History, Memory, and Multiculturalism: Representations of Muslims in Contemporary British Fiction

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Abstract

In a world that is both globalised and yet deeply divided, Muslim literary studies is crucial to understanding the complex relationship between Islam and the West. It is emerging as an inevitable and insightful field of enquiry that offers analyses of the growing body of fiction that explores the Muslim experience of Britain and the US. Contemporary fiction about Muslims is receiving substantial critical attention, and through this interdisciplinary thesis I show that it can also be a useful source in political theory. I make a contribution to this field by approaching contemporary fiction about Muslims through the lens of history and memory. I do this by examining a number of novels published from 1988 to 2015 that are either written by British Muslims or offer an insightful portrayal into the lives of Muslims in Britain. In the introduction to this thesis, I outline my theoretical framework, specifically how I apply the concepts of history and cultural memory. I also discuss the interdisciplinary nature of the work, drawing connections between political research and literary analysis. In Chapter One, I explore Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road From Damascus*, showing how close encounters in multicultural spaces do not necessarily suggest successful multiculturalism due to the ongoing evocation of colonial attitudes. In Chapter Two, I discuss Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. I suggest that both novels consider the importance of cultural memory in how Muslim migrants understand their British identities. Chapter Three examines Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, moving away from debates regarding Islamic history and instead making connections between British colonialism and race relations in the 1980s. My final chapter discusses Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love.* I argue that both novels use the concept of genealogy, or tracing ancestors, to interrogate cross-cultural relations in a time of imperialism and state violence. Ultimately, I submit that by approaching these texts through the theoretical lens of history and memory, we can gain a greater understanding of the Muslim experience of multiculturalism.

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Author’s Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to make a contribution to the field of Muslim literary studies by approaching seven works of literary fiction that explore Muslim life in Britain through the theoretical lens of history and memory. This field has been growing for a number of years, and many exceptional articles and monographs about the representation of British Muslims in fiction have been produced from angles such as ethnicity, class, and gender from scholars such as Geoffrey Nash, Peter Morey, Amina Yaqin, Claire Chambers, Rehana Ahmed, Stephen Morton, and Madeline Clements. Whilst articles that touch on the relationship between British Muslims, fiction, and history do exist, a single body of work that discusses a multitude of authors from this angle has not been produced. Because of this, my thesis is an original contribution to existing scholarship in the field of Muslim literary studies. In this thesis I ask how contemporary British fiction explores the Muslim experience of multiculturalism in Britain by engaging with history, often colonial, and memory, from personal to cultural and collective. I argue that by examining these texts, we can obtain a better understanding of how history influences British Muslim identity in the present day, and what this means for the ongoing project of multiculturalism and social plurality.

I only look at texts produced by authors writing in Britain for two reasons. The first is practicality, namely that linguistic barriers mean I can only discuss novels written in English rather than other European languages. The second is that every country has its own experience of multiculturalism, and I especially want to focus on how British authors define and understand multiculturalism. Nonetheless, I do not define the texts that I examine as 'British Muslim'. This is firstly because although some authors, such as Leila Aboulela, are happy with the label of British Muslim, others such as Salman Rushdie and Monica Ali are less keen to identify as Muslim. Secondly, it is because I discuss one author who does not define herself as Muslim at all: Zadie Smith. I have chosen to include her novel *White Teeth* because its discussion of Mangal Pande, a rebel from the 1857 Indian Rebellion, has received little critical attention. Pande functions as an important figure to whom the novel's Muslim family, the Iqbals, refer through an act of cultural memory that informs their present identity formation. Due to Smith's in-depth discussion of this historical event, *White Teeth* integrates well into my selection of books. Like many of the Muslim authors that I discuss, Smith uses historical events to critically revisit the history of British colonialism.

I have chosen not to include certain novelists who have explored Muslims in the West such as Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Sebastian Faulks, and Don DeLillo, who are 'routinely

discussed in studies of post-9/11 literature' (Chambers, *Muslim Eyes* 4) and who have tended to offer a binary understanding of Muslims and the West rather than a self-reflexive and historical one (O'Gorman 175). Zadie Smith, of mixed ethnic heritage and from a highly diverse area of North West London, offers a far more multifaceted and historically aware understanding of multicultural life for Muslims than the authors listed above. Furthermore, as a thesis that aims to explore alternative narratives to white male hegemony, to include the critically acclaimed authors listed above would detract from my argument.

Theoretical Concepts

History and Cultural Memory

In this thesis, I use ideas of history and memory as my theoretical framework. Specifically, I ask how the novels that I discuss employ personal and cultural memory and representations of significant historical events in order to explore the tumultuous and difficult relationship, both historical and contemporary, between Muslims and other ethnic and religious groups. I begin this section on my theoretical framework by broadly discussing the relationship between history and literature, particularly the novel form. I then go on to outline my approach and define terms such as history, historical fiction, historiographic metafiction, and cultural memory. I then discuss the utility of approaching postcolonial fiction through theories of history and cultural memory, and then, more specifically, justify the importance of employing this theory when exploring texts that narrate the Muslim experience in Britain.

In the nineteenth century and earlier, history and literature were approached as narrative forms that were closely connected through the method of storytelling (LaCapra 122). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, historical and literary narratives began to part ways as accurate data collection and improved documentation became a primary goal (Hutcheon 105; LaCapra 122). History, rather than being subjective, was approached as mimetic (Munslow 32) and part of the sciences rather than the arts (Moran 117). Attempts to create 'a more complex "dialogue" between past and present' were ruled out in favour of a supposedly scientific approach to historiography (LaCapra 117). Renowned critic Hayden White has challenged this long-held belief that history and fiction are inherently in opposition (122), and instead argues through much of his work that 'the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or correspond

with each other' (121). Rather than history as a science and literature as an art, White suggests that they share a common subjectivity.

Alun Munslow explains that there is a difference between 'history' and 'the past'. While the past exists, it does not have a voice of its own. Historians, therefore, must use objective evidence of the past in order to create a 'decipherable meaning' to this material. So whilst historical accounts claim 'empirical truthfulness', they are nonetheless still imagined accounts that are 'fictively construed' and thereby subjective (36). Although a writer of historical fiction uses a range of sources to construct a narrative, a historian too analyses raw information and ultimately constructs this information into a narrative that can be considered objective and unquestionably true. In my analysis of the novels, I emphasise the ability of fiction to encourage a critical approach to historiography. Eurocentric understandings of history, in particular, are questioned and disrupted in favour of alternative narratives. By drawing a connection between the past and the present, my chosen novels as well as historical postcolonial fiction in general encourage timely debates about contemporary and future political concerns. Like historiography, which I understand as a subjective process of deciphering and narrating past events, fiction is a way of rethinking and questioning history using an imaginative technique.

Linda Hutcheon, in her monograph *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, coins the term 'historiographic metafiction' to describe works of fiction that '[attempt] to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical' both thematically and formally (108). In other words, texts that could be described as historiographic metafiction 'self-consciously [explore] the status and function of narrative as an ideological construct shaping history and forging identity rather than merely representing the past' (Ansgar 216). The novels that I discuss, whilst engaging with a multitude of themes such as migration, place, sexuality, racism, and faith, employ elements of Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction. They use historical narratives and cultural memories not to represent or mirror the past, but to critically engage with how it is recorded, disseminated, taught, felt, and remembered. These histories often tend to centre on especially difficult and controversial moments from Britain's colonial past. Critically, and in the words of Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction 'suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is […] to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological' (110). Indeed, the novels that I explore try to resist the domination of Western historiography that often excludes minority voices. Instead, they insist on a fruitful conversation and rethinking about how we remember, learn from, and reimagine history, and also how we immerse ourselves in history and make it part of our identities.

All the novels that I discuss engage with history, but the ways in which they do this vary greatly. An approach to historical exploration and questioning that several of the novels adopt is that of cultural memory. The concept of cultural memory implies an ongoing history that is located in a specific culture and passed down generationally. Sudhir Kakar defines it as 'the imaginative basis for a sense of cultural identity […] a group's history freed from rootedness in time' (22). Cultural memory is 'handed down, learned, taught, researched, interpreted, and practiced', being both sustained and perpetuated by those who the memories belong to (Assmann 24). This suggests that cultural memory is something that, whilst being sustained and continued, must be reinterpreted and reimagined depending on the conditions in which the memory is being passed down. Cultural memory is also something that functions as a powerful binding force for communities and societies. Paul Connerton acknowledges this back-and-forth relationship between the present and the past, arguing that our knowledge of the past has a great impact on how we experience the present (*Societies* 3). Looking specifically at the migrant experience, Anne-Marie Fortier takes this further by arguing that 'practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings that mark out terrains of commonality, through which the social dynamics and politics of "fitting in" are delineated' (2). It is evident, therefore, that cultural memory is not something that is passively passed down the generational ladder, but is something that consciously marks the borders and boundaries of the community, showing who belongs and who does not.

I have chosen novels that encompass discussions about cultural memories within migrant communities, and whilst historical events are not always reimagined as such, they are shown to be of great significance in the present day. As Geoffrey Cubitt explains, memory is 'group-specific' and 'multiple', whereas history 'aspires to be unitary and universal' (44). By employing these cultural memories rather than adhering to a dominant narrative, the texts write back to accepted versions of history. Sabine Marschall suggests that these memories can be official or vernacular. Official memories are often maintained through a nation's recorded history, but can also be part of a bigger, collective memory. Marschall explains that official memories are passed down through the process of collective memory: they are 'officially sanctioned markers and spaces of memory, mostly government-endorsed memorials, museums, street names, commemorative monuments, and statues in the public domain', often backed by national heritage organisations (Marschall 79). Physical sites of memory and commemoration, such as statues and plaques, are therefore 'government-approved' representations of collective memories that supposedly reflect the sentiment of the nation as a whole. Crucially, the purpose of encouraging official understandings of history through the process of collective memory is to 'transmit a collective identity' (Assmann 7).

Vernacular memories, in contrast, are ‘highly localized, informal, spontaneous, ephemeral, community-based’ (Marschall 79), and manifest through the process of cultural memory as a means of passing down non-official and often underacknowledged memories.

Significantly more scholarly work has been produced on the role of memory in the lasting trauma of the Holocaust than on memories of colonisation (Walder 5). As Michael Rothberg explains, this phenomenon does not necessarily mean that we must approach memory as ‘competitive’. Rather, it can be ‘multidirectional’, ‘subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing’ (3). Employing the concept of cultural memory is beneficial in helping us to understand how literature explores the Muslim migrant experience. Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*, for example, remembers the 1919 Amritsar Massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in India from a perspective that critiques the brutality of the British army. Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* also frequently circles back to the family legend of Mangal Pande, a heroic figure in the Iqbal family who rebelled against the British in 1857 and is broadly condemned in British historiography.

Official sites of memory that reflect a dominant historical narrative are being challenged. The ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ campaign, which began in March 2015, was initially a protest movement against the statue of Cecil Rhodes that stands at South Africa’s University of Cape Town. More importantly, the movement ‘aims at a reckoning with the histories of colonialism and apartheid, and their contemporary legacies within and beyond the university’ (Chambers and Gilmour 3–4). Displaying this statue was seen by many as preventing a true decolonisation of higher education institutions across South Africa. Ultimately, the statue was taken down, and other victories included the termination of ‘exploitative outsourcing of cleaning and other services at UCT, the demise of the official English/Afrikaans bilingual language policy at University of Stellenbosch, and Jacob Zuma’s commitment to a 0% increase in student fees for the next academic year’ (Chambers and Gilmour 4). This demonstrates the potential for more ground-level protest against dominant historical narratives, symbols of collective memories, and racial injustice. Whilst the texts I discuss are works of fiction rather than activist movements, they use instances of cultural memory to add to the cacophony of minority, and majority, voices resisting dominant historical narratives.

Writers of postcolonial fiction often use literary techniques that engage with history and cultural memory because they allow authors to participate in an act of subversive resistance. In his monograph entitled *The Postcolonial Historical Novel*, Hamish Dalley argues that postcolonial literature can be valued as ‘a resource for learning about histories that lie outside, or athwart, the Eurocentric mainstream’ (4), and that postcolonial novels are not only imaginative endeavours but also can ‘[produce] meaningful knowledge of contested

pasts' (9). Although I agree with Dalley's argument that postcolonial historical fiction can offer a reader new knowledge about colonial pasts, his suggestion that texts can be used as a 'resource for learning about histories' runs the risk of consigning, and reducing, postcolonial literature to mere reflections of historical reality.

