated characters' stories of dislocation are used to compare faith and doubt, race and class, America and Afghanistan, the East and the West, the rich and the poor, the disenfranchised and the powerful, Washington and Kabul, the immigrant and the native Briton—and through these, Rahman brings to light issues of culture, migration, neocolonialism, sense of belonging, finance, and metaphors of knowledge. Zafar finds the West through his unrequited love for a lady from the ruling class—Emily Hamilton-Wyvern—an unremittingly bland, manipulative, non-committal, and hesitant woman who is both socially fluent and gauche. The narrator's success at a partnership in an investment bank with high-risk trading has made him the fall guy for his bank's collapse during the global financial crisis. Zafar's saga is fuelled by locating “the personal in the

⁵⁸⁰ Zia Haider Rahman, *In the Light of What We Know* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014). All page references are to this edition.

⁵⁸¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 877.

political”⁵⁸² as the narrative explores the war in Afghanistan, the rise of fundamentalism, and the problem of finance and politics in the post-9/11 era through the lens of epistemology.

Hidden in twenty-first-century finance and global politics, *In the Light of What We Know* presents a nameless narrator, who delves into Zafar’s childhood to understand his sense of alienation and parentage: “more than the few facts I have at my disposal which don’t even tell me how I came to know that his father, his true father, was a Pakistani soldier who raped his mother, and that this mother, his true mother, was the younger sister of the man who raised him as his own son.”⁵⁸³. The unnamed narrator uncovers the stories of Zafar, a Bangladeshi-British banker and mathematician, who embarks on a global journey in search of a sense of belonging. Zafar, a product of rape during the Bangladesh Liberation War, lacks a deep connection with either his birthplace or his adopted home in London. He decides to leave his banking career behind and travels to Afghanistan, where he becomes a human rights lawyer for the United Nations (UN). As a citizen of the world, Zafar has Boston, Bangladesh, London, New York, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in his index of home. His perilous trans-border journeys since birth bring to his life an aim of knowledge, truth, home, and hope.

Zafar’s “lack of home” and the “unmooring of his body” lead to, and result from, “the unmooring of his soul”.⁵⁸⁴ Zafar is not only “an exile, a refugee, if not from war, then of war, but also an exile from blood”.⁵⁸⁵ He discovers “a home in the world of books, a world peopled with ideas, whose companionship is offered free and clear, and with the promise that

⁵⁸² Alison Flood, “James Tait Black Prize Goes to Zia Haider Rahman’s Debut Novel” *The Guardian*, 17 August 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/aug/17/james-tait-black-prize-goes-to-zia-haider-rahman-debut-novel>.

⁵⁸³ Rahman, *In the Light*, 226.

⁵⁸⁴ Rahman, *In the Light*, 313.

⁵⁸⁵ Rahman, *In the Light*, 62.

questions would never long be without answers or better questions”.⁵⁸⁶ Both the anonymous American–Pakistani narrator friend and Zafar are transnational characters; they are the product of twenty-first-century migrations across the globe. The anonymous narrator, a third-generation immigrant, never does “discuss Pakistani politics”, nor do his parents “discuss Pakistan” at home, and they speak “only English”⁵⁸⁷ and prefer Pakistani food at dinner. The narrator’s grandfather maintains some connections with Bangladesh and India as he “was stationed there [in Sylhet] briefly in 1943, in the dog days of the Raj”.⁵⁸⁸ His grandfather is more connected to Pakistan, while the new generations only travel to Pakistan: “During their frequent visits to the US from Pakistan, either my grandparents would come to Princeton or, more often, we would join them in New York, where they’d take up a suite of rooms at the Carlyle on the Upper East Side.”⁵⁸⁹

The narrator is born and brought up as an American citizen, and he maintains both Pakistani and American passports. His higher studies at Oxford University allow him to assimilate to British culture. Though he censures America, he still feels a “romance and longing”⁵⁹⁰ for the city of New York. However, the narrator finds “no tie to America”⁵⁹¹ nor does he abjure being an American. It is a kind of “tiny hollow space”⁵⁹² within him “along some inward edge, a sensation”⁵⁹³ that he struggles to describe in his own mind. It resembles

⁵⁸⁶ Rahman, *In the Light*, 62.

⁵⁸⁷ Rahman, *In the Light*, 123.

⁵⁸⁸ Rahman, *In the Light*, 252.

⁵⁸⁹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 132.

⁵⁹⁰ Rahman, *In the Light*, 127.

⁵⁹¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 127.

⁵⁹² Rahman, *In the Light*, 135.

⁵⁹³ Rahman, *In the Light*, 135.

“the feeling of missing something without conscious awareness”,⁵⁹⁴ of what one misses, thinks, rather overstates it. With the emergence of majoritarianism, ethno-democracy cohered with post-9/11 securitisation and Islamophobia, making Otherized marginal bodies bear the brunt of the structural, religio-cultural, and ethno-political changes in the epistemic layout. In the earlier chapters, America is portrayed as a society that is perceived to be more democratic and equitable. Zia Rahman, the character in the story, takes pride in this notion and displays some patriotic sentiment. It is during this time that Zafar, another character, notices the epitaph inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty.: “‘Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!’ cries she with silent lips. ‘Give us your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free’”.⁵⁹⁵ Then, Zafar voices that he would “die” for an England like that. He narrates his nowhere-nation condition, his statelessness, and his consequent precarious and uncertain life: “If an immigration officer at Heathrow had ever said, ‘Welcome home’ to me, I would have given my life for England, for my country, there and then. I could kill for an England like that”.⁵⁹⁶

The calculus of border regimes has evolved into a site of violence in a bid to deepen territorial control over this stateless *homo sacer* in the wake of global violence and ethnic cleansing.. While there is a certain immaturity and lack of understanding regarding their ancestral lands, the inherent feeling of belongingness does not completely fade away, although it is experienced only “rarely”¹⁸. Conversely, throughout his life's journey, Zafar discovers that Emily Hampton-Wyvern serves as a metaphorical representation of home. To Zafar, Emily is “England, home, belonging, ... the promise through children of a future that

⁵⁹⁴ Rahman, *In the Light*, 135.

⁵⁹⁵ Rahman, *In the Light*, 128.

⁵⁹⁶ Rahman, *In the Light*, 128.

was rooted, bound to something treated altogether better by the world”.⁵⁹⁷ Zafar seeks a belonging with England and Emily, to break away from his own history. Both of them work for the UN in Afghanistan, and Emily accepts him as a fiancé in her usual reluctant and indifferent way. His precarious life is caught between his attempts to bridge the gap between Emily’s occidental fantasy and his oriental reality. The anonymous narrator details Zafar’s potential desire for home and statelessness:

Zafar had set himself in the pursuit of knowledge, and it is apparent to me now, in a way it was not before, that he had done so not in order to “better himself,” as the expression goes, but in order to lay ground for his feet to stand upon; in order that is, to go home, somewhere, and take root.⁵⁹⁸

Zafar has become “stateless in the world of nation-states”.⁵⁹⁹ With Bangladeshi roots, adopting British citizenship, and residing in the United States, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, Zafar's cultural identity remains fluid rather than fixed. He embodies the possibility of being a refugee, facing the challenges of elitist biases within postcolonial historiography. Unable to reclaim a physical sense of home, Zafar embarks on a journey of self-discovery where he fuses his narrative with elements of fantasy, memory, and knowledge, thereby shaping his own unique identity. In his quest, Emily becomes a metaphor and interpolation of home, and Zafar plays a game of “Empire and the Ego”⁶⁰⁰ with Emily to enliven his theorization of citizenship in geopolitical ramifications. Zafar’s hyphenated identities mean that he struggles

⁵⁹⁷ Rahman, *In the Light*, 545.

⁵⁹⁸ Rahman, *In the Light*, 636.

⁵⁹⁹ Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury and Ranabir Samaddar, ed., *The Rohingya in South Asia: People without State* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2–5.

⁶⁰⁰ Rahman, *In the Light*, 284.

to get a sense of belonging in the world of ideas—like the mathematician Kurt Gödel’s “Incompleteness Theorem”,⁶⁰¹ which claims that incomplete comprehensiveness is a mathematical truth of life: “Within any given system, there are claims which are true but which cannot be proven to be true.”⁶⁰² Over the course of time, it seems as though Zafar has undergone a division within himself:

A mitosis of the man and his memory, that leaves the boy parting from his infant self, and later the adult from the youth, like the image of human evolution, from a primate on all fours, through the savage half-man, bent double, to the proud heir to earth, Homo sapiens, who walks tall, each man abandoning his predecessor, each stage only preparation for the next, and in the end childhood left behind, put away.⁶⁰³

Zia Haider Rahman’s theme of immigrant bare life can be found in his representation of man living through several references to the push-and-pull factors of evolution. Man remains separated in “two”, and with every new advancement he must “abandon his predecessor”⁶⁰⁴ why only to proceed towards an advanced organic whole. Still, a feeling of immigrant stigma is sensed as “childhood [is] left behind”,⁶⁰⁵ and the identities modelled by the deserted home “put away”.⁶⁰⁶ Rahman fuses the beginning of human progress through the manifold planes of the genesis of Homo sapiens and the sweeping use of time before closing back in the time of the present. The treatment of scientific lexis, restrained diction, and

⁶⁰¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 18.

⁶⁰² Rahman, *In the Light*, 18.

⁶⁰³ Rahman, *In the Light*, 105.

⁶⁰⁴ Rahman, *In the Light*, 105.

⁶⁰⁵ Rahman, *In the Light*, 105.

⁶⁰⁶ Rahman, *In the Light*, 105.

embedded clauses like “mitosis”,⁶⁰⁷ “predecessor”,⁶⁰⁸ and “evolution”⁶⁰⁹ develop a scholastic register that echoes the text’s preoccupation with knowledge while cultivating the belief that it is not a destination but rather an unending fractal system.

Zafar’s transformation from an impoverished immigrant to a cultured gentleman is replete with traumatic happenings. The double consciousness of being at-home and not-home throws light on the instability and ambivalence of his life. Zafar’s assessment of the neo-colonial demeanour towards Afghanistan is visible when he says, “[the] Western reader ... has been taught to fear the Orient. This state, a mix of charm, mystique, and danger—the ingredients of riotously good sex—is the guarantor and licence of military, economic, and cultural enterprises that reduce the Orient”.⁶¹⁰ In a conversation with Zafar, Emily convinces him that his travel to Bangladesh would be a “romantic journey home”.⁶¹¹ Her orientalist remark matches her mind: “I’m curious to know what it’s like to go back home.”⁶¹² Emily’s remark frames Zafar’s identity as having a volatile refugee-hood that straddles a life of precarity and insecurity while having to deal with harassment and a constant fear of being a “native informant”⁶¹³ as a Muslim and a Bangladeshi. His Nietzschean cry for love for Emily/England, and for knowledge is akin to that of an “unconquerable horror”⁶¹⁴ in a schizophrenic “madhouse” of dystopian consciousness entrapped in the expectation of an imagined home—

⁶⁰⁷ Rahman, *In the Light*, 105.

⁶⁰⁸ Rahman, *In the Light*, 105.

⁶⁰⁹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 105.

⁶¹⁰ Rahman, *In the Light*, 286.

⁶¹¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 477.

⁶¹² Rahman, *In the Light*, 476.

⁶¹³ Rahman, *In the Light*, 39.

⁶¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105.

of which Edward Said had aptly said, “the phrase false expectation suggests great expectation”.⁶¹⁵ Zafar's ethnocultural concerns find themselves caught between systems of control and hospitality, oscillating between hesitant inclusion and violent rejection. This dynamic is vividly depicted through an encounter between Zafar and Dr. Reza Mehrani, a scientist of Iranian ancestry, at a private gathering in Colonel Sikandar's residence. Dr. Mehrani inquires about the “Shahadah,” and as Zafar explores the experiences of exclusion within expatriate communities, Dr. Mehrani warmly asserts, “You're one of us, dear boy. You're one of us... because you are a Muslim.” He then asks Zafar if he knows the Shahadah, to which Zafar provides the English translation: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.” However, Dr. Mehrani corrects Zafar for using a non-English word for God in the translation, expressing concern about giving the impression of worshipping a foreign deity. He emphasizes that the Shahadah is a beautiful creed of monotheism. When asked to recite the Shahadah once again, Zafar modifies it by saying, “There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his messenger.” Dr. Mehrani approves, stating, “You are one of us because you are a Muslim and you are from here.” Yet, Zafar firmly expresses his Bangladeshi heritage, which is met with resistance as Khan considers Bangladesh a painful reminder of the “betrayal of East Pakistan.”⁶¹³

Zafar's religious identity takes precedence over his national identity as he recites the “Shahadah”, marking a significant shift in his personal growth. He transforms into a figure who serves as an intermediary, connecting Muslims who are united in their collective efforts for the greater cause of the Afghan Muslim brotherhood and its neighboring province. However, Zafar bears an ironical relationship with Islam as he believes that Islam holds some

⁶¹⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 33.

answers to his queries. He argues: “I believed that Islam’s response to the pursuit of meaning was not to provide answers but to drill and drum men into forsaking meanings for ritual and habit. I believed such things when meaning counted for more than the rewards of ritual.”⁶¹⁶ At last, it is the practice of understanding the Shahadah, which produces him as an associate of an imagined community of brotherhood, which is compensated by ignoring the given spent identities. Zafar unlocks his heart among South Asian people as he voices the issue of cultural bonding:

I think that expatriate Pakistanis and Bangladeshis—the babus as you call them—they can no longer keep their distance. And there’s a deep pleasure in talking to someone who knows where you’re coming from right away, who knows what you’re talking about and can even finish your sentences. Nothing really beats that familiarity, that feeling of being swept into a vortex of mutual understanding. You all must know this. But equally I find it troubling. Is everybody so pleased to find a shared experience that their emotions rule the content? Not always but sometimes, sometimes as I walk away from the conversation, I wonder if it was a conversation framed by common defensiveness, a sense of unity by exclusion, which makes me uneasy because those kinds of conversations also exclude things that could challenge or test whatever’s being said.⁶¹⁷

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha finds: “The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities—as the grounds of cultural comparativism—are in a profound

⁶¹⁶ Rahman, *In the Light*, 214.

⁶¹⁷ Rahman, *In the Light*, 407.

process of redefinition.”⁶¹⁸ Here, space is seen in Michel de Certeau’s sense as “a practiced place”,⁶¹⁹ foregrounding the concept that space with its meanings and cultural implications can be (re)structured by individual practices and agency. Zafar perceives the fluidity of boundaries as a method to comprehend the changing constructs of identities. Focusing on representations of agency and negotiations of exclusionary boundaries, Zafar faces the transformative potential in the context of what might be termed a politics of destabilization. The reference to transnational correlation and the interconnectedness across disjunctions and the nations within them throws into relief the concept of homogeneity of nation-states and global cultures. With the disjunctions within and interrelations of national culture aside from those of the nation-state, its operation in obtaining homogeneity is drained away. Transnational connections, in the words of Ulf Hannerz, a Swedish anthropologist, are “becoming increasingly varied and pervasive, with large or small implications for human life and culture”.⁶²⁰

In contrast to the anonymous narrator, whose maternal grandfather held the position of an ambassador to the United States⁴⁹, Zafar hails from a peasant background, which leads to feelings of insecurity and exclusion within his own social sphere, particularly in his relationship with his parents. Zafar's experience of "exile" in London is pronounced as he strives for acceptance and recognition within English society. He rejects the notion of the East and West Pakistan conflict being labeled as a "civil war" and instead criticizes the Western stereotype of Oriental spaces, aiming to challenge the blurred boundaries between

⁶¹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 5.

⁶¹⁹ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004), 117.

⁶²⁰ Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 4.

the "Orient" and the "Occident".⁶²¹ Zafar's fascination for maps and the heavy footnotes in his diary show his melancholic memories of the "orient" that remain fresh and are cherished: "[Kabul] was a land of dusty, earthy tones. Whereas my beautiful Sylhet sang the song of seasons, of a yearly cycle, Afghanistan's barren, ragged desolation moaned a long dirge of ancient wonder, the earth's broken features ready to receive fallen horsemen, the lost traveller, and all the butchered tribes."⁶²² Ngũgĩ waThiong'o, in his essays in *Homecoming*, celebrates the excluded being as one "who lives closer to God ... and because of his suffering ... has attained ... wisdom." However, he easily understands that such wisdom might give the exile the "strength to await his deliverance and his return home from exile".⁶²³ There is no "home" for Zafar; as he says: "My friend, you know me well enough to know that I couldn't possibly use the word home without couching it in so many caveats as to make it useless. I was going back to my father's village, the family homestead, the place where I had lived as an infant, the place where I believe I was born."⁶²⁴ The exile is merely a beginning for him, not a final destination.

Zia Haider Rahman, in *In the Light of What We Know*, critiques the colonial projects of post-9/11 America, the financial crisis, and the war in Afghanistan. Rahman escapes the Afghan persecution as a pristine *homo sacer*, and rather poses an intricate political condition where local people work against, with, and without westerners. Zafar operates his work for the UN in Kabul only to get nearer to Emily while he keeps a side-line of stratagems running in service of the Pakistani secret agency. In Kabul, Emily Hampton-Wyvern with the other

⁶²¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 191.

⁶²² Rahman, *In the Light*, 31.

⁶²³ Ngugi waThiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays of African and Caribbean Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1972), 89.

⁶²⁴ Rahman, *In the Light*, 99.

members of the international agencies invest more time in the “UN bar”⁶²⁵ than assisting the local people. Afghanistan becomes the *centrum* of virtual displacement and repatriation for these people across the globe to split into fractured identities. Afghanistan becomes a focal point through which the intricacies of contemporary war showcase Kabul as a war zone, which is a junction of manifold military and non-military work. Zafar and Emily are in the process of transitional territory—in countries that belong to neither of them.

Rahman’s novel establishes connections between the war on terror and the financial crisis of 2008, highlighting their shared characteristics of being decentralized, obscure, and complex in nature. The novel’s recursive and digressive structure serves as a vehicle for exploring the Eurocentric models of reality in the midst of these crises, ultimately offering a glimpse into the realm of truth. With the analogies of theoretical physics, mathematics, and finance, Rahman creates a bricolage of epistemological uncertainty towards the exploration of truth and the limits of knowing. In order to acclimate the reader to the attacks of 9/11, Rahman decentres the other crises by defamiliarizing the war on terror in 2002 Kabul and the financial crisis of 2008 by interspersing these events with the characters’ personal, meandering, and circuitous narrations. In this post-9/11 context, Donald Rumsfeld’s noted epistemological exertion—“the unknown unknowns”⁶²⁶—between accepted unknowns and the mysterious or obscure unknowns gravitates towards the references of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, the multiple migrations of Zafar, and the histories of the war on terror. He argues, “The idea of known and unknown unknowns recognizes that the information those in the positions of responsibility in the government, as well as other human

⁶²⁵ Rahman, *In the Light*, 288.

⁶²⁶ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 21.

endeavours, have at their disposal is almost always incomplete”.⁶²⁷ One of the epigraphs of the novel from W.G. Sebald asserts both the broader aspect of finding the truth and its elusive nature: “Our concern with history ... is a concern with preformed images imprinted on our brains, images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, somewhere as yet undiscovered”.⁶²⁸

Zafar’s similar engagements with the question of authority for truths and the impossibility of correcting the misperception of optical illusions are prominent, as he writes in his notebooks: “*In order to catch even a fleeting glimpse of the world, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it.*”⁶²⁹ This epistemological perspective elicits the fetishism of Zafar towards the mathematical tilt of Kurt Gödel’s “Incompleteness Theorem”, where proofs are found to be unfathomable and cannot be proven; where truth remains in the realm of opacity and is withdrawn. What we imagine and what we know seems to be at the crux of “How do you know?”⁶³⁰ A character informs the unnamed narrator that the motto of Harvard is “*Veritas*” and that of Yale is “*Lux et Veritas. Light and truth*”.⁶³¹ The room between truth and light—the concept which illuminates a given matter—certainly does not bring us nearer to experiencing the truth. The “Incompleteness Theorem” echoes precariously in Rumsfeld’s proclamation when codifying his pre-emption strategy: “if something could not be proven to be true, then it could be assumed not to be true.”⁶³² Instead, we should “prepare for the

⁶²⁷ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 22.

⁶²⁸ Rahman, *In the Light*, 5.

⁶²⁹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 251.

⁶³⁰ Rahman, *In the Light*, 167–337.

⁶³¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 240.

⁶³² Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 22.

likelihood that we would be attacked by an unanticipated foe in ways we may not imagine”.⁶³³ This parallelism also focuses on the incipient correspondence between contemporary warfare and mathematics. The UN rapporteur sends Zafar to Afghanistan with Emily, who is busy with a rehabilitation agency. On his way to Afghanistan, Zafar’s mind is caught and enslaved by some clichéd ideas and facts about the history of clashing imperialism in Afghanistan and its tragic consequences, but on his return from Kabul, “a city scarred by war”,⁶³⁴ he remains unstuck with his preconceived ideas, and breaks away from it to understand nothing:

In the mess of Central Asia, there are as many sides as there are opportunities to steal a march. There are no sides to tell us who is doing what, for whom, and why. There are only exigencies, strategies, short-term objectives, at the level of governments, regions, clans, families, and individuals: fractals of interests, overlapping here, mutually exclusive there, and sometimes coinciding. No sides. Which should not surprise us. After all, we both know that good people do bad things, that friends will hurt you, and that everyone is from first to last on his own side.⁶³⁵

A surreptitious plan is proposed to Zafar by the Pakistani army colonel in Islamabad, reiterating a parallel casualty in the bombing in Café Europa to annihilate the US contractor Crane. The army colonel also updates him that Zafar will not be harmed in this mission as projected stealthily by the agencies. Later, Zafar retrospectively understands the situation of mass murder as he maintains his proximity to the act of bombing. He describes the scene vividly:

⁶³³ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 23.

⁶³⁴ Rahman, *In the Light*, 41.

⁶³⁵ Rahman, *In the Light*, 616.

First came the sound. People crying, not women but men, a wailing, the sound of cries for God, *Hai-Allah*, groans, and American voices on megaphones. Afghans and ISAF soldiers scrambling. Then I turned a corner. There was destruction everywhere, rubble and dust ... blood and bones, and the shredded ends of limbs, and the head with open eyes, and crying men, grown men, my father's age, men with beards, lifting wreckage to find the dead. I felt sick, my gut convulsing like a caught fish. But what I remember most vividly is a sensation behind my eyes, an extraordinary pressure pushing my eyeballs out, as if they were no longer mine, as if my body were rejecting them. Did I want to cry or did I want to keep myself from crying? I wanted both.⁶³⁶

Zafar's unintentional association and rabid exposure to this brutal conspiracy bring forth the vulnerability of an individual to the militaristic surveillance system, which debunks the individual's actions through systematic "infrastructures of control that track (and predict) one's actions in the post-9/11 universe"⁶³⁷ in a "networked world".⁶³⁸ Zafar, with all his minutiae and activity, is closely monitored by "intellectual vertigo"⁶³⁹ under the Pakistani militia and intelligence networks where he becomes progressively more penetrable and transparent. His failure to envisage a world governed by surveillance is one of the "epistemological failures"⁶⁴⁰ that Zafar is entangled in. His failed attempts to escape real

⁶³⁶ Rahman, *In the Light*, 604–5.

⁶³⁷ Alla Ivanchikova, *Imagining Afghanistan: Global Fiction and Film of the 9/11 Wars* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2019), 172.

⁶³⁸ Ivanchikova, *Imagining Afghanistan*, 172.

⁶³⁹ Ivanchikova, *Imagining Afghanistan*, 172.

⁶⁴⁰ Ivanchikova, *Imagining Afghanistan*, 172.

pressures is symptomatic of what he eventually professes: that is, “understanding is a mode of control”⁶⁴¹ that “subdues the unruliness of people in one’s head”.⁶⁴²

Rahman evokes a parallel between the war on terror and the 2008 worldwide financial crisis precipitated by unregulated markets and private mortgage lending. The mortgage market went into a radical change during the early 2000s with the rise of sub-prime mortgage credit, a powerful amount of which brought into being predatory products. The US economy in 2007 entered into a crisis that created turmoil and panic in the financial world. It was the result of a flawed financial approach, financial derivatives, and loan repayments. The 2008 financial meltdown and the worldwide recession which followed also resulted in a crisis where the central problem became indissociable. Rahman excavates an environmental disaster in 1989—the collapse of the Exxon Valdez oil tanker off the Alaskan coast, which released a massive oil slick, and the particular financial innovations going back to 1989 (the spilling of oil in Alaska) that set the base for the contemporary crisis.⁶⁴³ Rahman speaks about the ambiguity of “synthetic securities”,⁶⁴⁴ which cannot be separated from the goods, concrete, and mud upon which economies have always been restored. The accountability and regulators of “credit default swaps”, “mortgage repayments”, “equity tranche”, “mortgage-backed securities”, “collateralized debt

⁶⁴¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 439.