Just as historical documents written by colonial powers are filtered through layers of human subjectivity, so are the postcolonial novels that speak back to forms of Eurocentric historical narratives. Several of the novels that I discuss foreground the messy and subjective process of recording and remembering history. The Iqbal family in *White Teeth* memorialises Mangal Pande as their ancestor, although this 'fact' is passed down through the family with little evidence. Similarly, Oz and his mother in Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies* claim that they are related to the nineteenth-century Sufi Imam of the Caucasus region, Imam Shamil, but this 'knowledge' revolves around their supposed possession of his sword rather than documentation. However, these authors are not concerned with the veracity of their characters' genealogy as a historian would be. Instead, they are concerned with why the characters continue to venerate these historical, and often anti-colonial and rebellious, figures, and the impact that this has on their identity.

My approach to postcolonial historical fiction is perhaps more cautious, aligned with Jerome de Groot's description of such texts as troubling 'mainstream accounts of the past', challenging orthodoxy, offering space to silenced voices (162), engaging in 'political rewriting' (150), and responding to the legacies of empire (159). If we adhere to an understanding of historical narrative as always to some extent subjective, offering interpretations rather than truths, then postcolonial fiction can also be seen as offering new interpretations, but not necessarily objective truths. Bill Ashcroft explains that '[t]he question of resistance in post-colonial history becomes explicable as a contest of narratios […] encapsulated in narrative statements, but may offer an incompatible and contesting narratio to official histories' (89). Ashcroft elucidates that the concept of 'narratios' was coined by F.R. Ankersmit in his text *Narrative Logic*. Ankersmit claimed that historical discourse exists only because of other historical discourses, not because of the past, which no longer exists. He uses the analogy of clocks to clarify this concept: the time of a clock can only be compared to other times on a clock, not to time itself (Ashcroft 88). In other words, accounts of historical events from a postcolonial perspective offer alternative ways of understanding the past and add to or challenge already written histories, but our inability to return to the past itself means that each narratio challenges another, but none can claim genuine truth.

The novels that I explore, using Ashcroft's terminology, engage in a process of '*interjection*' (101, italics in original). Ashcroft explains that in this form 'the basic premises

of historical narrative are accepted, but a contrary narrative, which claims to offer a more immediate or "truer" picture of post-colonial life […] is inserted into the historical record' (101). In other words, a novel that adopts interjection introduces an alternative, minority perspective on historical events and weaves this into their discussion or representation of what happened in order to demonstrate the presence of alternative historical 'truths'. The act of 'writing back', in contrast, is described by Ashcroft as '*interpolation*', or rethinking history through 'canonical counter-discourses' (102, italics in original). Famous texts such as *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre* have been 'written back' to with the aim of interrogating their approach to slavery, invasion, and colonisation from a contemporary perspective (Ashcroft, Griffins, and Tiffin 189–190). Novels such as Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, to offer two examples, are writing back to a cultural object existing in the past (such as a colonial novel) rather than the actual past (de Groot 166). Instead of offering an alternative perspective alongside the dominant one, these texts entirely and radically reimagine events. Because the novels that I discuss engage in the more modest interjection rather than interpolation, they may not initially be understood as works of historical fiction. Their use of history and memory is often subtle and nuanced, although in some texts, such as *White Teeth*, *The Kindness of Enemies*, and *The Map of Love*, the historical exploration is more overt. Nevertheless, they all engage in Ashcroft's concept of 'interjection', and they therefore make a significant contribution to both our understanding of historical events and our understanding of the process of remembering and revisiting history.

Multiculturalism

This thesis does not intervene in the debate regarding the success or failure of multiculturalism. Rather, I examine how contemporary fiction draws connections between Britain's colonial and postcolonial histories in order to comment upon the challenges of contemporary multiculturalism, particularly for Muslims. Multiculturalism, both as an abstract concept and in practice, has long been a topic of heated debate. Whether it has been a successful policy in Britain is a particularly divisive issue within the larger debate. Varun Uberoi and Tariq Modood, for example, argue that multiculturalism should be understood as a positive ideology. This is because it can allow the multi-ethnic, multi-religious nation to embrace and recognise difference, thereby moving towards a cohesive society that celebrates the cultural heritage and beliefs of all its citizens (134). Kenan Malik, in contrast, suggests

that multiculturalism encourages an environment that is hyper-aware of cultural difference, resulting in a chronic fear of offending cultural minorities ('Tolerance' 154). On a rudimentary level, I understand multiculturalism as the common reality of 'the coexistence of groups associated to culturally distinct heritages' (Bousetta and Jacobs 26). However, political neutrality is neither possible within the texts that I discuss, nor within this thesis itself. Although I critically examine a number of positions towards multiculturalism, and look in more depth at how it is represented and explored through fiction, I lean towards a positive approach to multiculturalism that is most in line with the work of Tariq Modood. This approach allows me to comprehend and discuss the flaws of British multiculturalism, whilst optimistically considering it as a constructive way of managing difference.

Although often used interchangeably, there are significant differences between the concepts of assimilation, integration, and multiculturalism. Tariq Modood describes assimilation as when new citizens fully incorporate themselves into the host nation with little disruption to the pre-existing cultures and traditions (*Multiculturalism* 44). This approach, more often than not, is seen as 'cultural genocide' for the migrant communities (Callan 473). The US boasts of its successful assimilationist policies, often visualised through the 'melting pot' image, but this approach has been criticised as simply a way of absorbing people into the dominant white culture and encouraging the abandonment of non-Western cultural traditions (Parens 169). As Milton J. Esman argues, there is a 'fine line' between assimilation and integration (155), and the two terms are often used interchangeably. However, whilst assimilation suggests the absorption of the minority culture into the host society, integration suggests that minority cultures make a 'unique contribution' to the host society (Esman 156). Part of the minority culture survives, unlike in assimilation, but everyone works towards a 'common culture and mixed society' (Esman 156). Minority citizens are encouraged to participate in the practices of the host society, but are not required to 'give up their unique cultural heritage' (Pfeffer 47).

The line between integration and multiculturalism is similarly fine, yet there is a crucial distinction. Multiculturalism adheres to the concepts of integration, but calls for the *recognition* and *accommodation* of cultural, linguistic, religious, and social difference (Modood, *Multiculturalism* 44). In a multicultural society, minority ethnic groups are able to celebrate and maintain cultural heritage whilst also being protected legally and encouraged to contribute to the nation politically. The distinction between integration and multiculturalism is, therefore, how difference is managed. Under integrationist policies, maintaining elements of one's cultural heritage is acceptable, but they are largely maintained in private life. Multicultural societies, in contrast, undergo an act of 'public recognition – that is to say,

recognition in the public space – of particular identity differences of minority groups' (Bousetta and Jacobs 26).

The now well-known report 'The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain' calls for a society based on multiculturalism in which 'all citizens are treated with rigorous and uncompromising equality and social justice, but in which cultural diversity is cherished and celebrated' (Runnymede Trust and Parekh 16). This sentiment is echoed in Modood's scholarship in particular, which expresses optimism about the place of multiculturalism in British society, arguing that it allows non-European ethnic minorities to speak against prejudice and stigmatisation, leading to 'the challenging, the dismantling, and the remaking of public identities' (*Multiculturalism* 40). Consequently, multiculturalism is not about tolerating difference, but making a conscious effort to rewrite identity so those previously considered 'different' are now considered familiar and part of the national story. Marginalised identities, rather than being dismissed, ignored, or actively eradicated, are celebrated in a cohesive and diverse public sphere (Modood, *Multiculturalism* 59). Whilst this supposed celebration of difference is portrayed by the novels I discuss as constructive at times, it is more often approached as problematic and disingenuous. In *The Road From Damascus*, for example, Iraqi schoolteacher Muntaha is shown to have begun a process of consolidating her hybrid identity in order to thrive in a professional environment and pursue an Islamic lifestyle. In *The Kindness of Enemies*, in contrast, the Muslim characters are active and successful members of British society, yet their 'difference' is quickly framed as hostile and incompatible with the majority society when a fellow Muslim is accused of activities related to terrorism.

Whilst a policy of multiculturalism may sound ideal, it has been criticised for stifling contesting voices, exoticising and homogenising non-white communities, and limiting the rights of minority ethnic women. Author and commentator Kenan Malik espouses criticism of multiculturalism due to its potential to limit freedom of speech. He sees an irony in Modood's call for a pluralistic society, arguing that a diverse society under multiculturalism, in which everyone's traditions and cultures are respected, leaves little room for a true 'diversity of views' ('Tolerance' 154). Because of this, Malik argues, society has become overly concerned with not offending cultural minorities. The tenets of a 'healthy democratic society', namely the ability to discuss and critique through dialogue, are under threat ('Tolerance' 155). Without the risk of giving offence, Malik maintains, we limit the possibilities for intercultural discourse and social change.

Rather than allowing for genuine cross-cultural exchange, multiculturalism in practice may result in an insincere understanding of other cultures, religions, and traditions. Indeed,

Paul Gilroy argues that while a society may appear cohesive, the majority culture often simply appropriates and consumes the minority culture in order to 'glamorize racial difference' and to satisfy a 'love of exotica' (137). Ultimately, a minority culture becomes homogenised and reduced, for the majority culture, to a simple and easily definable group. This is significant, Stanley Fish argues, because it reduces the chance of minority groups achieving genuine equality. He distinguishes between what he terms 'strong multiculturalism', a multiculturalism that affords a '*deep* respect to all cultures at their core' (382, italics in original), and 'boutique multiculturalism'. The latter, he argues is 'the multiculturalism of ethnic restaurants, weekend festivals, and high profile flirtations with the other' (378). While a seemingly innocent way of performing multiculturalism, he argues that boutique multiculturalism implements outward displays of tolerance but, in reality, shies away from and even resists genuine social and political acts of solidarity with oppressed groups (378).

These assessments show a concern that multiculturalism allows for minority cultures to be marketed and consumed, and to be celebrated as diversifying the majority culture, but does not allow for sincere and genuine interaction between different ethnic groups. Therefore, minorities can become pigeonholed and are rendered invisible under a multicultural society, consigned to a cultural group and 'tucked away at the fringes of society' (Lentin 394). These criticisms are addressed in my discussion of *White Teeth* and *The Road From Damascus* in Chapter One. Zadie Smith's Samad Iqbal embarks on a short relationship with a white British woman, whose interest in South Asian cultures proves insincere when she brushes off the difference between India and Bangladesh. In *The Road From Damascus*, a seemingly successful multicultural friendship between Muntaha and her Russian colleague Gabor proves to be a way for the latter to pursue, sexualise, and belittle Muntaha because of her Arab Muslim identity.

Minority ethnic women, it has also been argued, are in particular danger under the 'excessive cultural relativism' of British multiculturalism (Macy 134). Susan Okin argues that because multiculturalism champions group rights, minority women remain under the control of their cultural, patriarchal traditions and are therefore not afforded the same rights as white Western women. State structures, by not intervening in cultural group dynamics, are doing a disservice to the less powerful members of communities, such as women, and are not offering them the social equality enjoyed by women from the majority culture (23–4). Similarly, Anne Phillips argues that multiculturalism can result in a 'minorities within minorities' structure, disadvantaging women and reinforcing patriarchal power structures (12).

While women's rights, regardless of religion or ethnicity, should be paramount in a democratic society, these criticisms are problematic. Okin, Phillips, and Macy's argument assumes that it is primarily white Western countries that have been the most successful in overcoming struggles for women's rights, which is not necessarily true. Other intersectionalities, such as class, disability, and sexuality, are overlooked in the assumption of Western superiority. Whilst Marie Macy does claim that Western women are 'frequently in a better position than their [minority ethnic] counterparts', she puts this down to 'historical and contemporary reasons' that are not expanded on (133–4). Okin, Phillips, and Macy also assume that a majority of minority women live under oppression with little resistance, a sweeping assumption that glosses over the diversity and heterogeneity of different cultures and communities.

Many of the female characters that my chosen authors portray live independently in Britain, and their lives are not dictated by patriarchal traditions or cultural norms. Nazneen in *Brick Lane*, for example, leaves her Bangladeshi husband for the sake of living independently in Britain with her children and the women in her community. In *The Kindness of Enemies*, Natasha returns from Scotland to Khartoum to try and connect with her cultural heritage, but returns to Scotland determined to practise her faith on her own terms. Other female characters are shown to feel less able, or do not want, to live independently of their husbands and cultural traditions. Hind Sufyan in *The Satanic Verses* and Kaukab in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, for example, are confined to the domestic sphere and are relatively powerless compared with their husbands. They are acutely aware of their migrant status and their working-class position in Britain.

In recent years, calls for 'decolonisation' have begun to supersede that of diversity, which anti-colonial activists have described as 'neo-liberal speak [and] the new corporatized version of multiculturalism. It is about management, efficiency, box-ticking' (Bhanot n. pag.). Diversity, Kavita Bhanot argues, is about forgetting the colonial past and celebrating a multicultural present, whereas decolonisation is about acknowledging the colonial past and openly tackling white supremacy (n. pag.). Whilst Bhanot's article focuses on the book and publishing industry, the critique of diversity and call for decolonisation has begun to infiltrate other sectors, such as universities and education (Pillay n. pag.; Samduzi n. pag.). This is evident through movements such as the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign in South Africa, and through 'Decolonize Our Museums', a grassroots movement stemming from Boston, MA. Movements such as 'Black Lives Matter', which originated in the US, have come to Britain and are combating the reality that 'the people that end up dead in or following police custody after the use of force, are disproportionately black and brown' (Barker n. pag.). This

questioning of the sincerity of a comfortable 'steel bands, saris and samosas' multiculturalism and a move towards terms such as 'decolonisation' shows that policies of multiculturalism and diversity may not be doing enough to tackle social inequality, white supremacy, and racial violence.

Methodology and Interdisciplinarity

Methodology

This thesis came about through collaboration between the Department of Politics and the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of York, with input from the Department of Geography at the University of Sheffield. It is part of a wider research network called 'Reshaping Multiculturalism Through Cultural Practices', hosted by the White Rose (York, Leeds, and Sheffield) and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Because my project is specifically an 'interdisciplinary studentship', I have tried to amalgamate the disciplines of the network in my thesis. Due to my background in and passion for literature, however, it is quite heavily weighted towards literary analysis, with the disciplines of politics and human geography informing my reading of the texts. Therefore, I have decided to use textual analysis as my primary methodology. The term textual analysis varies depending on whom and within what discipline one is speaking from. I take my understanding of the term from Catherine Belsey's essay 'Textual Analysis as a Research Method', published in Gabriele Griffin's edited collection *Research Methods for English Studies*. Belsey defines textual analysis as 'a research method [that] involves a close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions than we can help' (160). The literary text, although not a cultural object commonly studied in Politics departments, is a representative object that is created within society. It can therefore enlighten readers, through subjective analysis and interpretation, as to a contemporary political and social context.

Textual, content, and narrative analysis are used as qualitative research methods in the social sciences as well as in the humanities, or English studies more specifically. Like a novel, a political speech, for example, can be analysed in order to discover how many times the speaker says the word 'terror' or how many times they incite a sense of collectivity and comradeship using 'our nation', what language they use to encourage hysteria or calm, and

what story, or narrative, about the past, present, and future they are trying to tell.[1] Using textual analysis alongside political, social, and historical discussion, I bring to the forefront literary works that I believe are important in voicing and narrating the experiences of Muslims in multicultural Britain. This research is beneficial to English studies because it makes a significant contribution to the growing field of Muslim literary studies. It is also beneficial to the discipline of Politics because it demonstrates the importance of literary production within contemporary society, and how this body of literature can be understood as a cultural object both influenced by and exploring the intersections between Muslim life and British politics. In the following section, I discuss my understanding of interdisciplinarity when applied to the disciplines of English literature and Politics. Joe Moran offers multiple interpretations of interdisciplinarity, from a 'democratic, dynamic and co-operative' alternative to 'inward-looking' disciplines (3) to an 'undisciplined space in the interstices between disciplines' (15). More realistically, this project encourages a 'form of dialogue or interaction' between disciplines (Moran 16) in the hope that new understandings of British Muslim identity can emerge.

Interdisciplinarity

Roland Bleiker, in his discussion of the role of aesthetics in contributing to political theory, uses the example of a painting by surrealist artist René Magritte titled 'The Treachery of Images'. The painting depicts a detailed image of a pipe, but underneath it reads 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' (this is not a pipe). The image is indeed not a pipe, but a representation of a pipe. Bleiker uses this example to explain the significance of the gap between artistic representation and reality when considering the usefulness of aesthetic representations in understanding politics. He criticises the 'mimetic' approach (18), or the desire to 'represent politics as realistically and authentically as possible' (19), for imposing limitations on what can be learnt about political theory. Instead, he acclaims aesthetic insights into the political, and maintains that the use of these sources in political theory have constituted an 'aesthetic turn' (19).

This 'aesthetic turn', argues Bleiker, 'engenders a significant shift away from a model of thought that equates knowledge with a mimetic recognition of external appearances towards an approach that generates a more diverse but also more direct encounter with the

[1] See 'Chapter 18: Using Content Analysis' and 'Chapter 19: Understanding and Adopting Discourse and Narrative Analysis' in *Research Methods in Politics* by Roger Pierce (London: Sage, 2008) for a detailed discussion of how these methods of qualitative analysis are used in the study of politics.

political' (19–20). There is, he argues, plenty that can be learnt from adopting aesthetic approaches. This is partly due to the fact that 'political reality does not exist in an a priori way. It comes into being only through the process of representation' (21). Therefore, the painting shows how there can be no real representation of a pipe, because the artist's assumptions about how one should look could be entirely different from the opinion of the viewer. There is, therefore, no reality, but only multiple interpretations.

It is clear that there are benefits in considering literature as a form of aesthetic representation that can aid our understanding of political ideas. George Von der Muhll describes reading literature as an activity that allows the reader to see politics 'from the inside out' (31), meaning that we not only become engaged because of the novel's inherent characteristic of encouraging empathy, but that we are inside the political action as witnesses to the dialogic relationships of the characters. Maureen Whitebrook argues that novels are particularly useful due to their form. Because they progress from a beginning, a middle, and an end, they allow us to see the progression of the characters' lives and therefore how 'the individual constructs and maintains identity, including the political implications and outcomes of that process' (Whitebrook 33). However, Whitebrook clarifies that we must be careful not to read too much into the linear structure that is inherent in narrative. In reality, cause and effect is not always so obvious.

If we claim that literature is political, then we also need to ask what we mean by this assertion. Is writing literature inherently a political act, or only when the work itself engages with explicitly political themes? Writing literature can be considered a political act if it is directly speaking back to a particular social injustice or a corrupt government, or is espousing a particular political ideology, to offer two examples. But as Deborah Philips and Katy Shaw explain, literature has a place in politics too. Michael Gove, the Minister of Education from 2010 to 2014, for example, was 'determined to put his mark on the English Literature curriculum' by insisting that students must study 'Shakespeare, the 19th Century novel and Romantic poetry' (Philips and Shaw 7). Gove's desire for 'high-quality, challenging texts' translated into a prioritisation of English canonical fiction over contemporary and world literature (qtd. in Philips and Shaw 7).

Nevertheless, novels that are less explicitly political can still be considered politically significant if we take into account the ways in which the relationship between the writer and the reader is formed. Irving Howe argues that:

> In the political novel, then, writer and the reader enter an uneasy compact: to expose their opinions to a furious action, and as these melt into the movement of the novel, to

> find some common recognition, some supervening human bond above and beyond ideas. (24)

The reader's previously held beliefs, assumptions, and opinions – or even their lack of engagement with political ideas – are challenged through the act of reading fiction. Theoretical or ideological concepts are made real by the action of a political novel. Challenging political ideas such as democracy, justice, and morality, are explored dialogically, or through interaction between characters, rather than abstractly. This should, according to Howe, result in empathy, compromise, and a shared political understanding between the writer and the reader. However, Howe's assertion underestimates the value of theoretical discussion within the novel form. *White Teeth*, *The Satanic Verses*, and *The Kindness of Enemies* not only engage with political ideas dialogically, but through insightful interludes by the narrators into political and social issues such as racial tensions and the plight of the migrant. The reader does not only have to discover these significant political questions through exchanges between characters, but is directly confronted with them, and encouraged to reflect upon them.

As well as encouraging engagement with political and philosophical ideas, some literature, argues Margaret Scanlan, also has the potential to encourage its readers to engage actively with contemporary world politics. Her article 'Migrating from Terror: The Postcolonial Novel after September 11' particularly deals with how authors have approached the 'lethal polarities' between Muslims and Americans, or the West and the East, that have been created post-9/11. She argues that postcolonial authors writing after this time:

> transform that fault-line into a living, breathing space in which the human consequences of rigid and lethal polarities become visible. They do so in part by turning to traditional strengths of fiction, its capacity, for example, to voice silenced thoughts, to require readers to practice empathy by reading a first-person narrative. (267)

This 'living, breathing space' of literature allows readers to depart from reductive binaries and to immerse themselves in an empathetic position. However, Scanlan's argument does not only apply to post-9/11 fiction, but to any fiction that engages with social or political tensions. Postcolonial literature in general can often be considered as engaging with a 'fault-line' due to its inherent characteristic of questioning perpetual binaries such as East versus West, the 'uncivilised' and the 'civilised', and the 'other' and the insider.

Robert Young argues that postcolonialism, although employing an –ism that customarily signals a 'set of shared ideas, and a single, homogenous ideology' (63), is not actually a theory in the strictest sense of the term (64). Instead, he argues that 'postcolonial

theory asserts [...] a politics that draws on a wide, often contested, range of theory from different disciplines in order to develop its own insights' (64). This allows for the possibility of 'anti-theoretical' perspectives that give 'primacy to the value of individual consciousness and experience' (Young 64). However, considering postcolonial literature with other disciplines in mind does run the risk, as Catherine Zuckert notes, of 'reduc[ing] fictional statements about human life to mere reflections of external social conditions' (125). This is a risk run by studying postcolonial literature politically as it can result in not affording the authors the necessary praise for their literary skill, but instead using them as ways to study the cultures, perspectives, or voices of the 'other'.

Postcolonial literature, however, is inherently political due its status as 'writing back' against or reimagining colonial discourses and narratives. Due to the limitless possibilities of postcolonial expression, it is no wonder, Young asserts, that postcolonialism as an institution often resides in literature departments. This is due to their being open to 'subjective forms of knowledge' that take into account how colonialism and its effects were experienced, rather than simply what happened (Young 64). Therefore, discussions of colonialism and postcolonialism through literature perpetuate the process of 'cultural decolonization' in which the West is 'deconstruct[ed]' from the inside, 'challenging the limits of western ethnocentricity, and the assumption that the white male western point of view is the norm and the true' (Young 64). Consequently, space is created for literary perspectives and interpretations of the postcolonial experience that are not limited to the traditional, exclusionary canon.

The difficult relationship between politics and literature is an issue that particularly affected Salman Rushdie during the 1989 fatwa. In 1984, he wrote an essay strongly asserting the belief that it is wrong for authors not to wish to engage with contemporary politics. In his essay, titled 'Outside the Whale', Rushdie disputes George Orwell's 1940 essay of a contrasting name: 'Inside the Whale', its title being a reference to the biblical tale of Jonah accepting his fate of residing inside the stomach of a whale. Rushdie argues against Orwell's claim that the author must metaphorically reside in the belly of the whale, or in other words, must remove himself from political concerns. Rushdie argues that for Orwell, it was clear that 'politics' had turned into 'an underworld-become-overworld, Hell on earth' ('Whale' 96), and Orwell's recommendation to authors was, in Rushdie's words, to 'sit it out [...] we writers will be safe inside the whale, until the storm dies down' ('Whale' 96). Rushdie calls for a give-and-take relationship between politics and literature. He claims that 'works of art, even works of entertainment, do not come into being in a social and political vacuum; and […] the way they operate in a society cannot be separated from politics, from history' ('Whale' 92).

In this way, Rushdie suggests that works of art, including literature, can rarely be separated from the context in which they are produced. Furthermore, he claims that politics cannot, and should not, turn a blind eye to the revolutionary potential of literature: 'when intellectuals and artists withdraw from the fray, politicians feel safer' ('Whale' 97). Literature, therefore, is both produced politically and has the potential to be politically significant.

When Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was published four years later, it attracted international attention and triggered riots, book-burnings, and even murders. In her monograph, Margaret Scanlan argues that this degree of political attention to the 'printed page' is unusual, as 'they [the book-burners] did not regard the novel as an inconsequential imaginative exercise but as a powerful expression of ideas deeply engaged with reality' (*Plotting* 24). However, an author cannot always rein in the political and social fall-out of a published work of literature. Rushdie's enthusiasm for political engagement in the arts waned after the 'Rushdie affair'. In his essay 'In God We Trust', he states: 'I have found myself, in my fiction, unable to avoid political issues' (376). In a later essay and in a somewhat frustrated tone, he goes on to contend that 'at the centre of the storm stands a novel [*The Satanic Verses*], a work of fiction, one that aspires to the condition of literature. It has often seemed to me that people on all sides of the argument have lost sight of this simple fact' ('Good Faith' 393). His frustration then was that his novel was not considered a dialogic representation of Islam through character interaction and complex literary techniques, but was instead perceived by some as a politicised, blasphemous statement of hatred towards Islam.