⁶⁴² Rahman, *In the Light*, 439.

⁶⁴³ Rahman, *In the Light*, 328.

⁶⁴⁴ Rahman, *In the Light*, 332.

obligations”,⁶⁴⁵ and credit derivatives are, according to Zafar, “so esoteric”⁶⁴⁶ that “the only people who understand it are in the business”.⁶⁴⁷

Rahman deduces the framework of global capitalism in the war on terror in Afghanistan by establishing the nexus between the global real estate capitalist system and the funding for the war. Zafar finds the houses in Kabul “belonging to talibs but that had been acquired by Westerners for their rocketing market value, including diplomatic missions and their staff, whose real estate purchases had boosted taliban funding. Property in 2002, even in Kabul, was booming, as it was the world over”.⁶⁴⁸ Zafar witnesses the present advanced economy "deforming" the previous state, with inflation soaring. Accompanied by his guide Suleiman, Zafar drives through Wazir Akbar Khan, described as "an area where foreigners, NGOs, and crooks had already started buying property."⁶⁴⁹ Suleiman points out some houses “formerly belonging to Talibs but that had been acquired by Westerners for their rocketing market value, including diplomatic missions and their staff, whose real estate purchases had boosted Taliban funding.”⁶⁵⁰ “There is a saying on Wall Street”, Zafar tells his guide, “When there’s blood on the streets, buy property”.⁶⁵¹

Rahman, through the lens of global capitalism, tries to narrate the Afghan crisis with the help of historical catastrophes unfolding the hidden terror, both subjective and objective,

⁶⁴⁵ Rahman, *In the Light*, 77.

⁶⁴⁶ Rahman, *In the Light*, 332.

⁶⁴⁷ Rahman, *In the Light*, 332.

⁶⁴⁸ Rahman, *In the Light*, 45–46.

⁶⁴⁹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 45–46.

⁶⁵⁰ Rahman, *In the Light*, 45–46.

⁶⁵¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 45–46.

as well as the systematic violence, and “the specific relation of the new phase of monopoly-finance capital to imperialism”⁶⁵² as postulated by John Bellamy Foster. With the rise of inherent violence due to globalization, capitalism, and fundamentalism, Slavoj Žižek delves into the examination of three distinct forms of violence: subjective violence, objective violence, and systemic violence⁸². Subjective violence, as outlined by Žižek, involves acts of atrocity and terror perpetrated by "social agents, evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, [and] fanatical crowds."⁸³ This type of violence often diverts attention away from the underlying causes of violence, leading to a disregard for the true roots of societal unrest, thus deviating from the commonly perceived state of "peaceful" coexistence.⁶⁵³

Alternatively, objective violence has no definite perpetrator who is “inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence”.⁶⁵⁴ This type of violence has two subcategories: (1) systemic “invisible” violence, defined as “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems”,⁶⁵⁵ demonstrates an inherent relationship between subjective and objective violence; and (2) the symbolic violence found in language, which creates incitement of subjective violence and social domination. Subjective violence in the form of the genocide in Café Europa or the tragic incident of a family failing a home is palpable and is witnessed. In contrast, objective violence remains hidden, a broader subterranean series of actions that one cannot even dream of.

⁶⁵² John Bellamy Foster, “Monopoly-Finance Capital,” *Monthly Review* (December 2006): 11.

⁶⁵³ Žižek, *Violence*, 2.

⁶⁵⁴ Žižek, *Violence*, 9.

⁶⁵⁵ Žižek, *Violence*, 2.

Rahman unmask the limitations of eye witnessing in the process of narrating the traumatic history of Afghanistan—unlike a non-human onlooker like mathematics, which, “like Spinoza’s God, won’t love us in return”,⁶⁵⁶ is a limited but useful apparatus, which provides us with an insight into the intricate mechanisms of twenty-first-century catastrophes. The obvious presence of the non-human witnessing, with the trope of mathematical propositions and infrastructures, in consonance with the ramifications of present-day warfare, dethrones the human being completely over the decades. Accountability is extensively delivered within this infrastructure of control and destruction, as the narrator opines: “I feel no guilt for what I did in finance. There’s little doubt that the financial crisis will translate into an economic one and that recession will likely follow. People will lose their homes, their jobs. But tell me how I can feel guilt for doing something that was not only legal but actively encouraged by governments everywhere.”⁶⁵⁷ One’s subscription to the catastrophic incident is non-evaluative since there is the involvement of governments, organizations, institutions, and individuals. The narrator says: “How much should one foresee the consequences of one’s own actions? And how much do other causes that combine with one’s own actions, and thereby muddy one’s role, exonerate one?”⁶⁵⁸

In *In the Light of What We Know*, Rahman offers an evocative and problematic inquiry into the relationship between finance and knowledge—philosophical, mathematical, historical, and other kinds of knowledge—reflecting on the obliteration of the political crisis at the centre of post-Fordist capitalism, which is defined by growing economic fetishism, inequality, and a pervasive sense of political intemperance over the accumulation process.

⁶⁵⁶ Rahman, *In the Light*, 250.

⁶⁵⁷ Rahman, *In the Light*, 50.

⁶⁵⁸ Rahman, *In the Light*, 66.

The importance placed on hyper-consumerist self-referentiality remains a key constituent in the design of the post-Fordist *homo economicus*. Rahman's celebration of knowledge specifies an engrossment with the state of the world in different spheres, which proceeds to a settled elision of its social determinations in post-industrial production. *In the Light of What We Know*, in the words of James Wood, "wears its knowledge heavily, as a burden, a crisis, an injury ... because Rahman is interested in the possession of knowledge, and in the politics of that possession".⁶⁵⁹ The great paradox is that capitalist subjectivity can no longer be preserved within its phantasmatic limits. The ongoing issue with the ownership of knowledge reflects a privatization process that ironically highlights the controversial aspects it aims to eliminate. The mathematician Zafar and Zafar the storyteller—the two parts of a subjectivity (the narrator and his ideal ego)—are portrayed as an avoidance of the discursive practice of temporalities of the evolving economic crisis. Zafar's "general intellect",⁶⁶⁰ which shapes the social production in the post-Fordist era, is translated into a private intellect. Zafar's thorough obedience to genuine mathematics, which he finds to be "the product of the human mind turning to face itself",⁶⁶¹ as a "realm of necessary consequences, where no contingent fact is to be seen or heard or smelled or tasted or touched"⁶⁶² finds its conclusion in Gödel's

⁶⁵⁹ James Wood, "The World as we Know It: Zia Haider Rahman's Dazzling Début", *New Yorker*, 19 May 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/05/19/the-world-as-we-know-it>.

⁶⁶⁰ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin, 1993). Marx used the idea of "general intellect" in the *Grundrisse*. Some writers, like Andrea Fumagalli (2011), Carlo Vercellona (2013), Sandro Mezzadra (2011), Carlo Vercellona (2013), Sandro Mezzadra, Brett Neilson (2017), Antonio Negri and Carlo Vercellone (2018) adhere to the analytical idea of cognitive capitalism as a suitable feature of productive liaison in the post-Fordist era.

⁶⁶¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 154.

⁶⁶² Rahman, *In the Light*, 154.

Incompleteness Theorem, which voices “the simple message that the farthest reaches of what we can ever know fall short of the limits of what is true, even in mathematics”.⁶⁶³

By juxtaposing the neoliberal fiscal strategy with 9/11, the agential particularity of the disaster is neutralized and blurred. With the supra-sensible shape of disaster heading to “the realm of necessary consequences”,⁶⁶⁴ there is an understanding of finance as “fundamentally idealist-individualist, and therefore radically anti-political, terms”.⁶⁶⁵ Zafar, as a postcolonial being endangered by his traumatic origins and a powerful transnational knowledge worker, wishes to work for the betterment of infrastructural military-humanitarian networks. As a “buffer class of native informants”,⁶⁶⁶ he “lived beyond his psychic means”,⁶⁶⁷ and, as a prorated self, Zafar grows in a “continuing state of civil war”⁶⁶⁸ being “a man going forward as many selves contained in the same, shoulder to shoulder”,⁶⁶⁹ “partitioned into people who hated each other, and to side with one was to scorn the other”.

His social class is an insurmountable obstacle in his many unsuccessful efforts to settle his enduring postcolonial melancholia and conclusively turns into British. One part of him is very close to British elites like Emily, while another part suffers in a dilemma, as he thinks that befriending these elites is betraying his roots. His unsuccessful marriage with the white upper-class Englishwoman Emily poses the question of how “race, or as everyone now

⁶⁶³ Rahman, *In the Light*, 18.

⁶⁶⁴ Rahman, *In the Light*, 154.

⁶⁶⁵ Roberto del Valle Alcalá, *Contemporary Capitalism, Crisis, and the Politics of Fiction: Literature Beyond Fordism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020), 39.

⁶⁶⁶ Rahman, *In the Light*, 39.

⁶⁶⁷ Rahman, *In the Light*, 454.

⁶⁶⁸ Rahman, *In the Light*, 482.

⁶⁶⁹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 481.

likes to say, ethnicity, was never so much a source of anxiety as class”.⁶⁷⁰ He finds finance as a locus where the barriers of class are not important: “Finance is not about connections, it’s not about who you know but what you know, it isn’t like your grandfather’s world, with secret deals on golf courses and in country clubs, kickbacks and Swiss bank accounts.”⁶⁷¹ Zafar’s association with the old imperial metropolis is a kind of symptomatic repercussion of Britain’s elitism and America’s alleged egalitarianism. Zafar argues that America’s preeminence as a nation “bears the forbidden fruit of egalitarian hope, and everyone, high and low, can shake the branches of that tree”.⁶⁷²

The coupling of the UK–US is also evidence of the discursive workings at play in Zafar’s melancholic pronouncements. Zafar condemns the humanitarian workers and western development agencies as hyenas who visit Kabul because they find the smell of flesh in the air. He finds a close connection with people over there—the residents who are like his mother, surrogate parents who endure pains and chronicle injuries: “Something was gathering in me, as if armies had been summoned from all corners and the ground bore the first tremors of their approach. Now I might call them armies of injustice, humiliation, and defeat, but at the time I felt them as only the beginning of a kind of end”.⁶⁷³ He feels mortified, and seeks to “apologize to someone, to the Afghanis here and there, the drivers waiting by the gates, the attendants, the cleaners and cooks, the staff, the servant class”.⁶⁷⁴ He demonstrates his support for the residents of Kabul, while his increasing animosity towards Western

⁶⁷⁰ Rahman, *In the Light*, 435.

⁶⁷¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 248.

⁶⁷² Rahman, *In the Light*, 144.

⁶⁷³ Rahman, *In the Light*, 493.

⁶⁷⁴ Rahman, *In the Light*, 481.

individuals in Afghanistan becomes evident through his active involvement and collaboration with Pakistani agents, aligning with the planned sequence of events. This eventually leads to a bombing incident that results in the elimination of Crane, a military contractor and a minor participant in the secretive organization responsible for the Café Europa bombing. To Zafar, the history of conflicted imperialisms in the area foregrounds the opacity in the centre of the catastrophe, implying, possibly, that mathematics is one of the apparatuses which may conspicuously provide us with an intuition into the intricacies of the present-day situation. That is to say, the principles of mathematical cogitation is emblematic of “a failure of governance in post-Fordist capitalism”⁶⁷⁵ that eventually voices the unfeasibility of calculating profit in a structure of accumulation and production where capital is ungoverned.

In the "Introduction" of his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said presents his argument regarding the enduring consequences of imperialism and its impact on formerly colonized territories.⁶⁷⁶ The contemporary war against terror in Afghanistan, and the conflict between the Taliban and international organizations are different games of events where nations are involved in procuring economic benefits by eliminating the basic system under the guise of diplomatic deals. In *In the Light of What We Know*, AfDARI, a funded organization from Australia, is controlled by English and American diplomats and also governs the president of Afghanistan in their operation of neocolonialism. To Paul Jay, colonization and globalization are seen as a great combination. Jay's suggestions, as reviewed by Andrew J. Hines, are: “in order to understand contemporary globalization, one that has come out of some sort of disagreement, we are in danger of drawing a skewed picture of

⁶⁷⁵ Valle Alcalá, *Contemporary Capitalism, Crisis, and the Politics of Fiction*, 41.

⁶⁷⁶ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xii–xiii.

globalization and colonialism.”⁶⁷⁷ Transnational and international organizations are forms of mechanisms in the process of subjugating the once-colonized lands. Naomi Klein in “Baghdad Year Zero” voices the calculus of power of neo-conservative Americans over Afghanistan and Iraq. She examines the role of the “Taliban” in Afghanistan in the wake of post-9/11 to the “neocons” Iraq.⁶⁷⁸ As the Taliban come to power, they are in the process of hurling the whole nation into a “debauched Hades of opium and sex slavery”.⁶⁷⁹ The empirical neocolonialism in modern-day Afghanistan and the new power nexus are matters of concern to Zafar: “9/11? The financial crisis? External events, events that come out of the blue, ... changing lives all the time, every year, if not every day. Our choices are made, our will flexed, in the teeth of events that overwhelm and devour us”.⁶⁸⁰ The intervention of NGOs, the presence of AfDARI, and the association of “white” people with the UN, along with Sulaiman in Afghanistan sketch the manoeuvres of postcoloniality in the formation of a neocolonial world order.⁶⁸¹ Zafar opines that several people join the US Army as responsible national citizens, and before 9/11, people who knew a thing or two about Islam are now “returning to Islam”⁶⁸² because Islam has become more “accessible through better books and

⁶⁷⁷ Andrew J. Hines, “Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 231; ISBN: 978-0-8014-7607-5,” review of *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, by Paul Jay, *AmeriQuests*, 28 July 2011.

⁶⁷⁸ Naomi Klein, “Baghdad Year Zero: Pillaging Iraq in Pursuit of a Neo-Con Utopia,” *Common Dreams*, 1 September 2004, <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2004/09/01/baghdad-year-zero-pillaging-iraq-pursuit-neo-con-utopia>.

⁶⁷⁹ Klein, “Baghdad Year Zero”.

⁶⁸⁰ Rahman, *In the Light*, 156.

⁶⁸¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 166.

⁶⁸² Rahman, *In the Light*, 218.

better speakers”,⁶⁸³ and not just because “they’ve been politicized by the war on terror”.⁶⁸⁴ The narrator finds the rejoinder of the American administration and its people to 9/11 as irrational and governed by neocolonial attitudes towards Afghanistan. The narrator says:

I have read that after 9/11, there was a big jump in the number of people deciding to drive rather than take a plane, to get from D.C. to Boston, from New York to Chicago, and apparently more people died in the resulting increase in car accidents in the six months after 9/11, in the increase alone, than in the attacks themselves. The whole thing is irrational, of course, the response to the attacks, the individual human responses and the collective political responses.⁶⁸⁵

Naomi Klein has also detailed how the oil resources of Iraq had been regulated with the US sanctions, and how such approbations have changed a country like Iraq into a parched land with a dearth of food and medicines. She opines: “Iraq was to the neocons what Afghanistan was to the Taliban: the one place on Earth where they could force everyone to live by the most literal, unyielding interpretation of their sacred texts.”⁶⁸⁶ The nexus of profit and business in Afghanistan on the pretext of the war on terror is sounded by Zafar at the end of the novel:

The West does not care to be reminded, over and over, that the Americans supported jihadis in the war against Soviet occupation. But if my enemy’s enemy is my friend,

⁶⁸³ Rahman, *In the Light*, 218.

⁶⁸⁴ Rahman, *In the Light*, 218.

⁶⁸⁵ Rahman, *In the Light*, 545.

⁶⁸⁶ Klein, “Baghdad Year Zero.”

what is the quality of a friendship founded on common hatred? What have we each learned about the other, when all we need to know is that we share a hatred?⁶⁸⁷

He finds this neo-colonized land as a “Goddamn war zone”⁶⁸⁸ as though “the new colonials care very deeply what the Afghanis think”.⁶⁸⁹ The Afghan administration, with NGOs and UN officials, was vulnerable to global bureaucratic plays of power with their modern shape of colonization. In Afghanistan, the UN Assistance Mission was well settled by 2002. There were Land Cruisers in Kabul, helicopters from the US, “laden with UNAMA staff churned the dust at makeshift airfields in outlying districts; and, not least, up and running, pulling pints and pouring shots, was the UN bar in Kabul. ... a hundred important people were in place, housed in a compound adjoining that bar. The stage was set”.⁶⁹⁰ At the end of the novel, after the event of the death of Crane, Zafar finds himself in the dark regarding the bombing, questioning Emily and trying to evaluate every second to find who might be involved in this bombing. Though Rahman recounts the limitations and aporias of cognitive incommensurability, finance, and transnational perspectives, Ahdaf Soueif engages with Egyptian and British culture in an attempt to invoke imperial historiography—the potential ingredients in the (re)making of the historical Anglo-Arab encounter—coterminously.

Islam and Geopolitical Precarity Predating 9/11

Ahdaf Soueif, an Egyptian-born British writer and cultural commentator-activist, has received numerous literary accolades and was a finalist for the Booker Prize for her 1999 novel, *The Map of Love*.¹²² Soueif, who was born in Cairo and educated in both Cairo and

⁶⁸⁷ Rahman, *In the Light*, 615.

⁶⁸⁸ Rahman, *In the Light*, 593.

⁶⁸⁹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 492.

⁶⁹⁰ Rahman, *In the Light*, 161.

England, explores the intercultural exchange of Arab culture and literature through her works in both Arabic and English. In line with Edward Said's concept of "worldliness," Soueif's engagement with literature highlights the emergence of Arab literature beyond the confines of narrow nationalism, embracing an international perspective that addresses themes of "representation, migration/exile, and colonial/postcolonial transitions"¹²³. Through a blend of autobiography, historical chronicle, and fiction, Soueif critiques Orientalist portrayals of the "Other" from the East within Eurocentric frameworks. She advocates for the necessity of envisioning alternative approaches to shaping human relationships that transcend the East/West binary.⁶⁹¹ In *Orientalism*, Edward Said asks: "Can one divide human reality ... into clearly different histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?" And further, is there "any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into 'us' (Westerners) and 'they' (Orientals)?"⁶⁹² Within Soueif's writings, pseudo-autobiographical elements (in the shape of newspaper articles, journals, and emails) are deliberately portrayed as fiction and framed by the fictional conventions of division into Parts and Chapters, apart from the use of epigraphs. To her, the past bears a correspondence with the present, and neither the present nor the past can be assumed alone. Her *The Map of Love*, a "tour de force of revisionist meta-history of Egypt in the twentieth century",⁶⁹³ hinges between the present and the past with an attestation of imperial power; the past highly

⁶⁹¹ Malak, King, Wynne, and Nash draw attention to the re-examination of Orientalist viewpoint in Soueif's novel, but they do not delve into the connection between this and the amalgamation of life-writing and fiction in the work. See, Amin Malak, "Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of AhdafSoueif," *Alif* 20, (2000): 157. Katherine Callen King, "Translating Heroism: Locating Edward Said on AhdafSoueif's *The Map of Love*," in *Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation*, ed. Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustom, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 146. Catherine Wynne, "Navigating the Mezzaterra: Home, Harem, and the Hybrid Family in AhdafSoueif's *The Map of Love*," *Critical Survey* 18, no. 2 (2006): 65. Geoffrey Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arabs Writers in English* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 82.

⁶⁹² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978), 45.

⁶⁹³ Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 128.

dominates and shapes the present with a shifting approach to history, since “there can be no escapes from history”.⁶⁹⁴

In *The Map of Love*, there is a significant emphasis on fostering intercultural understanding within the backdrop of historical events. The novel portrays the American embassy and agencies traversing Cairo in their secure limousines, where the veiled limousines and smoked-glass windows symbolize the perceived necessity for Americans to shield themselves from the allure of the local population. Throughout the narrative, the novel explores the persistence of the old colonial order, the emergence of a neocolonial and globalized world, and the unbridled expansion of the American Empire. Alongside these themes, there is a central concern with navigating the challenges posed by cultural differences and bridging the boundaries between cultures.. In 1997, with two children left in England, Amal al-Ghamrawi returns to Egypt after 20 years of divorce. Amal, an Egyptian reader, translator, and interpreter, does “her best to translate” them from “one language into another, from one culture into another”,⁶⁹⁵ and we find AhdafSoueif escaping the fixity of a lone determining consciousness with her bilingual articulation. The socialist land reforms and the elimination of titles in Egypt under Abdel-Nasser dethrones her father from a *basha* and elite landowner, in a sheer historical inevitability, to holding a partnership with the *fallaheen*, and sharing in the crop and contributing money “to buy fertilizers or update the watering machines”.⁶⁹⁶

The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis interrupts the life of Amal as well. Amal, a secular intellectual living in Cairo, cannot reconcile with herself as she visits the

⁶⁹⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 23.

⁶⁹⁵ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 559.

⁶⁹⁶ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 183.

empty family house at Tawasi. She was born “in the year of Nasser’s revolution”;⁶⁹⁷ her mother, a Palestinian lady, suffered eviction during the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, an incident her father fought against by guiding a battalion that resulted in defeat. During the six-day battle against Israel, Amal participated in demonstrations in favour of Egyptian forces and also against Sadat’s agreement of peace, who was known widely and perceived as a national enemy. From her side, she accepted defeat in both battles, and her life became a history of empty national dreams and dishevelled agreement.⁶⁹⁸ The personal–historical narratives of Amal’s family members are fused with the happenings of the Arab Renaissance (*Nahda*) and the *Nakba*, clubbing genealogy (*nasab*) with history. After the 1948 disaster, Amal’s mother was “among the thirty thousand Arabs who lost their homes”⁶⁹⁹ to the State of Israel. She suffered miscarriages in displacement in 1948 (*Nakba*) at Tawasi in Upper Egypt. In September 1952, the Land Reform Law was passed in Egypt to redistribute income and ownership in the agricultural sector for the sake of the poor and landless farmers—remoulding the savings of the middle class from the acquisition of agricultural lands to investment in industry. Still, it was done for a political vendetta rather than the goal of economic prosperity.⁷⁰⁰

Soueif begins the novel with a Dickensian resonance, “To begin my life with the beginnings of my life”, with chapters titled “A Beginning”, “An End of a Beginning”, “A Beginning of an End”, and “An End”.⁷⁰¹ As Lyotard has said in *Instructions païennes*, “we

⁶⁹⁷ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 173.

⁶⁹⁸ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 172–74.

⁶⁹⁹ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 173.

⁷⁰⁰ Galal Amin, *Whatever Happened to the Egyptians?: Changes in Egyptian Society from 1950 to the Present* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 56–7.

⁷⁰¹ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 6–7.

are always spoken by another's narrative, somebody has always already spoken us".⁷⁰² For Soueif, the metaphor of beginning unearths the unceasing corollary of colonialism and history; as John Erickson finds that "Every beginning has its roots in an elsewhere".⁷⁰³ Her "A Beginning" and "The End" are ambiguous, and the closure of the novel is virtually deferred with a double-time structure that finds the cohabitation of past and present in parallel structures. She dissects the material corollary of colonialism, which makes it impervious to an after which is aimed at and this recognition marks a postcolonial knowledge of teleology.⁷⁰⁴ *The Map of Love* posits the "problem of continuity in time, and between times in history, firmly at the centre of their plots and represent it 'physically' in their forms",⁷⁰⁵ having a linear genealogical connection reiterated through time. The elements and practice of imperial connotations are also enfolded within the story of the Anglo-Egyptian family at the centre of the narratives.

The Map of Love revolves around political engagements, acts of violence, historical events, and cross-cultural encounters. Amin Malak interprets the novel as a "revisionist meta-history"¹⁴⁰ due to its thorough examination of Egyptian nationalism and British colonialism. In contrast, Noha Hamdy characterizes the novel as a "mongrel version of an Orientalist romance forcibly yoked to a postcolonial narrative,"¹⁴¹ embodying elements of "imperial historiography."¹⁴² Drawing from Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Egypt between 1882 and 1907, during the time of English occupation and imperial expansion, serves as an illustrative

⁷⁰² Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Instructions paiennes*(Paris: Editions Galilee, 1977), 47.

⁷⁰³ John Erickson, *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20.

⁷⁰⁴ Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, "Hystorical Fictions: Women (Re)writing and (Re)reading History," *Women: A Cultural Review* 15, no. 2 (August: 2008): 141.