If perspectives other than that of the white Western male have been considered secondary throughout history, then contemporary postcolonial literature has the potential to function as a political tool that can make alternative perspectives public. Charles Taylor, in his influential essay 'The Politics of Recognition', argues that our identity can never be 'discovered' internally, but is shaped externally by our relationships with those around us, making human life 'fundamentally dialogical in character' (79). Ultimately, he argues, 'the making and sustaining of our identity [...] remains dialogical throughout our lives' (80). Similarly, Stuart Hall argues that identities are 'constantly in the process of change and transformation' due to being constructed across multiple 'discourses' and 'practices' ('Introduction' 4). Therefore, Hall argues, 'identities are [...] constituted within, not outside representation' ('Introduction' 4). This implies that how we are perceived and treated by others has great bearing on how we represent ourselves within society. Indeed, Taylor argues that 'a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or

society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves' (75).

However, as Simon Thompson and Majid Yar explain, the idea of misrecognition has proven to be just as significant as recognition. They argue that the 'impetus' for recognition amongst Muslim communities, or the need for social and political struggle, is due to preexisting social misrecognition (1). In other words, a community or individual's need for political recognition can be due to incorrect comprehension of said community or individual, or even lack of recognition itself. Misrecognition, therefore, can be a powerful incentive for social change. This misrecognition can come about, for example, when cultural identities are categorised in the justice system, resulting in 'drastic oversimplification of individual or group identities' (Meer, Martineau, and Thompson 133). Although a well-meaning endeavour, this can ultimately result in the dissolution of diverse identities. Indeed, Tariq Modood astutely notes that this recognition of Muslim identity can lead to the assumption that those who regard themselves as Muslim want to be kept completely separate from British culture. This kind of stereotyping, or failure of recognise the multifarious quality of ethnic or religious groups, is a form of oppression within itself (Modood, 'Citizenship' 160).

The images that emerge in discussions about Muslims after 9/11, and are repeated and circulated through modern channels of communication, are often little more than caricatures in which the propensity for extremism and violence of a small segment of politicised Islam is magnified and projected onto Muslim communities around the world (Morey and Yaqin 18). Although there are over two and a half million Muslims in the UK (2011 census), images of an extreme minority prevail. It is clear then, that the society in which our identities are being formed is of crucial importance, particularly when a group or individual is being represented negatively through dominant opinion or media. Postcolonial literature, I therefore argue, has the potential to critically interrogate these damaging and simplistic representations, and to offer depictions of Muslims that are more nuanced than popular and sensationalist caricatures. Furthermore, many of the authors I discuss are also highly politically engaged *outside* of their literary careers. For example, Salman Rushdie spoke out against ISIS at the award for the 2014 PEN/Pinter prize (Flood, 'Hate-filled' n. pag.); Robin Yassin-Kassab often writes about the problems in Syria in his blog; and Ahdaf Soueif regularly discusses Egyptian politics through her Twitter account.

The novels I examine are important politically because they provide the reader with an insight into how a political and social environment that is distrustful of Muslims shapes the identities of those that fall victim to stereotypes and suspicion. As postcolonial literature, it offers us this perspective from outside of the primarily white Western canon. As Irving

Howe asserts, studying politics through literature allows us to see it from 'the inside out', but I would argue that studying politics through postcolonial literature allows us to reflect on political realities from a position that is not often given a voice in public forums. Many would agree that maintaining a singular view of the world is problematic and dangerous, and therefore literature that creates alternative dialogues can give us a new kind of 'knowledge' of contemporary social interaction.

Structure of Thesis

In Chapter One, 'Urban Multicultural Encounters', I examine how history, both private and public, and memory function in processes of identity formation for Muslim characters living in highly multicultural urban spaces. I begin the chapter by discussing Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, drawing attention to the story of Mangal Pande, an Indian rebel in the 1857 Rebellion. This is a significant point of memory for the Muslim Iqbal family, a factor that has been relatively overlooked in previous scholarship. I argue that this cultural memory functions both to highlight the importance of history in how migrants in Britain understand their identities, and to critique the British reluctance to consider histories other than their own imperialist ones. In my analysis of *The Road From Damascus* in the second half of this chapter, I argue that the body – its everyday functions, its representations in society, and its function as a vessel of pain – is the medium through which the characters negotiate their migrant identities. Memories and histories are shown as being explored through the everyday physicality of the human body, as well as through more traditional mediums such as cultural objects and storytelling. Whilst both novels are set in London, a place often considered a thriving multicultural city, I argue that the two novels draw on issues around history and memory in order to adopt a critical perspective toward supposedly seamless multicultural environments.

In my second chapter, 'Migration and Cultural Memory', I ask how history and memory function in seemingly segregated Muslim South Asian communities. In my exploration of Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* in the first half of this chapter, I show how the characters' cultural and personal memories of the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar demonstrate the significant connection between present-day Muslim identity and British colonial violence. I argue that the traumatic moment when Shamas's father is injured during a raid on Gujranwala by the British is 'remembered', and this trauma of colonial violence is passed down through the family and affects their ability to integrate into British

society. In my consideration of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* in the second part of this chapter, I explore how the novel engages with British colonial history and questions of cultural heritage, a perspective that has been rather unobserved in previous scholarship. While the retrospection to the relationship between Britain and South Asia is more overt in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, I argue that *Brick Lane* calls on cultural memories of Britain's role in South Asia in order to elucidate the difficult race relations of the 1980s. I also consider how Bangladeshi cultural heritage functions in contemporary Britain, particularly from the specifically female perspective of the protagonist Nazneen. Both novels depict Muslim characters that have little interaction with other ethnic and religious groups, a characterisation that has not always been received well by critics because of the potential for offering stereotypes of unassimilated Muslims. I argue that this lack of integration between communities is perpetuated by both the need to maintain minority cultural heritage in the diaspora, and an understanding of British colonial history in South Asia as contributing to present-day racism and intolerance.

In my third chapter, 'Colonial History and Race Relations in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*', I depart from discussions about Rushdie's use of Islamic history and instead explore how he uses modern history to critique Britain's tumultuous history of race relations from the British Raj to London in the 1980s. In the first section, I offer an outline of the events surrounding the 1989 'Rushdie affair' whilst paying particular attention to the importance of both British colonial history and Rushdie's personal history in India. The following three sections engage in literary analysis of the novel, with the second section of the chapter discussing how Rushdie looks back to colonial relations between Britain and India to interrogate modern race relations. In the third section, I focus on how *The Satanic Verses* explores the experience of migrant subjects, arguing that whilst Rushdie's portrayal of the East End Bangladeshi community is sympathetic, his portrayal of black British subjects borders on the stereotypical. In the final section, I change direction by discussing the narrative sections that explore Ayesha and the 1983 Hawkes Bay Incident. This aspect of the novel has been rather neglected, but I argue that it is important because it firstly, reveals a sympathetic approach toward religious faith, something that Rushdie moved away from after the infamous *fatwa*. Secondly, it explores broader questions about purity, hybridity, and religious tolerance, a discussion that I argue contributes toward a reader's understanding of Rushdie's position in debates around multiculturalism and race relations.

In Chapter Four, 'Genealogy and Culture-Crossing', I argue that Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* are novels that place history and memory at the forefront of their explorations into contemporary Muslim identities, both in Britain and globally. Both Soueif and Aboulela delineate an investigative protagonist who

combines historical research with the tracing of heroic, anti-colonial ancestors. Natasha conducts academic research into the life of Imam Shamil, a Muslim leader in the Murid War of 1830–1859 between the Russian Empire and the tribes of the Caucasus Mountains. This fictional imagining of events is paralleled with the present-day narrative, which explores the perpetual suspicions and hostilities aimed at Muslims in Britain by Anglo-American governments post-9/11. Soueif's character learns of her great-aunt Anna Winterbourne's travels abroad, and her subsequent change from indifferent English aristocrat to anti-colonial, Egyptian nationalist. This return to the stories of her ancestors, and their tales of colonial resistance and cross-cultural romance, encourages Amal, and the reader, to think critically about the global position of Muslim citizens today, particularly the aggressive expansion of Israel into Palestinian territories. I argue that Aboulela and Soueif employ narratives of genealogical memory in order to, firstly, explore pertinent questions about the relationship between memory and postcolonial identity formation; and secondly, critique contemporary instances of state violence, surveillance and oppression.

Chapter One: Urban Multicultural Encounters

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, published in 2000, and Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road From Damascus* (2009), both explore the lives of characters living in Britain's multicultural capital. *White Teeth* is set in Willesden and is centred on the Muslim Bangladeshi family the Iqbals and their British-Jamaican friends the Joneses. The Iqbal family's understanding of their pre-migration history, particularly the role of Samad's great-grandfather Mangal Pande in the 1857 Indian Rebellion, is of crucial importance to how members of the family distance themselves from and embrace their British identities. *The Road From Damascus*, set around the Harrow Road area in west London, follows the lives of Syrian Sami Traifi and his Iraqi wife Muntaha. Both part of the capital's migrant communities, and both holding on to familial memories of broken marriages, torture, and political exile, Sami and Muntaha must navigate a difficult marriage through reconciling their understanding of what it means to be a Muslim in the West.

Occupying an urban setting, both novels explore everyday, cross-cultural encounters in the multicultural metropolis. Smith and Yassin-Kassab critically approach London, often hailed as a hub of successful integration and hybrid cultures, through exposing quotidian forms of prejudice within multicultural relationships. In *White Teeth*, Samad has an affair with a white woman named Poppy, and in *The Road From Damascus*, Muntaha is wooed (albeit unsuccessfully) by a Russian friend named Gabor. In both encounters, the relationships prove to be based on exoticism, stemming from European colonial discourse about non-whites, rather than a genuine desire for mutually respectful, cross-cultural communication. Through relationships such as these, I argue, both Smith and Yassin-Kassab expose the imperialist attitudes that still pervade British society, even within supposedly integrated urban settings.

For the characters themselves, both Smith and Yassin-Kassab show the significance of cultural and personal memories in the process of post-migration identity formation. For Samad, the memory of his great-grandfather is crucial to how he understands both his own identity in a postcolonial setting, and the relationship between India and Britain. For him, the unacknowledged and forgotten memories of his great-grandfather signal a refusal on Britain's part to appreciate Indian historiography. For Sami and Muntaha, they must choose whether to let memories of a traumatic familial past define their British identity. Importantly, the novel reconsiders the long-held Western understanding of Islam as obsolete and oppressive, and

questions these assumptions by breaking down binaries of religion versus secularism in favour of a hybrid British Muslim identity.

This chapter asks how Smith and Yassin-Kassab explore relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as amongst Muslims themselves, in a multicultural setting. It intimates that for the Muslim characters, who I focus on more heavily than the non-Muslim characters, familial and post-migration memories are significant when creating and moulding a British identity. Furthermore, colonial history is pervasive throughout both novels, influencing both how non-Muslims view the Muslim characters and how they interact with each other. Most importantly, this chapter shows how Britain's imperial history still influences contemporary relationships in supposedly successful multicultural environments.

'If you ever hear anyone speak of the East […] hold your judgement': British Historiography and the Indian Rebellion in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

Zadie Smith, daughter of a Jamaican psychotherapist and British war veteran, was born in 1975 in the highly multicultural borough of Brent in northwest London (Walters 1). To date, she is the author of five novels: *White Teeth* (2000), *The Autograph Man* (2002), *On Beauty* (2005), *NW* (2012), and *Swing Time* (2016). *White Teeth* was a successful novel from its moment of publication, winning a number of prestigious prizes such as the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, the Whitbread Book Award for best first novel, and the Commonwealth Writers First Book Prize. The novel received significant critical appraisal, although the reviewers' focus on Smith's youth and mixed heritage, seen for example in Stephanie Merritt's article for *The Guardian* entitled 'She's Young, Black, British', has led to accusations of 'sexy exoticism, safely hemmed in by the reassuring waiver of Britishness' (Tancke 27). Published during the early Blair years, when multiculturalism as a model for society was flourishing (Tancke 27), *White Teeth* was 'for all its tensions [...] a peculiarly sunny novel' (Quinn n. pag.).

White Teeth is set in Willesden, a diverse area situated between suburban Wembley, known for its high percentage of BAME (black, Asian, and minority ethnic) residents, and the far wealthier and much less diverse Hampstead. Although a lengthy and eclectic novel, *White Teeth* ultimately follows the lives of two families living in Willesden: the Jamaican Clara Jones, her British husband Archie, and their daughter Irie; and the Bangladeshi Samad and Alsana and their twin sons Magid and Millat. Archie and Samad met during their relatively

brief stint in the army, posted in ‘a tiny Bulgarian village bordering Greece and Turkey’ (91) during the Second World War. The novel begins thirty years later, Samad still reeling from his ineffective and unimportant role in the campaign from which he departed with a dead hand and no medals. Archie, kind-hearted and naive, is unperturbed by his colleagues’ shock at his new wife Clara arriving at the office dinner ‘black as anything’ (69).