⁷⁰⁵ Heilmann and Llewellyn, "Hystorical Fictions," 147.

example of the intersection between various pseudo-scientific academic disciplines and colonial discourses¹⁴³. According to Said, Egypt is “not just another colony”, but it has a paradigmatic connotation as “the vindication of Western imperialism; it was, until its annexation by England, an almost academic example of Oriental backwardness; it was to become the triumph of English knowledge and power”¹⁴⁴ Said's critique of *The Map of Love* stems from his emphasis on the discursive nature of Orientalism, wherein the textual construction sheds light on a significant portion of the imperial archive. His concurrent vision extends from the altruistic rationality of the West, which seeks to naturalize and normalize the unknown while simultaneously relegating its otherness to the masses. In this novel, Soueif redefines the monolithic portrayal of the nineteenth-century Orientalist narrative by introducing Amal, a contemporary Egyptian reader, translator, and interpreter, thus facilitating a dialogical extension of perspectives. Through her skilful use of dialogue, Soueif effectively incorporates elements from Edward Said's critical text, creating a harmonious connection between the two works in terms of time and setting. The novel is primarily situated in Egypt and England, spanning the years 1896 (from the infamous Sudan expedition involving Gordon and Kitchener) to 1913. Notably, both texts feature the distinct presence of Lord Cromer, the British governor of Egypt. Additionally, in a contemporary context within the novel, the character of Omar al-Ghamrawi, a captivating musician of Egyptian-Palestinian descent, assumes a critical role, being referred to as the “Molotov Maestro” and the “Kalashnikov Conductor.”⁷⁰⁶ reframing Edward Said himself for his political militancy and his disenchanted association with the Palestinian National Council. The other protagonist in the novel, Sharif al-Baroudi's reflection on the quintessence of the colonial approach towards Egypt bears a semblance of *Orientalism*.

⁷⁰⁶ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 30.

For Sharif,

the East holds two attractions for Europe: 1. An Economic attraction: Europe needs materials for its industries, markets for its products and jobs for its men. In the Arab lands it has found all three. 2. A Religious, Historical, Romantic attraction to the land of the Scriptures, of the Ancients, and of Fable. This attraction is born in the European while he is still in his home country. When he comes here, he finds that the land is inhabited by people he does not understand and possibly does not much like. What options are open to him? He may stay and try to ignore them. He may try to change them. He may leave. Or he may try to understand them.⁷⁰⁷

Edward Said extensively elaborates on the first three options, but *The Map of Love* focuses primarily on the fourth option, which revolves around the mutual tolerance and understanding between an Egyptian husband and an Englishwoman representative. The novel delves deeply into historical causes and their contemporary consequences, skillfully employing various correspondences and artifacts like letters, paintings, diary entries, tapestries, and clothing. The story unfolds through the perspective of Amal, the protagonist living in the late twentieth century. Amal embarks on a journey of exploration into the lives of her great-aunt Anna Winterbourne and great-uncle Sharif al-Baroudi (Basha), her ancestors from the early twentieth century. The narrative is presented in the first-person point of view, seamlessly transporting readers between contemporary New York and Egypt in the early 1900s. The plot unravels through the contents of a century-old family trunk containing journals, diaries, and letters, drawing parallels between the present and the past, and bridging the divide between the East and the West. The story centers around Isabel, an American journalist, who discovers

⁷⁰⁷ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 710.

a trunk full of personal letters and journal entries in her dying mother's house in New York. This family archive belongs to her English great-grandmother, Anna Winterbourne, and is written partly in English and partly in Arabic¹⁴⁷. Amal and Isabel are distant cousins, and the narrative effortlessly transitions between late Victorian and Edwardian England and modern-day Cairo. The story unfolds through the perspectives of Amal, Anna, and Layla as narrators.

Out of an orientalist longing for Frederick Lewis's oil canvasses in the South Kensington Museum, Anna Winterbourne eventually marries Omar El Ghamrawi, an Egyptian nationalist. Isabel, a century later, takes pains to travel to Egypt to seek the help of Amal, who translates the contents of the family trunk for her sake, in a geographically parallel movement to Anna's journey to Egypt. It also reverses the conditions bemoaned by Anna a century earlier: "*I have come to believe that the fact that it falls to Englishmen to speak for Egypt is in itself perceived as a weakness; for how can the Egyptians govern themselves, people ask, when they cannot even speak for themselves?*"⁷⁰⁸ The story fluctuates between Anna's letters and Amal's increasing attraction to the reformation of Anna's life. The two principal and contemporary narratives run parallel with this historical search into cross-cultural investigation. The retrospective plot line of *The Map of Love* is primarily structured around the romantic relationships involving the protagonists Anna Winterbourne, Sharif al-Baroudi, and Layla al-Baroudi. These characters grapple with the evolving political and social landscapes that surround them. The novel weaves together three interconnected narratives, each associated with a key female character: Anna Winterbourne, Amal al-Ghamrawi, and Isabel Parkman. The focus lies on two cross-cultural romances that span nearly a century, transcending national and cultural boundaries as well as the limitations of

⁷⁰⁸ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 586.

time and space. The portrayal of "love across countries and seas" collapses these boundaries, offering a compelling exploration of the complexities and enduring power of romantic relationships.⁷⁰⁹

In the year 1900, Lady Anna Winterbourne travels to Egypt, which was under British dominance at the time. During her visit, she engages in a romantic relationship with Sharif Basha al-Baroudi, an Egyptian nationalist-aristocrat and a lawyer who comes from a landowning background. Anna and Sharif spend eleven years together in Cairo, sharing a conjugal life. Moving to the mid-1990s in New York, we encounter Isabel Parkman, the divorced great-granddaughter of Sharif and Anna. Isabel embarks on an affair with Omar al-Ghamrawi, Amal's brother, resulting in the birth of their son, whom they name Sharif.⁷¹⁰ With such family extensions over three continents, the text centres on Amal, who after spending twenty years with her British husband in England, separates from him and restores herself to Egypt.⁷¹¹ Amal, residing in Cairo as a translator, finds it challenging to adapt to her solitary existence. Her children have grown up and left her, further adding to her sense of loneliness. Through her genealogical explorations, Amal becomes disillusioned with her present circumstances and feels apprehensive about what the future holds for her. Anna's descriptions of life evolve through various means, including her correspondence with friends and family in England, entries in her personal journal, and a collection of newspaper clippings. The unfolding story of Anna and Sharif comes to light as Amal al-Ghamrawi, the novel's translator and narrator, and Isabel Parkman delve into the contents of a trunk filled with

⁷⁰⁹ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 516.

⁷¹⁰ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 278–80.

⁷¹¹ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 58–104.

Anna's belongings. This event takes place within the narrative of 1997, adding another layer of discovery and connection to the past.

As Amal reads an entry from Anna's diary, she skilfully intertwines Anna's perspective with her own, blurring the lines between their experiences. Amal describes the scene, saying, "As Anna lifts her eyes from the letter, I perceive Mabrouka, the maid, entering the haramlek."⁷¹² In this moment, Amal not only immerses herself in the exploration of her family history but also transcends the boundaries of time and reality, allowing her imagination to transport her back to a different era. Through her journey into the past, Amal finds a means to engage with broader political issues rather than solely focusing on her personal challenges. Uncovering her family's history becomes a catalyst for her involvement in more significant political matters, expanding her perspective beyond her individual concerns. She muses:

That is the beauty of the past; there it lies on the table: journals, pictures, a candle-glass, a few books of history. You leave it and come back to it and it waits for you—unchanged. You can turn back the pages, look again at the beginning. You can leaf forward and know the end. And you tell the story that they, the people who lived it, could only tell in part.⁷¹²

Amal renounces the pleasures of the past and speaks of the economic crisis and reforms of the present, "paying off Egypt's debts",⁷¹³ the growing domination of Islamism in 1990s Egypt,⁷¹⁴ as well as the contemporary Israel–Palestine conflict, the nexus between

⁷¹² Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 345.

⁷¹³ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 588.

⁷¹⁴ Dina Shehata, *Islamists and Secularists in Egypt: Opposition, Conflict, and Cooperation* (London: Routledge, 2010), 127.

finance and politics with an aim to displacing the Palestinians, and in founding “a state not merely friendly to Europe, but European in substance and Colonial in ideology”⁷¹⁵ in the heart of the Arab lands. With the advent of post-9/11 European demonization of the Arab people and its society, Soueif critiques capitalism and the western pigeonholing of Arab countries.

In the novel, Egypt is sculpted after the 1882 Urabi Revolt, the Omdurman War of 1898, the al-Nahda movement and the Mahdist Revolt in Sudan in 1891.⁷¹⁶ Soueif forms a dual contrapuntal narrative that shapes the novel and the history that it redrafts as a palimpsest.. The villagers of Tawasi in Cairo face difficulties due to a politically repressive establishment. Schools and clinics, which were initially established by Sharif al-Baroudi, are forcibly closed by government soldiers as an act of feudal patronage and paternalism. Amidst these troubling circumstances, 'Am Abu el-Ma'ati, a family friend, visits Amal and delivers a message that the people of Tawasi are struggling to keep the school open. The government suspects that the education provided there may be fostering extremism among the students.¹⁵⁸ In this situation, where the educated elite fails to comprehend the underlying causes of fundamentalism among the rural poor, Amal's decision to visit Tawasi takes on significant political implications. Despite being distanced from the intensified atmosphere of Cairo, Amal recognizes the importance of addressing the issue. The resolution to this critical situation comes about through the involvement of Tareq Atiyya, a childhood neighbor and friend. Tareq wields influence over the governor of the province within the Egyptian government, although it comes at the cost of compromising inclusive national ideals. To Amal's surprise, Tareq intends to employ Israeli agricultural engineers to boost the

⁷¹⁵ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 713.

⁷¹⁶ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 48–178.

productivity of his land, advocating for a pragmatic and alternative understanding of the nation that prioritizes “economics” over “old ideologies.”⁷¹⁷ Tareq retorts: “I am a patriot. I do more for my country by strengthening its economy than I would by sitting in a rut and hoping things will take the course I want somehow.... [T]his isn’t an emotional issue. It’s a practical one.”⁷¹⁸ To him, “everything is determined by economics”.⁷¹⁹

Tareq eschews the sentiment of nationalism and history in influencing the present situation of the nation. In contrast, Amal provides a rebuttal to this changed perspective with the very presence of the documents and historical events kept in Isabel’s trunk, which helps in tracing the primary stages of the growing presence of Jews in Palestine and unlocks the reason for the predicament at the end of the century in the Middle East. Amal’s life is also interspersed with the growing conflict between Palestinians and Israelis as she was born “in the year of Nasser’s revolution”,⁷²⁰ and her mother, a Palestinian, was expelled in 1948 at the formation of the State of Israel. During the battle against Israel, she supported Egyptian forces and fought a fight for the nation-state.

Under the regime of Abdel Nasser, all movements and political parties were prohibited, civil society organizations were taken under corporatist command, and a huge portion of economy had been nationalized. Consequently, there were limited approaches to autonomous societal, political, and economic pluralism, and efforts to question the hegemony of the regime were fiercely muzzled.⁷²¹ In a discussion in Chapter 16 of the novel, Arwa

⁷¹⁷ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 297.

⁷¹⁸ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 297.

⁷¹⁹ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 297.

⁷²⁰ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 173.

⁷²¹ Shehata, *Islamists and Secularists in Egypt*, 20.

Salih (one of the leaders of the student movement of the early 1970s), Deena al-Ulama (a lecturer of mathematics at Cairo University and a volunteer for the Legal Aid Bureau and the Committee for the Support of the Palestinian people), and Ramzi Yusuf (an old professor of Amal's) discuss the "drawbacks" of Nasser's national project and its failure. Since the people have "[a] will it has to have a certain amount of space and freedom, freedom to question everything: religion, politics, sex";⁷²² they also argue about the crisis over the "Israeli dominance over the area that they like to call the Middle East".⁷²³ Isabel Parkman contends:

We were a part of a dying Ottoman Empire. Our Khedive Ismail loved modernism and Europe ... He likes the Suez Canal project and so he borrows money. He is not careful where he borrows. He borrows from Europe—from Britain and the Rothschilds and France ... "Europe is strong and moving outwards—"a huge expansive gesture with the arms—" colonialism is the spirit of the age. Their old enemy the Ottoman Empire is dying. So they use the Khedive's debts to expand into our part of it. Into Egypt. The rest is history.⁷²⁴

Under Anwar Sadat's leadership, Egypt embarked on a process of *infitah*, which involved opening up the economy and dismantling the social agreement that had been in place during Gamal Abdel Nasser's centralized economy. This economic transformation quickly shifted Egypt towards international capital. According to Galal Amin, during the early stages of *infitah*, the poor were not disheartened by the accumulation of wealth by a few individuals. However, frustration began to seep into the lower and middle classes when they became aware of the origins of this wealth and realized that "all the doors were closed to the poor."¹⁶⁷

⁷²² Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 341.

⁷²³ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 330.

⁷²⁴ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 331.

The primary source of this wealth was "the appropriation of public property"¹⁶⁸ and the "plundering already existing assets," specifically state funds and the public sector. As a result, the measure of success shifted away from academic or professional pursuits and social or political status. Instead, success was defined by the accumulation of wealth and "the ability to get one's hands on state property."¹⁶⁹ This economic climate fostered a shift in priorities, with the focus being on personal wealth acquisition and gaining control over state resources. The pursuit of material wealth and access to state property became the primary markers of success in this new economic landscape." Until the second half of the 1950s, the increasing rate of industrialization, the pace of economic development, and the redistribution of income beyond the agricultural sector did not begin, and did not survive much longer than 1956 to 1967 in the Nasserist era. This period witnessed the five-year plan for the period 1960 to 1965, the nationalization of the Suez Canal following an industrial program in 1958, and the sweeping nationalization of commercial and industrial firms, and insurance companies and banks, including some large retail firms.⁷²⁵

Soueif, in a precipitous move, brings in the real political fractions with some historical references with the portrayal of the 1906 "events at Denshawai"—a clash between *fellaheen*/peasants and English officers.⁷²⁶ On 13 June 1906, some British officers led by Major Pine-Coffin, in the Egyptian village of Denshawai carried out some pigeon shooting, which culminated in casualties among both the villagers of Denshawai and the British occupation army. According to Soueif, British imperialism in Egypt had far-reaching consequences that deeply affected Egyptian society. It served as a stark example for the people of the early twentieth century, revealing the consolidation of power in the hands of the

⁷²⁵ Amin, *Egypt in the Era of Hosni Mubarak*, 50–51.

⁷²⁶ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 625.

strong, the willingness to subvert justice to maintain that power, and a belief in racial superiority. One particularly shocking incident that illustrates these dynamics occurred in Denshawai. During this incident, one British officer was killed and around 250 individuals were arrested. The subsequent legal proceedings resulted in severe punishments: four men were sentenced to death, nine received penal servitude, three were sentenced to prison and flogging, and five were subjected to flogging alone⁷²⁷. Among the Egyptian fellaheen, five were wounded and one lost their life. What is notable is that even before any formal investigation had taken place, British officers issued a statement that praised their own colleagues while placing blame on the fellaheen for the events. This prejudiced stance was taken without allowing for a fair examination of the facts surrounding the incident.⁷²⁷ Hannah Arendt's inquiry into the political tools of global conquest and expansionism and imperialism provides the traces of two important tools, namely scientific bureaucracy and scientific racism.⁷²⁸ The former applies to chiefly Muslim countries, such as Sudan, Egypt, and Algeria; the latter, to some people whose manners and looks were considered frightful, shocking, non-human, and distinctly dissimilar to Europeans. What Arendt recognizes is the bureaucratic efficiency of England's civilizing approach in Egypt and other Muslim nations, establishing a link between the general discourse of modernity and a secular form of governance. In the context of imperialism, the association between modernity and administration projects a transformation from savagery to so-called "enlightenment" Bureaucracy, as a tool of government, becomes the defining line that segregates European human society from Arab-Muslim sub-human society. Lord Cromer, after his twenty years of service as British commissioner in Egypt, authored two volumes that significantly resonate with Arendt's

⁷²⁷ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 625.

⁷²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1975), 207.

concept of scientificity. These volumes shed light on European colonialism's treatment of modern bureaucracy as a means of validating colonial aggression and encroachment:

Looking to the special intricacies of the Egyptian system of government, to the license of the local press, to the ignorance and credulity of the mass of the Egyptian population, to the absence of Egyptian statesmen capable of controlling the Egyptian society and of guiding the very complicated machine of government, it appears to me impossible to blind oneself to the fact that the Egypt of today is very different from the Egypt of the preoccupation days. A return to personal rule of the oriental type would create a revolution. It may be that at some future period the Egyptians may be rendered capable of governing themselves without the presence of a foreign army in their midst, and without foreign guidance in civil and military Affairs; but that period is far distant ... It is a contradiction in terms to describe a country as self-governing when all its most important laws are passed, not by any of its inhabitants or by any institutions existing within its own confines, but by the governments and legislative institutions of sixteen foreign powers.⁷²⁹

Cromer repeatedly accentuates the important shift in administration his regime had imported with a “civilizing project”, and its dissimilarity from an “Islamic” or “oriental” type of rule. When it comes to the question of civilization, Cromer is perceived as a product of the Eurocentric episteme. *The Map of Love* does not separate the public from the private, and serves as a national allegory within the frame of typical nationalist literature, where “the story of the private individual destiny”, writes Fredric Jameson, “is always an allegory of the

⁷²⁹ Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, vol. 2 (London: The Macmillan Co., 1908), 567–85.

embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society”.⁷³⁰ George Bernard Shaw, the famous Irish playwright, also voices this incident in his exhaustive “Preface” to *John Bull’s Other Island*. For G. B. Shaw, Denshawai is a mere *isti’āra* (“borrowing” in Arabic), an allegory for the violence that military English people had executed in Ireland.⁷³¹ Denshawai was important for Ireland as it could “help rally world opinion against the abuses of the Empire”.⁷³² Though Shaw agrees that his Irish identity had entailed in him an “implacable hostility to English domination”,⁷³³ he berates the barbarism of the British at Denshawai. He contests the ridiculous idea of Sir Edward Grey, the foreign secretary at the time, that the event was pre-planned as part of “a gigantic Moslem plot to rise against Christendom in the name of the Prophet and sweep Christendom out of Africa and Asia by a colossal second edition of the Indian Mutiny”.⁷³⁴ Mohammad R. Salama, in his book, *Islam, Orientalism and Intellectual History*, speaks about Soueif’s use of the incident by critiquing that *The Map of Love*

opens up a literary space that questions memory and forgetting ... the fictional pashas of her novel appear to draw attention to the perspective of Turkish–Muslim aristocracy so that Ottoman Islam, too, might have a role in the redemption of the moment of colonial aggression. It is from this small window that Soueif’s novel reconstructs Denshawai as a history of Ottoman imperial redemption.⁷³⁵

⁷³⁰ Fredric Jameson, “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88.

⁷³¹ George Bernard Shaw, *John Bull’s Other Island* (London: Constable, 1960).

⁷³² Mohammad R. Salama, *Islam, Orientalism and Intellectual History: Modernity and the Politics of Exclusion since Ibn Khaldūn* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 182.

⁷³³ Shaw, *John Bull’s Other Island*, 63.

⁷³⁴ Shaw, *John Bull’s Other Island*, 62.

⁷³⁵ Salama, *Islam, Orientalism and Intellectual History*, 186.

Salama also argues that “the novel’s attempt at historical redemption is based on the false assumption that the English occupation shattered the Islamic past of Egypt”.⁷³⁶ He simultaneously criticizes the pashas who were guilty of “much barbarism” too.⁷³⁷

Marxists maintain that history consists of a "series of class struggles based on economic conflict," and sometimes these struggles entail "changes in political cartography." According to Perry Anderson, there is ambiguity in Marx's definition of "class," but he argues that the "secular struggle between classes is ultimately resolved at the political—not at the economic or cultural—level of society."¹⁸⁴ To explore this "political level," Anderson suggests a typology rather than a strict sequence of absolutism, stating that "periodization" alone should not be the sole criterion for historical analysis. He highlights the presence of recurrent absolutism in different European states, including "Spanish absolutism, English absolutism in the seventeenth century, French absolutism in the eighteenth, Prussia in the nineteenth, and Russia in the twentieth centuries." Anderson emphasizes that while the temporal dimension is important, it is necessary to consider significant thematic determinants before embracing truncated historical theories that reduce absolutism to a simple class struggle. By taking into account these thematic factors, a more nuanced understanding of historical processes can be achieved. Anderson goes further to say that the Ottoman Empire “always remained largely a stranger to European culture, as an Islamic intrusion into Christendom, and has posed intractable problems of presentation to unitary histories of the continent to this day.”⁷³⁸

⁷³⁶ Salama, *Islam, Orientalism and Intellectual History*, 186.

⁷³⁷ Salama, *Islam, Orientalism and Intellectual History*, 186.

⁷³⁸ Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 397.

Soueif's presentation of the alienation of Egyptian citizens, under the guise of paternalistic structures of a "civilizing" mission and Empire, can be understood as a fundamental condition of being as projected by Emmanuel Levinas. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas critiques western philosophy and ontology (metaphysics)—an abatement of the other to the same by the meddling of a neutral and middle term which establishes the understanding of being.⁷³⁹ He finds western philosophy as an *egology*.⁷⁴⁰ For Levinas, Heidegger's ontology as the first philosophy is the philosophy of injustice and power.⁷⁴¹ He opines:

Ontology studies the being. Ontology reduces the other into the same. To theory as comprehension of beings, the general title ontology is appropriate. Ontology, which reduces the other to the same, promotes freedom—the freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other.⁷⁴²

... Universality is another inhumanity. – A philosophy of power, ontology is, as the first philosophy which does not call into question the same, a philosophy of injustice.... Being hidden by existents, Heideggerian's ontology, which subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relation with Being in general, remains under obedience to the anonymous, and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny.⁷⁴³

For Levinas, inhumanity is the abatement of the otherness of the other. Levinas' examination of the radical and irreducible "other" as an infinitive being that cannot be totalized, and is

⁷³⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1992), 43.

⁷⁴⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 44.

⁷⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

⁷⁴² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42.

⁷⁴³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46–47.

beyond the knowledge-measuring cogitation registers. The external that is restricted in language and in expression,⁷⁴⁴ serves the internal that is transcendent. The face which is approached is the “seen” of the unseen. Levinas dumps the terminology of Husserl and Heidegger, where both of them summate the otherness of the other into the sameness of the sovereign self. The Levinasian intervention in western ontology premised on the primacy of “Being” (as in Heidegger) was an extension of onto-political fields of totalization and co-option, wherein the Heideggerian topology became fecund grounds for the rise of National Socialism in Nazi Germany. Ethics as the first philosophy thus intervenes in the larger political affective field of geopolitical determinism, and the inability to read the otherness of the other within the a priori fields of the western *langue* of nationalism and the secular nation-state. The fallacies of the implication of totalization in Egypt with the rise of Egyptian nationalism, the Israel–Palestine conflict, and British imperialism draw attention to the correspondence between early twentieth-century colonialism and the contemporary precarious predicaments that “are bound to cause a rift between the Jews on the one hand and the Christians and Moslems on the other”.⁷⁴⁵

Soueif narrates the Denshawai violence in her text through her protagonist Anna Winterbourne, whose diary entries exhibit contrasting views on the event, compared to figures such as Cromer. She writes: “*Mr Matchell [Advisor to the Ministry of the Interior] has already put out a statement praising the officers and blaming the fellaheen for the events—and this before any investigation has taken place.*”⁷⁴⁶ In addition, Soueif depicts how the officers at Denshawai disregarded the villagers' plea to conduct their shooting away from the

⁷⁴⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

⁷⁴⁵ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 662.

⁷⁴⁶ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 625.

vicinity of the villagers' homes. Furthermore, she makes a contentious claim that the assault on the officers was premeditated.⁷⁴⁷ Commenting on the Israel–Palestine conflict, Anna further points out that the Palestine Office in Jaffa is “really a colonial office organizing the purchase of land which from the day of its purchase is never to be allowed to pass into non-Jewish hands”.⁷⁴⁸ Initially unaware of the growing turmoil in Palestine, Anna gradually becomes acquainted with the concept of Zionism as a colonial endeavor that has systematically displaced the Palestinians from their homeland. Later on, Sharif and his friend Shukri Bey express their anger regarding the United States' involvement in the Zionist project, referencing a meeting in Milwaukee that initiated the collection of "contributions from Jews in all countries to buy Palestine from the Sultan."¹⁹⁶ Shukri Bey observes the settlers colluding with the US to distance themselves from the daily lives of Arabs. He says: “What are they doing in the midst of us?”⁷⁴⁹

As Amal moves away from Anna Winterbourne's life and delves into the current crisis in Palestine, her past love interest Tareq Bey raises the topic of their failed marriage plans. Amal expresses her disappointment with the person he has become, stating, "You're the one who's thinking of doing business with the Israelis." In response, he dismisses the Israeli issue, emphasizing a personal perspective. Amal counters with the statement, "the personal is the political."¹⁹⁸ Aware of the divide between herself and Tareq, she refuses to confine herself to the realm of the "private" any longer. Through narratives of events like Denshawai, Palestine, and colonial violence, Soueif explores imperial history and contemporary politics through genealogical quests that reflect on the future of cross-cultural confrontations. In this novel,

⁷⁴⁷ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 626–627.

⁷⁴⁸ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 662.

⁷⁴⁹ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 467.