It is clear that growing up in this multicultural setting on the outskirts of central London significantly influenced Smith. She explains, ‘I grew up with girls who wore the head scarf [*sic*], a fact that seemed no more remarkable to me at the time than Jewish boys wearing yarmulkes or Hindu kids with bindis on their foreheads’ (‘Monsters’ n. pag.). However, Smith argues that the supposed normalcy of quotidian multiculturalism began to change after the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks. In particular, the average Muslim boy went from ‘quiet, sexless, studious child – sitting in the back of class and destined for an engineering degree – to Public Enemy No. 1’ (‘Monsters’ n. pag.). However, in her attempt to question present-day Islamophobia, Smith falls into the trap of stereotyping South Asian Muslims as a ‘model minority’, or migrants who are ‘well assimilated, upwardly mobile, politically nonthreatening’ (Wu 2). The British Muslim has been made into a ‘monster’, Smith claims, and yet we cannot give up hope that differences can be reconciled. Smith’s short essay reflects the kind of themes that she explores in *White Teeth*, namely the immigrant’s experience of racism and prejudice in Britain and the need for peaceful cohabitation. Although the novel has been read as an optimistic, even utopian, depiction of cultural integration (Jakubiak 202), it essentially grapples with the traumatic aspects of migration alongside the difficult process of forging a multicultural nation.

Whilst *White Teeth* tackles big multi-generational, multi-ethnic issues, literary critic James Wood argued the novel is let down by its use of what he terms ‘hysterical realism’, stylistic pizzazz that prevents genuine character development. Hysterical realism, Wood explains, is akin to ‘magical realism’, a style that parallels everyday mundanity with fantastical, impossible events, such as two men falling from an exploding plane and surviving in Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, or a dead child incarnating into an adult woman and emerging from a lake in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Rather than impossible events, hysterical realism performs unlikely events, such as Clara’s mother Hortense being born ‘in the middle of the legendary Kingston earthquake, 1907, when everybody else was busy dying’ (34). *White Teeth*, Wood argues, is ‘all shiny externality, a caricature’ (*Irresponsible* 172), and lacks ‘moral seriousness’ (*Irresponsible* 176). Smith’s use of crude words such as ‘arse’ and vernacular terminology such as ‘squished’ prove particularly troublesome for Wood (*Irresponsible* 180–1).

On 6 October 2001, less than a month after 9/11, Wood published an article entitled 'Tell Me How Does It Feel?' in *The Guardian*, a piece that was later echoed in his book *Irresponsible*, published in 2005. In this journalistic piece he lambasts both the social novel, for attempting to hold a brief mirror up to our fast-moving society, and hysterical realism, as a 'perpetual motion machine that appears to have been embarrassed into velocity' (n. pag.). Instead, he argues, we need more novels that reflect inwards on the nuances of human consciousness ('Tell Me' n. pag.). Smith, in a witty reply just one week later, defends her use of comedy in novel writing, stating that her writing entails 'not a division of head and heart, but the useful employment of both' ('This Is How' n. pag.). *White Teeth* is a highly social and political novel, but Wood appears to have overlooked the novel's exploration into the human consciousness, namely the difficult negotiations and endeavours of post-migration identity in the ever-changing, postcolonial metropolis of London.

Although *White Teeth* is about multicultural London at the turn of the millennium, history and memories of the past are also 'rampant' throughout the novel (Moss 11). In my analysis, I explore how Smith uses history to elucidate the migrant experience of integrating into British society. Specifically, I examine her characterisation of the Muslim Bangladeshi family, the Iqbals, and how the familial myth of their ancestor Mangal Pande, a soldier who supposedly triggered the 1857 Indian Rebellion, contributes to their identity formation in the present day.[1] I argue that by examining this relatively under-acknowledged aspect of the novel in more depth, we can gain an understanding of Smith's exploration of Muslim lives in Britain that goes beyond accusations of a naively optimistic multiculturalism. This analytical angle opens up important questions about the relationship between British history, contemporary racism, and Islamophobia, particularly how these factors contribute to our understanding of Muslim identity. I begin this chapter section by discussing in general terms

[1] Within historical writing on the 1857 Rebellion, there is significant variation regarding the terms used to describe events. In nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Britain, the term 'mutiny' appears to be used frequently, see: Ascott Robert Hope Moncrieff's *The Story of the Indian Mutiny* (1896), Henry Gilbert's *Story of the Indian Mutiny* (1916), and George Fletcher MacMunn's *The Indian Mutiny in Perspective* (1931). South Asian writers, however, tend not to use the term 'mutiny', perhaps due to its generally understood meaning of rebelling against a proper authority, something that many South Asians did not consider the British, an occupying force, to be. Indeed, Rozina Visram, author of *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, describes the 'so-called "mutiny"' as an 'Indian National Rising' (7). Terms such as 'revolt', 'revolution' and even 'war of independence' are also used, see: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence* [1909] (1960), Amaresh Misra's *Mangal Pandey: The True Story of an Indian Revolutionary* (2005), and Amit Kumar Gupta's *Nineteenth-Century Colonialism and the Great Indian Revolt* (2015). In an attempt to remain relatively impartial, I use the words 'rebellion' or 'uprising' to refer to the events of 1857, terms that I believe avoid the derogatory connotations of 'mutiny' but do not carry excessively nationalist sentiment.

how Smith approaches history and migration, and then move on to discuss the specific South Asian Muslim context, particularly through the characters of Samad and his son Millat.

Throughout *White Teeth*, personal histories of migration are not only present but also problematised, particularly across generational lines. Samad pines for a return to pre-migration life, fearing the debauchery of 1980s London has infected his archetypically 'cool' son Millat. Archie's daughter Irie, in contrast, approaches history not through nostalgia but as a weight that cannot be lifted. For her father, Archie, his time as a soldier in the Second World War is his point of reference for his self-worth, his average looks and job folding paper offering little appeal. He says, 'you can't beat experience, can you? [...] we are, like, wells of experience the children can use, you know, when they feel the need. We're like encyclopedias' (242). To this, Alsana retorts: 'You *fool*. Don't you know you're left behind like carriage and horses, like candlewax? Don't you know to them you're old and smelly like yesterday's fishnchip paper?' (242, italics in original). For the working-class Archie, his English is inelegant and tentative, peppered as it is with filler words. Alsana betrays her non-British roots by saying 'carriage and horses' rather than the standard phrase 'horse and carriage', and fish and chips is fused into one word, 'fishnchip'.

Their articulation is in contrast with that of Marcus Chalfen, scientist and father of Joshua, Irie's friend from school. Irie's envy of Joshua's life shows dissatisfaction with both her class and her personal history of migration. When she visits her friend's home, she is struck by the contrast between his bedroom and her own:

> Marcus's room was like no place Irie had ever seen. It had no communal utility, no other purpose in the house apart from being Marcus's room; it stored no toys, bric-a-brac, broken things, spare ironing boards; no one ate in it, slept in it or made love in it. It wasn't like Clara's attic space, a Xanadu of crap, all carefully stored boxes and labelled just in case she should ever need to flee this land for another one. It wasn't like the spare rooms of immigrants – packed to the rafters with all that they have ever possessed. (335–6)

When Irie discovers the seemingly perfect lives of the white middle classes, an event she describes in quasi-religious terms as a 'Chalfenist revelation' (326), she becomes acutely aware of how her cultural history perpetuates feelings of non-belonging in Britain. The multitude of personal objects in the Joneses' home signifies an ongoing connection with the past. In comparison, the Chalfens' home is both airy and functional, assured of its place in the present and holding little connection to the past. The juxtaposition of 'Xanadu', a fictional paradise in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan', and 'crap', a very British curse word,

removes any romanticised associations from the migration experience and grounds it in a difficult and messy reality.

The claustrophobia of Irie's bedroom extends into her everyday life. Not only does she feel closed in by physical objects that signify a familial heritage, but her understanding of her identity is entirely consumed by the past. She notes that white, middle-class men like Marcus Chalfen, 'dealt in the present [...] didn't drag ancient history around like a chain and ball [...] [and] were not neck-high and sinking in the quagmire of the past' (326). From this perspective, the novel appears to be critical of migrants who maintain close connections with their personal, cultural, and national histories post-migration. From Irie's perspective, the past denotes both suffocating closeness and archaism. However, Smith's image of multicultural Britain also denotes a native population that struggles to let go of colonial conceptions of a distinct 'East' and 'West':

> [D]espite all the mixing up [...] it is still hard to admit that there is no one more English than the Indian, no one more Indian than the English. There are still young white men who are *angry* about that; who will roll out at closing time into the poorly lit streets with a kitchen knife wrapped in a tight fist. (327, italics in original)

Even with the backdrop of a pre-9/11, optimistic approach to multiculturalism, Smith highlights a perpetual nostalgia towards the days of pre-Second World War migration. The men that Smith describes – young, white, pub-goers – signify a sense of disenfranchisement and dissatisfaction with society that can be present amongst the working classes.

One example of this social tension occurs when Millat, Magid, and Irie are descending from a bus on their way to deliver food collected at the harvest festival to elderly people in the community. They are creating noise as they depart, and this instigates a comment from a passenger: '*If you ask me*,' said one disgruntled OAP to another, '*they should all go back to their own…*' (163, italics in original). Tellingly, the sentence is unfinished, yet there is an assumption that the sentiment is so ubiquitous in British society that it does not need to be finished for it to be understood. The narrator wryly comments that this sentence, 'the oldest sentence in the world' (163), has gone unnoticed. 'Oldest sentence in the world' is not meant to be understood literally, but instead functions to illuminate the historical weight behind the sentiment. While the incident itself happens in a matter of seconds, the narrator manages to connect it to a longer history and phenomenon of racial bigotry. Successful multiculturalism hinges on an understanding of Britishness as more than just whiteness (Runnymede 10; Uberoi and Modood 134). Yet the Britain that Smith's characters inhabit is defined by colonial nostalgia and a reluctance to accept hybrid identities.

One of the ways in which Zadie Smith explores this relationship between migrant subjects and postcolonial Britain is through the use of cultural memory. More specifically, Samad Iqbal, originally from Bangladesh, struggles to find a balance between an Islamic identity and a British one, finding the former excessively didactic and the latter grotesquely amoral. Unable to amalgamate the two identities, he calls on the 'memory' of his great-grandfather, the soldier Mangal Pande who supposedly instigated the famous 1857 Rebellion against the British. The memory of Pande is on the one hand ancestral, having been passed down via oral storytelling through the Iqbals, and on the other, cultural, being inherited through objects such as photos and history books. Samad evokes the memory of Pande in an attempt to draw a line of heroism from the Rebellion to the present day, and to solidify his identity as noble amongst a backdrop of racial prejudice and a degrading day job.

Samad's memory, in this sense, is not individual but cultural. Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka argue that cultural memory has the ability to both concretise an identity and to reconstruct identity (130). Samad's memory of his ancestor allows him to define a specific South Asian cultural identity as different from the dominant British identity via the ways in which historical events are remembered. Because of this, it also allows him to construct his identity through a critical approach towards the relationship between his present circumstances in Britain and a colonial past in South Asia. By passing down the story of Mangal Pande through multiple generations, the family is able to construct a cultural identity that is situated in the past rather than in their difficult, post-migration present. Samad hails Mangal Pande as 'the great hero of the Indian Mutiny!' (87), an understanding of events that challenges British historiography, thereby allowing him to distance himself from British society.

Mangal Pande was an Indian Hindu sepoy in the 34th Regiment of the Native Infantry of the Bengal Army at the time of the Rebellion in 1857 (Sarup i). Although very little is known about him, the sources concerning his rebellion against the British in Barrackpore on 29 March 1857 vary greatly, from hailing him as a 'sacred Brahmin' (Savarkar 45) to denouncing him as irrational and often fuelled by drugs (Fitchett 5). So far, no historian has been entirely sure as to what triggered the rebellion against the British. However, it has been widely suggested that rumours spread amongst the sepoys that the cartridges for the new Enfield rifles were greased with cow and pig fat could have been the trigger (Fitchett 14; R. Mukherjee 31; Sarup xv; Savarkar 43). For both Hindus and Muslims, biting off the tip of the cartridge to load the rifle was a conscious and vicious threat against their religious beliefs from the British. Rudrangshu Mukherjee also suggests that there was a rumour circulating at the time that the British were mixing the bone-dust of cows and pigs with the *attah* (flour)

sold in bazaars (39). The mounting presence of Christian missionaries (Anderson 4), and a general discontent towards the East India Company's annexation of land and frequent changing of trade routes (Anderson 9), have also been suggested as potential causes of the rebellion. Because of these disparate grievances and a lack of clear leadership, the rebellion appears to be more of a local 'counter-revolution' to increasing social discontent than a 'forward-looking nationalist one' (Anderson 11).