Soueif critically examines Nasserism as a pan-Arab anti-Western modernity with its own limitations. In the 1960s, Anouar Abdel-Malek, the Egyptian sociologist, observed that during the height of pan-Arabism, the Arab-Muslim world faced vulnerability to the Western political and economic system, putting its cultural identity at risk under the influence of European imperialism. He pointed out that this threat was evident through deliberate barriers imposed to discourage unfiltered and direct economic relations. According to Abdel-Malek, unless Arab cultures reinforce their resources and establish distinct market mechanisms, there is a likelihood of their gradual decline.⁷⁵⁰

Francis Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington, and Bernard Lewis perceive the world's globalization and the dissemination of a capitalist economy as leading to the backwardization of Islam and the universalization of the West. They view both the West and Islam as civilizations, and their speculative characterization includes terms like “the clash of civilizations” and “the end of history” within the framework of modernity and socio-historical backgrounds. While the authors provide historical contexts to support their claims about Islam, they fail to adequately examine how the characteristics that distinguish the West from the rest of the world have emerged. Arif Dirlik counters Huntington's argument of the “clash of civilizations” by critiquing essentialism and exposing the logic of a de-historicized Americo-Eurocentrism:

He reifies civilizations into culturally homogeneous and spatially mappable entities, insists on drawing impassable boundaries between them, and proposes a fortress Euro-America to defend Western civilization against the intrusion of ... unassimilable others. What is remarkable about his views is his disavowal of the involvement of the

⁷⁵⁰ See, Anwar Abdel Malek, *Dirāsāt fī al-Thaqāfaal-Waṭaniyya*[Studies in National Culture] (1963), n.p., see also, Abdel Malek, *Nahḍ at Miṣr*[Egypt's Renaissance] (1983), n.p. and *Modern Arab Political Thought*, ed. Charles Issawi, trans. Ihsān ‘Abbās (Princeton, N.J.: Kingston Press, 1983).

“West” in other civilization areas ... [he denies] the legacies of colonialism, [and insists] that whatever has happened to other societies has happened as a consequence of their indigenous values and cultures.⁷⁵¹

In contrast, Soueif counters this rhetoric of a clash of civilizations and sees Egypt as a “mezzaterra... a meeting-point of many cultures and traditions.” She argues that Egypt still has the potential to serve as an enlightening prototype for the West:

Where the Arab media is interested in the West it tends to focus on what the West is producing today: politics, technology and art, for example—particularly as those connect to the Arab world. The Arab media has complete access to English and other European languages and to the world’s news agencies. Interpretative or analytic essays are mostly by writers who read the European and American press and have experience of the West. The informed Arab public does not view the West as one monolithic unit; it is aware of dissent, of the fact that people often do not agree with policy, of the role of the judiciary. Above all, an Arab assumes that a Westerner is, at heart, very much like her—or him.⁷⁵²

Arab reformers of the *nahda*, according to Soueif, selectively absorbed European concepts and “a few Westerners” (Soueif quotes Wilfrid Blunt and Duff Gordon) fairly occupied Egyptian (multi)cultural space.⁷⁵³ The romance between Sharif and Anna is also administered in French, since Anna’s Arabic is not competent at the beginning. Sharif tells Anna, “[French]

⁷⁵¹ Arif Dirlik, “Is There a History after Eurocentrism?: Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 42 (Spring 1999): 17.

⁷⁵² Soueif, *Mezzaterra*, 3–4.

⁷⁵³ Soueif, *Mezzaterra*, 6.

makes foreigners of us both. It's good that I should have to come some way to meet you".⁷⁵⁴ Sharif's mother also warns her son to "never burden [Anna] with the [colonial] guilt of her country",⁷⁵⁵ telling him that his wife "will be your guest and a stranger under your protection".⁷⁵⁶ Developing a gendered and cultural otherness at the beginning of their romance, Sharif marvels, "would they always hold fast to what they imagined of each other?"⁷⁵⁷ The brittleness of cross-cultural friendship is also alluded to with reference to Amal's collapsed ties with an Englishman. The murder of Sharif by his political rivals is intricately associated with his marriage to an Englishwoman, Anna, who resolves to raise their daughter outside Egypt; also, the relationship of Omar with Isabel in the narrative remains unsettled. Soueif reshapes Egyptian history through economies of trans-linguistic and transnational inclination, in spite of the fact of Amal's satirization, "that tired phrase, 'the palimpsest that is Egypt?'"⁷⁵⁸ We find in a conversation between Amal, Isabel, and the doorman's wife Tahiyaa, the trace of inter- and trans-linguistic translation:

"Hallo", Tayihha says loudly in English, straightening up and smiling, raising her hand to her head, miming a greeting in case Isabel doesn't understand. "Hello", says Isabel. "Izzayel-sehha?"

Tahiyaa's eyes widen as she turns to me: "She speaks Arabic!" "See the cleverness", I say.

⁷⁵⁴ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 233.

⁷⁵⁵ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 418.

⁷⁵⁶ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 418.

⁷⁵⁷ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 403.

⁷⁵⁸ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 96.

“Yakhtibrawaaleiha. She looks intelligent ... Is she married? ... Like the moon and not married? Why? Don't they have men in Amreeka?”⁷⁵⁹

Here, English of numerous pronunciations, as well as Egyptian Arabic, are portrayed through Amal's distinct selectively translating outlook which brings in Soueif's effort to embrace non-middle and upper-class languages, exemplified in the excerpt when Amal goes back to her Upper Egypt village. Amal, at the end of the text says, “[i]t is so difficult really to translate from one language to another, from one culture into another; almost impossible really”. Soueif formulates her “own particular, postcolonial brand of English”⁷⁶⁰ by positing the English language and shaping the basic ways she deconstructs the “nation”. Therefore, Amal enters what Wail S. Hassan says is “the construction of cultural identities from [an] in-between space”⁷⁶¹ consciously, and is aware of the inexorable translational failures rendered in practice. The processes of linguistic and cultural bonds of the cross-assimilation of Anna, Amal, and Isabel epitomizes Kamuf's design of love, in which “some internalization of the other has already begun ... There is at once a division, an other within the self who is not the self, and no division, the other internalized by the self as the self.”⁷⁶² Linguistic mediation plays an important role in the production of cultural understanding and uniformity of experiences. Using French is a neutral process of conversation between Anna and her husband since “it makes foreigners of [them] both”⁷⁶³ and binds them in seeking words which

⁷⁵⁹ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 116.

⁷⁶⁰ Susan Muaddi Darraj, “Narrating England and Egypt: The Hybrid Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif,” *Studies in the Humanities* 30 (2003): 1.

⁷⁶¹ Wail S Hassan, “Agency and Translational Literature: Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*,” *Publication of the Modern Language Association* 121, no. 3 (2006): 754.

⁷⁶² Peggy Kamuf, “Deconstruction and Love,” in *Deconstructions: A User's Guide*, ed. Nicholas Royle (London: Palgrave, 2000), 160.

⁷⁶³ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 233.

outshine their respective prejudices, that, as Soueif and Said agree, are discursively enforced and linguistically motivated. Both Isabel and Anna begin to learn Arabic. Later, it is investigated that the garden becomes a linguistic construct, not a physical space, which can be rediscovered: “‘al-Jannah’—Paradise, the place that is hidden—... ‘junaynah,’ garden, is little paradise”.⁷⁶⁴ However, Amal is powerless, as one of Amal’s friends, a group of elite intellectuals puts it, “[we] sit in the Atelier or the Grillon and talk to each other. And when we write, we write for each other. We have absolutely no connection with the people”.⁷⁶⁵ From this precarious position, Amal seeks solace in the past, whose “beauty” is that “[y]ou leave it and come back to it and it waits for you—unchanged. You can turn back the pages, look again at the beginning. You can leaf forward and know the end. And you can tell the story that they, the people who lived it, could only tell in part.”⁷⁶⁶

Ahdaf Soueif in *The Map of Love* is troubled by the inescapable political correctness of economic and cultural imperialism and acts of violence against the Egyptian people’s intersectional identities (individual and plural) that generate patterns of resolution and mobility in a teleological or open-ended manner. Soueif destabilizes the imperial narrative of Arab-Muslim domesticity and culture by aligning with post-imperial politics within the context of domestic and familial relations of “a fertile land; an area of overlap, where one culture shaded into other, where echoes and reflections added depth and perspective, where differences were interesting rather than threatening because they were fore-grounded against

⁷⁶⁴ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 728.

⁷⁶⁵ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 333.

⁷⁶⁶ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 345.

a backdrop of affinities”.⁷⁶⁷ For Soueif, “the power of culture against the culture of power”

⁷⁶⁸ invokes Edward Said , who brilliantly sums up her work:

Soueif does not fall for East versus West, or Arab versus European formulas. Instead, she works them patiently ... Soueif renders the experience of crossing over from one side to the other, then back again, indefinitely, without rancour or preachiness ... The fine thing, though, is that Soueif can present such a *hegira* ... thereby showing that what has become almost formulaic to the Arab (as well as Western) discourse of the Other need not always be the case. In fact, there can be generosity, and vision, and overcoming barriers, and, finally, human existential integrity.⁷⁶⁹

Soueif—with the personal and the political—straddling the late nineteenth to early twentieth-century period in Egypt, explores border epistemes of intimate relations in subverting the historicity of the text with imperial discursive structures for a strategic and positivist use of it before the 9/11 perspective. Grappling with ideas about history, mathematics, politics, and religion, Rahman and Soueif, in *In the Light of What We Know* and in *The Map of Love*, make us see the financial intricacies of Eurocentric modernity and globalization by representing the expansion of the neo-empire and its domination through American belligerence in Afghanistan and the British neocolonial underpinnings of territorial precarity in Egypt. Under the garb of a civilizational process of Third World nations, covert economic purposes are furnished and restructured with an aim to form “another country in the image of its hopes for

⁷⁶⁷ Soueif, *Mezzaterra*, 7–8.

⁷⁶⁸ Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 253.

⁷⁶⁹ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2001), 410.

itself”.⁷⁷⁰ Civilizational undercurrents and the building of empire before and after 9/11, in the two novels, are characterized by the axiom of “the rights of the self”,⁷⁷¹ and the untutored nationalism of history and Islamism where, according to Soueif, “Everybody is a suspect”⁷⁷² by connecting the economic liberalisation of *Infitah* to the rise of political Islam in Egypt during the 1980s and 1990s imperial archive. Rahman finds that the West “fight their wars of reconstruction under the banner of *let him be* or *let her be*” rather than “*let them be*”⁷⁷³ in the globalized structure of the world economy and international consciousness, where enlightenment comes with differences, where the “pungent admixture of alcohol and human bodily order” was not a part of local culture, rather “[i]t came from another world”.⁷⁷⁴ The economy of the world is appropriated through investment in growing finances by NGO advisers/workers in unlikely isolated places in the negotiation of the cultural flows of *financescape* and *ethnoscape*⁷⁷⁵ while helping development activities to aid backward areas like Mazar-e-Sharif, Kabul, and Kandahar.⁷⁷⁶ The echoes of a troubling past, on the other hand, are heard in present-day Egypt, where the Arab unrest with the aspects of imperialism and historical focus is portrayed by Soueif. As Said observes, the people without history, “people on whom the economy and polity sustained by empire depend, but whose reality has

⁷⁷⁰ Rahman, *In the Light*, 244.

⁷⁷¹ Rahman, *In the Light*, 395.

⁷⁷² Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 647.

⁷⁷³ Rahman, *In the Light*, 396.

⁷⁷⁴ Rahman, *In the Light*, 634.

⁷⁷⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

⁷⁷⁶ Rahman, *In the Light*, 46.

not historically and culturally required attention”,⁷⁷⁷ have withstood the Empire from the beginning. Both Rahaman and Soueif emphasize the resistance of war-afflicted people in the transnational consciousness of the Third World, questioning the sanctity of “playing the game”⁷⁷⁸ in the name of procuring finances for global economic enterprises and war.

⁷⁷⁷ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 75.

⁷⁷⁸Rahman, *In the Light*, 394.

Conclusion

By revisiting the structural role of the community within the existing British society, I have attempted to understand the interstices of the Islamic umma based on shared divine consciousness. It thrives not in a spurious homogeneity but on the transitions and indeterminacies that are shared within the post-Enlightenment liberal ethos gesturing towards a more inclusive and variegated understanding in the post-9/11 global cultural imaginary. The concept of normative agency is exemplified through the creation and dissolution of communitarian spaces, which becomes a symbol for the limitations imposed by secular nationalism in politics. It highlights the significance of pietistic practices in shaping our perception of the public sphere. The new imaginaries of public good in tandem with modern liberal conceptions of the public sphere from the vantage point of religious resurgence unsettle the disciplinary borders of European modernity. Foregrounding the realms of religious pluralism within modernity, the research has tried to intervene in the tapestry of the “emergence” of the widespread resurgence of faith in the post-9/11 era. The inference of negotiations on cultural underpinnings provides a base for the profound shift in the manifold modes of secularism, fundamentalism, and violence during and after the Rushdie Affair in 1989.