Many historians and authors have attempted to reconstruct precisely what happened on the night that Mangal Pande rebelled against the British. The sources, however, differ drastically. W. H. Fitchett's *The Tale of the Great Mutiny* claimed that Pande was in fact nothing but a drunk and a drug user. As with Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*, which I discuss in Chapter Four, Zadie Smith alludes to actual historical accounts in order to question supposedly objective historical truths and to construct a narrative that opposes these accounts. Samad is aware of Fitchett's version of events, and thinks, 'like a Chinese whisper, Fitchett's intoxicated, incompetent Pande had passed down a line of subsequent historians, the truth mutating, bending, receding as the whisper continued' (255). On reading Fitchett's chapter on Pande, it becomes clear that his report is as scathing as Samad claims. Fitchett describes Pande using language that infers he is out of control: he 'swaggers to and fro' and shouts in 'shrill and nasal monotone' (1). In Fitchett's telling, Pande's insurrection is not carefully planned, but is rather 'loaded [...] dangerously by fanaticism strongly flavoured with bhang [cannabis]' (4–5).

Whilst no British player in this scenario goes unnamed in Fitchett's account of the incident, the sepoys are described as a homogeneous group. He imagines them as a 'huge crowd of swaying Sepoys' (5), their 'white teeth' gleaming and their 'black eyes' flashing (4). The sepoys' reaction is described as stemming from emotion rather than reason: 'every shout from his [Pande's] lips runs like a wave of sudden flame through the brains and along the nerves of the listening crowd of fellow-Sepoys' (Fitchett 2). For Fitchett, Pande is not heroic but simply an uneducated, intoxicated man who instigates frenzy amongst the men for believing in the 'villainous theological properties' of cow and pig fat (14). He conflates 'villainous' with the Muslim belief that pigs are unclean, and is ignorant to the Hindu understanding of cows not as 'villainous' but as sacred. Indeed, he betrays a lack of understanding and laziness regarding religious practices.

At the other end of the spectrum is a Hindu nationalist understanding of the rebellion. Samad keeps a mental list of who believes Pande is 'a palaver over nuffin'', which includes his family, friends, and 'British scholarship from 1857 to the present day'. He also inventorises those who see Pande as 'an unrecognized hero', a list containing only himself

and the historian A. S. Misra (250). It is A. S. Misra's text that Samad travels to the University of Cambridge to peruse with his nephew Rajnu. While a tearful Samad clutches the text, Rajnu quietly maintains a colonial perspective established through his studies at a very traditional institution: 'Rajnu knew in his heart that the book was an inferior, insignificant, forgotten piece of scholarship, but he loved his uncle, so he smiled, nodded and smiled firmly again' (258). While the title of the text is not stated in *White Teeth*, Samad appears to be referring to *Nana Saheb Peshwa and The Fight for Freedom* by Anand Swarup Misra, published in Lucknow in 1961. Like Smith's description, the book is 'heavy, many paged, bound in a tan leather' (258) and a large portrait of Pande resides on page 204 above a caption stating: 'until [Pande's] last breath he refused to disclose the names of those who were preparing for, and instigating, the great uprising'. The caption that Samad quotes is identical to Misra's, but Smith adds:

> *His self-sacrifice gave the siren to the nation to take up arms against an alien ruler, culminating in a mass-uprising with no parallel in world history. Though the effort failed in its immediate consequences, it succeeded in laying the foundations of the Independence to be won in 1947.* (259, italics in original)

This statement can be found on page 208 of A. S. Misra's book, rather than in the caption as Smith states. Her inclusion of this passage shows that Pande is important to Samad not only because he wants to defend the reputation of his family, but because he wants to play a part in the historical narrative of Indian rebellion against the British. Smith therefore draws a narrative line directly from 1857 through to 1947, and finally to 1989.

In 1909, the Hindu nationalist V. D. Savarkar published *The Indian War of Independence*, and not long after was sent to the penal colony in the Andaman Islands on charges of sedition (Anderson 10). Whereas Fitchett makes the broadly homogenising statement that the sepoys' reaction to the greased cartridges was extreme because they were all possessed of 'eccentric sensitiveness' (15), Savarkar insists that the outrage was because the British were insisting that the sepoys bite the cartridges in an ominous attempt to 'experiment' on them (43). In contrast to Fitchett's depiction of Pande as wild and irrational, Savarkar implies that he was precisely aware of his actions. Savarkar perpetuates the heroism of Pande, personifying Pande's sword to represent his loyalty and warrior-like instincts: 'the sword of Panday positively refused to rest in its scabbard [...] Mangal Panday's sword would not wait!' (44). Savarkar perpetuates a heroic identity for Pande throughout his account, repeatedly asserting that the latter is a Brahmin and therefore from the highest and most respected Hindu caste (44).

Unlike Fitchett, Savarkar also attempts to give Pande a voice in his account. Supposedly, Pande says to the sepoys: 'Rise! ye brethren, rise! Why do you hold back, brethren. Come, and rise! I bind you by the oath of your religion! Come, let us rise and attack the treacherous enemies for the sake of our freedom' (Savarkar 44). This proclamation is not present in Fitchett's account, and serves to position Pande as heroic and anti-imperialist. In a similar vein, Amaresh Misra's *Mangal Pande: The True Story of an Indian Revolutionary*, describes itself as rupturing 'all previous, exotic-oriental-Anglicist notions of Asiatic-Indian men and events' (back cover). As such, Amaresh Misra clearly frames his book as writing back to British historical accounts of India. The text's aim, as Amaresh Misra explains in the Prologue, is to exemplify Pande as 'an actor […] who turned the tide, virtually changed the course, in a defining moment of Indian history' (xiv).

It is evident from these contrasting perspectives towards the events of 1857 that the character of Pande can be read as both pathetic, from an imperialist perspective, and heroic, from an Indian nationalist perspective. There are, as might be expected, more balanced accounts. For example, Leela Sarup argues that Pande probably spoke up very little during his trial because he was gravely ill after attempting to shoot himself when the rebellion failed (xi), rather than because he was consciously protecting the other men out of loyalty as Savarkar claims (45). Similarly, Rudrangshu Mukherjee concludes that it is dangerous to exalt Pande as a hero of Indian nationalism, as this removes him from his context. In reality, he was simply from a small village in Awadh in Uttar Pradesh (52) and probably became riled up out of a rising distrust of the British, encouraged with the confidence given to him by *bhang* (R. Mukherjee 45).

Whilst Mangal Pande is important for Samad's conception of his own identity, for Alsana and Millat the family myth is frustrating and repetitious. When Archie once again goads Samad into telling the story of Pande, it is preceded by a chorus of 'no', miming slitting of throats and self-asphyxiation, and the feigning of narcolepsy from his uninterested family (225). Millat, whose heroes come not from his bloodline but from Hollywood films such as *The Godfather*, is incurious about the 'crook-backed,' 'huge-nosed' sepoy who was 'spliffed up to the eyeballs' and failed to kill even himself (226). For Millat, Pande is an insignificant and embarrassing figure whose story only survives through the ramblings of his father. Whilst Samad's storytelling is once again received with groans by the entire family, including the Joneses, an incident occurs that disrupts the narrative flow:

> A mammoth tree – the kind endemic to North London, the ones that sprout three smaller trees along the trunk before finally erupting into glorious greenery, city-living

> for whole diaspora of magpie – a tree of this kind tore itself from the dog shit and the concrete, took one tottering step forward, swooned and collapsed. (226)

The motif of roots, used both throughout the novel and as chapter titles to signal historical exploration of a character, occurs again in this scene and acts as a symbol of the migrant's problematic relationship with the past. Although this 'glorious' tree could idealistically represent the successful flourishing of migrant families when integrated into British society, Smith shows it as being something unstable and problematic. With unflinching realism, the tree is rooted in 'dog shit', suggesting a messy history and directly opposing the pure heroism of his ancestor that Samad tries to insist upon. Most significantly, the tree uproots in a storm and collapses, no longer able to maintain its roots and therefore moving towards decay.

Throughout the text, we see a similar decaying process as the Iqbal family history becomes blurred and distorted. For example, characters are frequently mistaken regarding Samad's relation to Pande: Mickey, the owner of O'Connell's Café, thinks Pande is Samad's grandfather (248), Archie also repeatedly thinks that Pande is Samad's grandfather (99; 259) and once even his 'great-uncle whatsis name' (114), and Millat thinks that Pande is *his* great-grandfather (226). Their lack of concern when realising they have misunderstood the family genealogy is troubling for Samad, and the gradual forgetting of Pande from the family's collective memory signals a greater problem, namely a disconnection from their Bangladeshi heritage and an increasing acceptance of their place in Britain. Rather than a vibrant memory living on through familial storytelling, the tale of Pande fades into a 'much-neglected, 100-year old, mildewed yarn' (99).

Whilst the genealogy is unclear amongst the novel's characters, it is also unclear within the text itself. Mangal Pande was a Brahmin, the highest social caste in India, and so Smith's decision to make him an ancestor of a Muslim Bangladeshi family is rather perplexing. Whilst Smith endeavours to critique British historiography and contemporary understandings of Britain's relationship with its empire, her argument is rather devalued by this seeming discrepancy in the family tree. The intellectual laziness that the novel exposes is also, to an extent, reinforced. Nevertheless, the fading memory of Pande serves to explain Samad's identity crisis, and contributes to the novel's broader purpose of questioning British colonial historiography. By reconceptualising history through the medium of hysterical realism, Smith's novel takes on characteristics of Hutcheon's 'historiographic metafiction', a form that not only reimagines historical events, but is also aware of the problems and failings of historiography. Samad's discussion of Pande as a hero, interwoven as it is with uninterested and contestatory responses, offers the reader an alternative understanding of the events of 1857, while refusing to come to any conclusions. What his stories do offer is an

exemplification of how British colonial history can impact self-understandings of identity for present-day minorities.

Samad's attempt to establish a heroic genealogy through the story of his great-grandfather is, I argue, a reaction to two things. Firstly, as I have discussed, it stems from a disillusionment with British historiography that, even decades after Indian Independence, refuses to acknowledge understandings of history that cast the British in a negative light. Secondly, it develops out of Samad's struggle with everyday life as a migrant in modern Britain. The back and forth between blatant prejudice and covert exoticism is deeply rooted in a historical context and imagination. Although Samad, the café owner Mickey, and Archie Jones live in the same neighbourhood and are of a similar economic standing, they are distinguished by their attitude towards ethnic minorities. As a loyal customer, Samad is desperate for a picture of Pande to be hung in Mickey's café, but Mickey is dubious, unable to articulate exactly why but simply feeling that Pande 'looks a bit bloody *shady*' (247–8, italics in original), and will put people off their food (248).

Mickey, we learn, is actually called Abdul-Mickey, brother of Abdul-Colin and father of Abdul-Jimmy. This comic combination of an Arabic prefix and an English suffix creates a compound name that symbolises a hybrid identity and is comically juxtaposed with Samad's son Magid's traditional and lengthy name: Magid Mahfooz Murshed Mubtasim Iqbal. Regardless of his extra-British heritage, Mickey holds prejudices against non-whites that resemble those held by the white British characters, such as Archie. Though Archie admires Samad's supposedly heroic ancestor, he assures himself that at least he is 'good honest English stock' (99), his use of the word honest signifying native Englishness and excluding migrant identities such as Samad's. Although Archie is naive and uneducated in comparison to Samad, his position as a white man still provides him with a sense of superiority. His desperation to prove that Samad is wrong about the heroism of Pande demonstrates Archie's engrained belief in the superiority of the white British over the non-white British. This oscillation between the past and the present creates a connection between India in 1857 and contemporary Britain. The belief in white European superiority and distrust of Indians in the mid-nineteenth century does not dissolve over time, but instead translates into a present-day context where non-white skin still implies unresolvable difference and to privilege Indian above British history is unacceptable.

The cultural memory of Pande is not the only aspect of Samad's past that the novel explores. There is also an analepsis to a more recent past, particularly Samad's time with Archie in the Second World War. Travelling to Thessaloniki in Greece in a five-man tank are Samad, Archie, the wireless operator Roy Mackintosh, the co-driver Will Johnson, and the

captain and gunner Thomas Dickinson-Smith (84). Samad is the only non-white member of the group, and is called 'the Indian Sultan bastard' (85) when making an objection to procedure. Much to their annoyance, he tries to correct their insult:

> It's not historically *accurate*, you know. It is not, even *geographically* speaking, accurate. I am sure I have explained to you that I am from *Bengal*. The word "Sultan" refers to certain men of the *Arab* lands – many hundreds of miles west of Bengal. (85, emphases in original)

Predictably, the response to this speech by the other men is boredom. Although Samad appears more knowledgeable about history, culture, and geography than the other men, it becomes clear that being white, and therefore being associated with supposedly authentic Britishness, means having the greater social power.

While Archie is an unsophisticated and at times laughable character, he demonstrates awareness of the value of whiteness in British society and the subordinate position of non-whites. In retort to the story of Mangal Pande, he says, 'They don't speak well about Indians back home; they certainly wouldn't like it if you said an Indian was a hero … everybody would look at you a bit funny' (99–100), and his response to Samad grabbing his hand is, 'Indians were emotional, weren't they? All that spicy food and that' (100). Archie's understanding of Samad is based upon a homogeneous picture of 'Indians' concocted at the colonial centre, and Samad is desperate to challenge this. He says:

> Do me this one, great favour, Jones […] if ever you hear anyone speak of the East […] *hold your judgement*. If you are told "they are all this" or "they do this" or "their opinions are these", withhold your judgement until all the facts are upon you. Because that land they call "India" goes by a thousand names and is populated by millions, and if you think you have found two men the same amongst that multitude, then you are mistaken. (100, italics in original)

Although Samad and Archie do maintain a relationship after the war, Samad's desperate attempts to admonish the British for their homogeneous understanding of South Asians results in little change. His one chance of emulating Pande's heroism is dashed when he is shot through the wrist on his third day of fighting, and consequently spends the rest of the war with a useless group nicknamed 'the Buggered Battalion' (89). Just as Pande's failed attempt at suicide by shooting himself using his foot meant he would later be executed, Samad's useless hand meant that his chance of being a real war hero was extinguished. Ironically, Samad hopes to become a hero like Pande, but tries to do this by fighting *with* the British rather than against them. Samad praises Pande for rebelling against the British, yet he continues to be desperate both to impress them through military heroism, and to change their

minds about South Asians. Unlike his son Millat, who forms a Muslim activist group with friends and protests the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, Samad craves approval from the British and struggles with the concept of rebelling against existing hierarchies.

The racial prejudice of mid-twentieth-century Britain does not fade as the narrative moves towards the 1980s, but instead takes on the form of exoticism. The 'exotic', as Graham Huggan explains, is not a quality present in people but is instead 'a particular mode of aesthetic *perception* – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery' (13, italics in original). At home, Samad is dominated by his wife Alsana, whose quick tongue and commanding presence allows Smith to question the Western stereotype of the meek Muslim woman who needs to be liberated, a received opinion famously critiqued by Lila Abu-Lughod ('Really Need Saving' 783).

However, when Samad meets Poppy Burt-Jones, his sons' 'pretty red-haired music teacher' (140), he knowingly partakes in a relationship that allows him to demonstrate overt masculinity, something he can never experience with Alsana. For example, when he 'saves' Poppy from 'Mad Mary', she 'wiped away a frightened tear and sighed' (179). Concurrently, Samad envisions the blurring of his own self with that of Pande over 100 years earlier: he 'saw that great-grandfather of his, Mangal Pande, flailing with a musket; fighting against the new, holding on to tradition' (180). In this anachronistic moment, Pande is transported to twentieth-century London. Samad willingly partakes in this hypermasculine fantasy, but also allows Poppy to indulge her interest in his culture through exoticism rather than genuine interest. Whilst Samad's friends and family show perpetual indifference to his stories of Pande, Samad is able to play upon Poppy's tendency to exoticise him to maintain her interest. Her naive fascination with Samad's cultural origins give him the ego boost that he craves, in contrast to his apathetic family and the vulgar diners at his restaurant.

Samad tries to use the traditionally Romantic literary device of synaesthesia, the 'blending or confusion of different kinds of sense-impression' (Baldick 328), to metaphorise his love for Poppy: he hears the colour of her hair, smells the touch of the hand and tastes her smile (140). However, this is no radical exemplar of a modern multicultural union. Poppy's fascination with Samad is insincere, and his obsession disappointingly culminates in regular masturbation in 'every public convenience in London' (140). Rather than learning about his cultural history and offering him the kind of childlike devotion that he craves, Poppy homogenises South Asians in a blasé tone. Poppy assumes that Samad is from India, but he corrects her and informs her that he is actually from Bangladesh. She proves unaware of the tumultuous history of South Asia and glibly replies: 'Oh, right. Same sort of ball-park, then'

(133). Her response mirrors that of Samad's fellow soldiers in 1945, who wrongly describe him as a sultan and show no concern when corrected. The prejudice that Samad experienced in his past, specifically in the Second World War, both continues through his interactions with Archie and Mickey, and morphs into the equally destructive process of exoticism with Poppy. Samad wants Poppy to exist in an alternate present, radically different from his own dismal reality. In his disappointment, however, he discovers that instead of living in Islington, West Hampstead, or at least Swiss Cottage, she lives in Harlesden (164), a 'notorious black urban crime hot [spot]' (Gunter Intro). He imagined Poppy to exist in a world of whiteness and economic prosperity, but just as Poppy tries to force Samad into the 'ball-park' of Indian, Poppy is not the middle-class stereotype that Samad hoped for. This realisation that identities are not as clear-cut as he hoped encourages Samad to cling more closely to his idealised Bengali identity, but Alsana reads him the disappointing encyclopedic entry for 'Bengali':

> The vast majority of Bangladesh's inhabitants are Bengalis, who are largely descended from Indo-Aryans who began to migrate into the country from the west thousands of years ago and who mixed within Bengal with indigenous groups of various racial stocks. (236)

She tells him that 'you go back and back and back and it's still easier to find the correct Hoover bag than to find one pure person, one pure faith, on the globe' (236). She prevents any sanctimonious self-reflexivity by bathetically comparing a search for a Hoover bag with searching for truth. Samad's search for truth and purity of identity is met sharply with mundanity as Smith shows how cultural and racial hybridity is simply 'part of the practice of everyday life' (Moss 11). His supposed love of Bangladesh and his cultural heritage is present in his research into Pande, but in practice he is settled into life in the West, glued to his sofa in his underwear watching *The Antiques Roadshow.*

The 'Indian' restaurant where Samad works further contributes to our understanding of problematic multicultural spaces that thrive on prejudice and exoticism rather than intercultural communication. It is estimated that there are over 9,000 restaurants in Britain that are run by South Asian migrants, and the majority of their customer base tends to be white (Buettner 865; 866). Many of these 'Indian' restaurants do not employ Indian staff or serve Indian food, but rather offer Pakistani and especially Bangladeshi cuisine. However, as Ravi Arvind Palat explains, restaurant owners know that 'India' conjures up romanticised images of the exotic colonies (175). In contrast, Bangladesh is associated with natural disasters, and Pakistan with militant Islam (Palat 175). By the 1990s, South Asian cuisine (known popularly, but inaccurately, as simply 'curry') was a restaurant, supermarket, and household staple. As Shrabani Basu explains, 'gone are the days of the fifties and sixties

when English landladies would stop their Indian tenants cooking curries because it made the house smell' (xiv).

Although it may seem that the popularity of 'Indian' cuisine in Britain is due to improved relations between the white British and the South Asian migrant population, it has been argued that this in fact constitutes insincere multiculturalism. This was famously explored in the comedy sketch 'Going Out For An English' on BBC Two's *Goodness Gracious Me* in the late 1990s, in which four Indian actors parody the British tradition of 'going for an Indian' after a trip to the pub. Elizabeth Buettner argues that 'multiculturalism as culinary celebration or as a white consumer practice constitutes only a limited form of tolerance', and that it is too easy to substitute this celebratory form of multiculturalism for genuine communication (869). Whilst South Asian food is lauded as a British staple, all too often the waiting staff is subjected to verbal abuse and racist taunts (Palat 173).

Samad's restaurant could be seen as a multicultural space where cuisine from the periphery has been introduced to the autochthonous British diner. However, Samad is aware of the insincerity of the relationship between the waiters and the diners. After their relationship has ended, Poppy visits the restaurant with her sister. She frostily asks for 'Two Lamb Dawn Sock', which presumably is 'dansak' mispronounced, and 'rice, with chips' (208). Her amalgamation of South Asian and British cuisines highlights her change in attitude from wanting to learn about South Asian cultures to becoming a stereotype of the ignorant British diner. By visiting the restaurant where Samad works, and specifically asking for him to serve her, Poppy's exoticism turns to prejudice as she makes a clear statement about their power dynamics. She becomes part of his association with the restaurant as another imagined colonial space:

> It is a long walk [through the restaurant] if you are to negotiate the jungle; attending to the endless needs and needless ends, the desires, the demands of the pink faces that strike Samad now as pith-helmet-wearing gentlemen, feet up on the table with guns across their laps; as tea-slurping ladies on verandas cooling themselves under the breeze of the brown boys who beat the ostrich feathers (206)

Although the ubiquity of South Asian cuisine in British cities could be praised as evidence of cultural integration, Samad instead sees this phenomenon as another arena for the British to enact cultural appropriation. In this passage, Samad places himself anachronistically in the restaurant, in the present, and also in colonial times, suggesting that he sees the British regard to non-white people as unchanging. There is an obvious antipathy towards the British in this passage as their orders are described as 'desires' and 'demands', their composure is lazy and their tea-slurping women are undignified.

As Samad did when saving Poppy from 'Mad Mary', he again aligns himself with Mangal Pande, but this time not in terms of heroism, but with disdain for the British. Just like the forgotten history of Mangal Pande, the restaurant is another means of cultural imperialism in which his history is deprived of a narrative of its own, and is instead appropriated and consumed by the British. Ironically, when Samad leaves the supposed multicultural space of the restaurant, he is faced with the statue of General Henry Havelock in Trafalgar Square, the man who, 'from the other side of the country, on a chaise longue in Delhi' ordered the execution of Mangal Pande (254). This moment sums up the problem with history that concerns Samad, namely that British collective memory is perpetually at odds with his own, non-European, understanding. It is evident that throughout the novel, Samad wants to prove that his history deserves a place in the dominant discourse of British history rather than at the periphery. Samad's telling and retelling of the story of his great-grandfather is a way to assert his roots, to claim that he and his ancestors are worth something: 'When a man has nothing but his blood to commend him, each drop of it matters, matters terribly; it must be jealously defended' (255). Because of this, he oscillates between hating the British, and wanting to ingratiate himself through military success and displays of heroic masculinity.

Whilst it may seem that Samad is the only Muslim character who struggles to find a balance between remembering his cultural identity and adapting to life in Britain, his sons Magid and Millat both construct their identities based on Britain's long history with South Asia. Ironically, in sending Magid back to Bangladesh in an attempt to reinvigorate his Muslim identity, Samad inadvertently creates a son who resembles a British colonialist. In a fit of rage while Magid consumes a bacon sandwich, Samad accuses him of being a 'kaffir' and a 'white-trousered Englishman with [a] stiff-upper-lip and his big white teeth' (454). It is his brother Millat, who remained in Willesden and helped to create the comically named K.E.V.I.N., or 'Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation', who eventually becomes the most religious son. Millat is the archetype of the hybridised British migrant, but this identity does not sit easily with him:

> He had to please all of the people all of the time. To the cockney wide-boys in the white jeans and the coloured shirts, he was the joker, the risk-taker, respected lady-killer. To the black kids he was fellow weed-smoker and valued customer. To the Asian kids, hero and spokesman. Social chameleon. And underneath it all, there remained an ever present anger and hurt, the feeling of belonging nowhere that comes to people who belong everywhere. (269)

His multicultural identity is only skin deep, and beneath his cool lies a crisis of identity. Adopting the characteristics of other ethnic groups serves only to reinforce his own feelings

of unbelonging.

In an attempt to form a type of coalition amongst his young Muslim friends, Millat and his friends travel from London to Bradford to join the 1989 protests against the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*. They accuse Rushdie of being a 'coconut', a slang term for somebody who has 'the superficial characteristics of one race and the deeper cultural characteristics of another race' (Hornsey and Jetten 170). Ironically, Millat and his friends also have hybrid, or inauthentic, identities that incorporate Jamaican music and street slang; an appreciation for Western, predominantly white, film culture; and Muslim loyalties. The specific accusation of 'coconut' is important because it signifies a loyalty to whiteness over other, often oppressed, non-white identities. As Michael Mitchell explains in his analysis of Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*, the accusation of 'coconut' describes someone who is 'a traitor to his ethnic roots, someone who has assimilated to the white lifestyle of the former colonialist oppressors, who has "sold out"' (331). Rushdie, therefore, is seen as traitorous for assimilating into the culture of the former colonialist oppressors rather than defending black and Asian communities.

Millat's group, Smith explains, can only be described as 'Raggastani' (231), a colloquial term which fuses Jamaican culture with Pakistani identity. They spoke 'a strange mix of Jamaican patois, Bengali, Gujarati and English' (231) and although 'Allah featured', he was more of a 'collective big brother than a supreme being, a hard-as-fuck geezer who would fight in their corner if necessary' (231). Rather than appealing to Allah because of faith, they call on him as a symbol of a powerful and profoundly masculine force that gives them the courage to assert a Muslim identity in the face of quotidian prejudices. Indeed, active and public Islamism is one way for Muslims to express their need to merge their 'private religion' with 'public action' in order to defend their threatened identities (Glynn 180).