The viability of this study relies on the contemporary self-awareness facilitated by the discursive dynamics within the secular public sphere. This sphere exists within a diverse society marked by contentious and idealized interactions between “Islam and the West.” The reframing of the dividing line opens up the possibilities of religious and secular layers conforming the British Muslims to the non-western “habitations” of modernity.⁷⁷⁹ The

⁷⁷⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

research provides both normative and socio-historic yardsticks for “alternative” modernities in unfolding secular frameworks. It also highlights the novel and creative contours of publicness to preserve its alleged purity and cosmopolitan distinction under the threatening images and signs of difference. The new dynamics of prejudicious democratic pluralism envision a pluralism beyond nationalism. It also gestures towards a cosmopolitan worldliness that is not retroactively conditioned by the demands of western global capitalism and its predominant currency of modernity.

I argue that British Muslim identity is not necessarily the “clash of cultural values”⁷⁸⁰; 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”.⁷⁸¹ 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 people⁷⁸² 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,

⁷⁸⁰ Anshuman Mondal, *Young British Muslim Voices* (Oxford: Greenwood, 2008), 74.

⁷⁸¹ N. T. Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁷⁸² See Philip Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim* (London: Continuum, 2007); Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Clive D. Field. “Young British Muslims since 9/11: A Composite Attitudinal Profile,” *Religion, State & Society* 39, nos. 2/3 (June/September 2011). <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2011.577201>.

generalizations of being a Muslim, and attenuated respective faiths, the “felt awareness”⁷⁸³ of British Muslims incur the otherwise subversive signification of the dominant metaphors of Islamic reality.

The everyday sense of belonging and piety exemplify the resurgence of religious faith as a transcendent symbol representing the fundamental truths of “home” and the stability it offers in the complexities of modern life. I agree with the idea that an internal sense of contradiction plays a crucial role in fostering the revival of religious belief as a necessary foundation for finding inner peace. This revival is deeply rooted in the core declaration of faith (“the shahada”) and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Thinking through the geopolitics of suspicion and the all-out war on terror, it (the possibility of religious affiliations) identifies British Muslims (in particular) into a category of “risky body”⁷⁸⁴ as a potential monster. The ontologized condition of the risky Muslim body is situated within the present oppositional framing of “we” and “them”. And the idea of monstrosity that exacerbates how white anxieties and “moral panic”⁷⁸⁵ over “terrorism” and migrant “invasion” reinscribe the supreme value of Britishness surfaced as an ideal category.

The prioritization of allegiance to the global umma, even at the expense of religious profiling, is evident in various events and policies such as the Muslim Ban, the detention of Muslim men following the 2001 attacks, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, the utilization of Guantánamo Bay prison for housing Muslim men, and the

⁷⁸³ Anshuman A. Mondal, “Researching Young Muslim Lives in Contemporary Britain”, in *Young British Muslims: Between Rhetoric and Realities*, ed. Sadek Hamid (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 23.

⁷⁸⁴ C. Aradau, “The Perverse Politics of Four-Letter Words: Risk And Pity in the Securitisation of Human Trafficking”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 2 (2004): 251–277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298040330020101>

⁷⁸⁵ Gaia Giuliani, *Monsters, Catastrophes and the Anthropocene: A Postcolonial Critique* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 5.

implementation of the domestic surveillance program Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). These actions stem from a “religio cultural rejection of western modernity”⁷⁸⁶ based on religio-cultural grounds, aiming to counter the rise of extremism within the public sphere. However, the resurgence of an increasing “Muslim consciousness”⁷⁸⁷ poses a risk of essentializing both Muslims and Christians, thus reinforcing a homogeneous loop of community identity. This sense of belonging that defines the contours of communitarian space connotes the transnational imaginings, as Modood argues, that the Fourth National Survey “found that minority ethnic individuals, including those born and raised in Britain, strongly associated with their ethnic and family origins; there was very little erosion of group identification down the generations”.⁷⁸⁸ Similar to ethnic affiliation, the subscription to a group is a mobilizing force, as the transnational community based on the “shared perception” of a “community under attack and require defence” worldwide.⁷⁸⁹ It also affords the room for “radicals” to aggravate the ignorant habit of framing the individual into collective possibilities in resituating the mutual commitment to one another. Such a notion of “community” runs counter to the more capacious and all-encompassing affirmation of neighbourliness through the discourse of a *tawhidi* world view to bring people together in delinking historical and political consciousness.

⁷⁸⁶ Arun Kundnani, *Spooked: How Not to Prevent Violent Extremism* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 2009), 39.

⁷⁸⁷ Nasar Meer, *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism: The Rise of Muslim Consciousness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁷⁸⁸ Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 194.

⁷⁸⁹ Dale F. Eickelman and James P. Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 146.

I demonstrate the radical possibilities as well as the contradictions, absences, and ruptures in British Muslims in a great deal that blur the boundaries of what are sometimes easily glossed as “religious” and “secular” activism. The research reveals the paradoxes and fissures within the ways that views “British Muslim” identity as a compatible one with liberal multiculturalism and neoliberal democracy, if performed by the aspects of belief (*‘aqida*) incumbent on the virtuous Muslim subject in general. The informed understanding of *din* is mutually reinforcing with *tawhīdi* reality—the exclusive Divine Unicity. The Qur’anic reality remains unmourned and creates a space where different projects of modernity are discussed, disputed, dismantled, and put together again in bringing about the learned rubric of religious faith.

Islam that is often debated from outside, though not within, is an aggressive, radical version—a rejection of values, a threat to be unlearned. In other words, Enlightenment modernity’s global takeover of the public sphere is not neutral and free of power relations in narrating the polar narratives of faith and threat between a familiar sign and an ostentatious one. Muslim practices are neither exclusively religious nor cultural; rather, the daily lives of Muslims hinge on the modalities through which the nation state should negotiate the normative adherents of religious faith as contingent democratic machinery. The believers as visible citizens in the public sphere that unsettles the “subjective aspect of faith”⁷⁹⁰ beyond space and time are rendered outside the palpable presence of modernity. Jacques Derrida’s suggestion of the religious stratum reminds us that the private and public space, citizen-subject, and the sovereign state are “theologico-political”.⁷⁹¹ The appeal to the possibilities of

⁷⁹⁰ Nilüfer Göle, *The Daily Lives of Muslims: Islam and Public Confrontation in Contemporary Europe*, trans. Jacqueline Lerescu (London: Zed Books, 2017), 61.

⁷⁹¹ Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone”, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 60.

religious faith nurture all social intersubjectivity and “every act of language and every address to the other”.⁷⁹² In addition to that, Derrida also goes further by saying that reason itself can only allow faith as the “mystical foundation of authority”.⁷⁹³ The very basis of justice and law entails a “call to faith”. According to Derrida, without the elementary interface of religious faith, “there would neither be ‘social bond’ nor address of the other ... neither convention nor institution, nor constitution, nor sovereign state, nor law”.⁷⁹⁴ The supposed locus of this elementary faith is, in its essence, the “elementary condition, the milieu of the religious if not religion itself”.⁷⁹⁵

The conceptual texture of the *umma* that shows the inclusivity of social difference stands unguarded on different occasions. This is exemplified by the Bradford book-burning incidents in the name of protests against the contemporary liberal narrative about “the Rushdie affair”, the killing of a teacher in the 2005 Danish cartoon controversy, and the recent (in 2022) brutal attack on novelist Salman Rushdie at a public lecture in New York. These attacks infuse and spill the “fault-lines within Islam” lying so deep that Kamila Shamsie finds that the harmonious pan-Islamic *umma* is “no more than an illusion”.⁷⁹⁶ Shamsie recognizes that the response to a perceived offence is primarily a political phenomenon as she touches the base by holding that “in order to understand what’s going on, it is essential to understand the national politics and history of those countries whose citizens

⁷⁹² Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge”, 56.

⁷⁹³ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge”, 57.

⁷⁹⁴ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge”, 80.

⁷⁹⁵ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge”, 81.

⁷⁹⁶ Kamila Shamsie, *Offence: The Muslim Case* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2009), 15.

are involved in the protests".⁷⁹⁷ Saba Mahmood provides an analysis of Muslim religious distress as a form of "moral injury," characterized by an emotional trauma rooted in the deep attachment to the Prophet Muhammad, particularly in relation to the Danish cartoon controversy. She contends,

While some of them could see the lurking racism behind the cartoons, it was the religious dimension of the Muslim protest that remained troubling. Thus, even when there was recognition that Muslim religious sensibilities were not properly accommodated in Europe, there was nonetheless an inability to understand the sense of injury expressed by so many Muslims.⁷⁹⁸

According to Saba Mahmood, the significance of religiosity observed in "Muslim reactions to the cartoons" does not arise solely from a perception of transgressing "the law," but "against a structure of affect, a *habitus*, that feels wounded".⁷⁹⁹ The emotional distress felt by believers is rooted in their embodied practices and virtues, which are not solely influenced by cultural, historical, and traditional *habitus*, but rather by the tawhidic paradigm of Islam. This paradigm is founded upon the essential Islamic doctrine of tawhid, which emphasizes the absolute and unconditional oneness of God and its incompatibility with other representations or depictions. The subsequent layers in this framework of *din* include the absolute trust in God (*al tawakkul Allah*), the consciousness of God (*taqwa*), hope and fear, Divine decree (*qadar*), belief system (*aqeedah*) and knowledge of Islam. The virtues of *tawakkul*, *tawhid*,

⁷⁹⁷ Shamsie, *Offence*, 12.

⁷⁹⁸ Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?", in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, ed. Talal Asad et al. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2009), 68.

⁷⁹⁹ Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect", 78.

and negation of the *nafs* (to desire, to esteem) hold the individual subjectivity to the communitarian belonging with particulars of faith and conformation.

When examining the religious resurgence depicted in certain contemporary British Muslim fiction, the exploration of faith and religious identity has traditionally been overshadowed by the categorization of “religious criticism” versus “religion as identity politics.”⁸⁰⁰ However, there has been a recent shift in addressing the gaps in postcolonial discussions of identity by acknowledging religion as a valid and significant subject of inquiry. This shift invites a more nuanced exploration of the role of religion in shaping individual and collective identities. The growing visibility of religious markers, whose visible presence in the public sphere forms an impasse where “alternative value-systems to those of the west”, are silenced.⁸⁰¹ And the recognition of religious faiths’ “metaphysical and epistemological commitments”⁸⁰² necessitates the voluntary reappraisal and reinscribing of the believers’ thought, though not as blind engagement, but as a response to European modernity. In validating the value of faith under “the democratic state’s response to diversity”,⁸⁰³ the normative terrain of public life thrives on the rethinking of concomitant religious subjects compatible with the liberal political rule. By highlighting discussions surrounding the revival of religious faith within the Islamic public sphere, I place particular emphasis on the significance of the Islamic tradition of *ijtihad*, which pertains to the practice of independent reasoning (which is important in discussing the realm of faith and reason), the

⁸⁰⁰ Edward Said. “Gods That Always Fail”, in *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

⁸⁰¹ Robert J.C. Young. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 338.

⁸⁰² Mahmood, “Religious Reason and Secular Affect”, 91.

⁸⁰³ Charles Taylor, “What Does Secularism Mean?” in *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays*, ed. Charles Taylor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 310.

modern differentiated structures of liberal democracy, and the processual non-institutionalization of Islam subsequently.

This landscape of interpretation offers an avenue of Islam as a signifier of divine faith, parallel modernities, history as recurrence, and multiple temporalities embedded within the nation state's emerging disorientation post-9/11. The research explores the discursive synthesis of faith and social cohesion of British Muslims in assessing the formation and conception of what I call "believers' communities" enacted through what GerdBaumann contends as "multiple discursive competencies".⁸⁰⁴ The research has also attempted to understand how multiple, transmodern cosmopolitan realms could be located outside the overwhelming templates of western modernity and its affective alibi triggered by the 9/11 scene.

A re-engagement with the idea of what constitutes a community based along imaginary lines like religion and faith could also help us understand how the eventual breakdown of the matrices of the modern nation state would not necessarily result in a situation of absolute stalemate but could actually be newer ways to understand and locate collective selves in domains and templates that eventually move beyond the strict corridors of western modernity. 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. Finally, the thesis has attempted to show how the stereotyping of the resurgence of faith as a

⁸⁰⁴ Gerd Baumann, *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-Ethnic London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10.

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.

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