Much of Millat's anger comes from attitudes towards South Asians, rather than Muslims, especially the stereotypes of South Asians as being asexual benefit-scroungers, or nothing more than dentists, shop-owners, or 'curry-shifters', and only worth sympathetic media attention in the case of brutal murder (233−34). Millat and his friends' fervent defence of Islam is treated with seriousness as well as comedy by Smith. Like many who protested against the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, Millat and his friends confess they have not actually read the book (234), and Millat's claim that 'you don't have to read shit to know that it's blasphemous' (234) echoes the well-known statement by Indian MP Syed Shahabuddin: 'I do not have to wade through a filthy drain to know what filth is' (Malik, *Fatwa* 32). Although there appears to be a great divide between generations in *White Teeth*, both Samad

and Millat struggle with an identity that they feel subjected to because of British cultural ignorance. Whilst the British Raj may have collapsed many years ago, British society is still based on the assumption that 'British ways of thinking and acting were [...] innately superior to all things Indian' (Ballard, 'South Asian' 198). Unlike Archie, the Iqbals struggle to be perceived as 'good honest English stock', and because of the British unwillingness to accept cultural difference they realise that they will always be referred to as 'Pakis', regardless of their Bangladeshi origins.

If the Mangal Pande story is considered in depth, we can challenge an understanding of the novel as a *celebration* of British multiculturalism. Most importantly, this aspect of the novel highlights the importance of history – both remembering and refusing to remember – to the formation of identity for migrant communities, as well as Britain's reluctance to acknowledge the role its violent history plays in the formation of postcolonial identities. Although published seventeen years ago, the British attitude towards its colonial history, shown through political and media discourse and popular representations, is still worryingly unapologetic. At the time the novel was published, as well as afterwards, there were concerns that reviewers' lionisation of Smith's supposedly happy and diverse Britain actually ignored deeper cultural and social tensions. Dave Gunning argues:

> Often seen as a paean to the multicultural reality of early twenty-first-century Britain, [*White Teeth*] is perhaps equally an indictment of the failure of cultural diversity to ensure equity or the eradication of racist injustice. More than anything, it is a call against the complacency and triumphalism that finds the end of racial history in the achievements of multiculturalism. (148–9)

Today, after several high-profile terrorist attacks, increased monitoring of Muslims by domestic security services, and a tilt towards the idea that multiculturalism is 'dead' rather than flourishing, British history is being approached through the lens of colonial nostalgia.

British historian Niall Ferguson, for example, propounds the benefit of empire is his book *Empire: How Britain Made The Modern World*, which according to Amazon's UK site holds the accolade of best-selling book in the category of 'social and economic history of imperialism'. In *Empire*, Ferguson claims that the British empire was a success because it established liberal capitalism, a more successful model than the Russian and Chinese models of communism; it brought important structures such as universities, the civil service, the army and the press to colonies such as India; it enabled the English language to be spread across the globe; allowed for free trade, free capital movements, and free labour; and maintained 'global peace' (366). Social and moral travesties such as 'enslavement, transportation and the "ethnic-cleansing" of indigenous peoples' (Ferguson 366) are lamented because they

compromised Britain's value of 'individual liberty' rather than because they exposed the cruelty of the empire. A YouGov poll published in July 2014 produced shocking results: 59 per cent of people interviewed believed that the empire was something to be proud of, and 49 per cent believed that the colonised countries were better off because of British colonisation. 34 per cent of respondents even claimed that they would like Britain to still have an empire (Dahlgreen n. pag.). This act of remembering colonial atrocities is particularly pertinent in the twenty-first century as imperial nostalgia reemerges in British national consciousness.

Eurocentric British historiography, *White Teeth* shows, plays an important part in how the nation views itself. However, Smith's novel is not immune from critique for how it portrays its Muslim characters. The characterisation of Samad borders on stereotypical, particularly when he takes his son Magid out of school and sends him to Bangladesh, or when he stands up in the middle of a school meeting and asks for the Harvest Festival to be abandoned and more Muslim holidays to be celebrated. Moments like these play into the stereotype of Muslims in Britain as people who refuse to fit into a 'traditionally British' way of life. Nevertheless, the overarching picture of multicultural Britain that Smith creates is both a place where people mix, and a place where cultural, particularly historic, tensions run deeper than might at first be apparent. The ubiquitous cultural memory of colonialism and the perpetual racism that pervades the text shows that multiculturalism may be a social reality, but it is not necessarily a success.

'[T]his determinedly Muslim population, hairy and hijabbed': Self-Loathing and Secularism in Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road from Damascus*

Robin Yassin-Kassab, who is of Syrian descent, was born in London in 1969 (Qunfuz n. pag.). Yassin-Kassab has also lived in Merseyside and Scotland and, after studying at the University of Oxford, in Pakistan, France, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Morocco, Turkey, and Syria (Chambers, 'Yassin-Kassab' 191). Whilst *The Road from Damascus* is the only novel Yassin-Kassab has published to date, his non-fiction book *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War*, co-written with Leila Al-Shami, was published in January 2016. He was also an editor for the quarterly magazine *Critical Muslim*, and has made a number of appearances on radio and television (Qunfuz n. pag.). A reversal of St Paul's conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus, *The Road From Damascus* follows Sami Traifi, a disenchanted

London-based Syrian who struggles to coalesce a secular identity in Britain with his Muslim heritage in Syria.

In *On Identity*, Amin Maalouf writes that 'each of us has two heritages, a "vertical" one that comes to us from our ancestors, our religious community and our popular traditions, and a "horizontal" one transmitted to us by our contemporaries and by the age we live in' (86). Sami is a character that occupies the intersection between these two 'heritages'. In his determination to reject his Muslim heritage, a project started by his secular father Mustafa Traifi, he begins a self-destructive journey towards what he thinks will bring him happiness, namely secularism and a hedonistic lifestyle. I argue that the simplistic binary that Sami creates between a supposedly rational and progressive secularism and obsolete theology and restrictive religious communities is, in fact, explored through the body. Paul Connerton, in his monograph on the relationship between memory and the body, argues against Kant's presupposition that the body is pre-cultural and autonomous to its social environment (*Mourning* 99). Instead, Connerton explains, the body is 'already culturally and socially incorporated, produced by material practices and by symbolic meanings elaborated in places' (*Mourning* 99). The way in which humans understand their 'orientation', therefore, is dependent on their surroundings. Incorporating Connerton's theory, I approach the body in *The Road From Damascus* as a site that can be used to signify either religiosity, in the case of Sami's Muslim wife Muntaha, or secularism, in the case of Sami himself. The couple's position as non-native migrants in Britain means that they must orient their bodies, and therefore themselves, toward particular identities. The body, consequently, functions as a medium through which the characters must experience and perform the intersection of both their Muslim heritage and contemporary British identities in order to 'orient' themselves within Britain.

The novel incorporates flashbacks to Sami's uncle, Faris, in Syria and Muntaha's father, Marwan, in Iraq; two men who lived under repressive and brutal regimes and were tortured for their religious and political allegiances. This familial memory of bodily pain, I argue, is passed down to the novel's present generation, Sami and his wife Muntaha, and informs their understanding of life as Muslims in the West as different from the traumatic experiences of their relatives. Furthermore, the diasporic lives of Sami and Muntaha are not only influenced by familial memories of pre-migration bodily pain, but also influenced by a broader problem regarding race relations in Britain. In particular, the novel explores how the performance of multiculturalism (Muntaha's fellow school teacher Gabor learning about Muslim culture, for example) does not necessarily reveal successful and sincere

multiculturalism. As in *White Teeth*, exoticism towards Muslims, stemming from colonial concepts of the 'other', is still present in everyday interactions.

Sami undergoes a journey during the novel in which his dogmatic and insular perception of Islam and his reluctance to connect with his family in Syria is challenged. *The Road from Damascus* shows that Muslim citizens and communities can perpetuate imperialist binaries of an obsolete East and a progressive West as much as native Britons. I examine how Yassin-Kassab uses intimate and corporal imagery as a way to explore broader ideas about social belonging in multicultural Britain. I argue that Yassin-Kassab not only uses the motif of the human body to instil a sense of intimacy in the mind of the reader, but also explores the migrant's relationship between a personal history in the East and the present reality of life in the West. Indeed, he centres the body as the battleground for negotiating and determining identity in multicultural Britain.

Although from a traditionally Muslim country, Sami associates Islam with moral, educational, and sexual backwardness, and for much of the novel he is reluctant to be associated with the religion. Due to his appearance, people assume that he is a Muslim. Instead of confirming this, he replies with: 'Perhaps originally. A long time ago. Not any more' (61), showing his determination to separate his self-created, urban identity of 'Black music, Arabism and poetry' (15) from a traditional Islamic identity. Greatly influenced by his father, Sami perceives Islam, and religion in general, as obsolete. His criticisms, however, are based on theology rather than the everyday cultural and social practices of faith. By using free indirect discourse, Yassin-Kassab brings the unflattering and racist perceptions of South Asian Muslims that prevail in society to the forefront of the readers' attention:

> In Britain Muslims meant Pakis, which meant crumbling mills and corner shops. Which meant anoraks and miserable accents and curry houses. Dismal northern towns where day never truly dawned [...] Neither sexy nor strong. Badly dressed and poorly educated. Islam's cobwebs in their eyelashes, and its mould on their tongues. (61)

To Sami, the popular perception of Muslims in Britain is closely connected with the Pakistani, working-class migrants of the north, a group that he ultimately resents for their low socio-economic status rather than their Muslim faith. His disdain for Islam is both borne out of his present in Britain – the association between South Asians, Islam, and poverty – and of his past – his father's secularist teachings. This passage is starkly reminiscent of Smith's passage, from the perspective of Millat, which I quoted earlier in this chapter (see page 45). Similarly to Smith's passage, Yassin-Kassab's begins with the shock of the word 'Paki' and the evident racism that this word entails, and then proceeds to list associations made with South Asian Muslims. However, Smith's list is solely of stereotypical perceptions of South

Asians in general: that they give all the jobs to their relatives, or can only be 'dentists' or 'shop-owners', to give two examples. Yassin-Kassab's list, however, moves from specifically South Asian Muslim stereotypes to a more general perspective on how Sami views Islam's position in the twenty-first century. Using the bodily imagery of eyelashes and tongues, Sami anthropomorphises Islam as a decaying body, suggesting that its teachings obscure a forward-looking vision ('cobwebs in their eyelashes'), and that it preaches antiquated commands ('mould on their tongues'). Whilst Millat's anger is directed outwards against the failure of multiculturalism to defeat society's stereotypes, Sami's discontent is directed inwards at his physical appearance and his familial heritage in Syria, both of which signify a Muslim identity that does not concur with his performed identity of secular Arabism.

Sami idealises his father from childhood through to adult life, but struggles with his relationship with his mother. When his secular father died, his increasingly religious mother showed no outward sadness and Sami refused to forgive her for what he saw as a betrayal. His father, we learn, was a successful academic who published a book entitled *The Secular Arab Consciousness*. Sami aims to emulate his father in every way, from staunchly defending secularism to mimicking his career path through studying for a Ph.D. in Arabic poetry. As his Iraqi wife Muntaha begins to wear the hijab regularly, feeling that it allows her a closer relationship with God, Sami retaliates by immersing himself in the antithesis of a Muslim community: the seedy underworld of drugs, alcohol, and sex.

Sami's determination to use his body to resist Muntaha's increasing Muslim faith reaches its crescendo when, in the early hours of the morning at a drug fuelled party, he has sex with a woman whose name he does not know. The scene is imbued with images of dirt and poor hygiene in stark contrast with words used to describe Muntaha, who is shown to be virtuous throughout the novel, her skin 'unravaged' by alcohol unlike Sami's (110). In contrast, Sami's act of infidelity is described as happening in a kind of moral underworld in the heart of London:

> Down the back steps behind a sturdy grey terrace in the latter part of dawn, in among old-fashioned clatter bins and fag ends and bits of yellow grass and scratchy soil and probably, from the smell of it, dogshit, and the London odour of grease and used petrol and spilt beer. (165)

The scene is imbued with imagery of death and decay: the finished cigarettes that nobody wants; the dehydrated and lifeless patches of grass and soil; the remains of animal excrement; the smell of grease from old cooking, of petrol from cars long gone, and of beer from partying that has now moved on. Whilst Sami perceives Islam as a dying and irrational faith, the imagery of London's party scene is ironically imbued with images of decay and chaos.

Muntaha, in contrast, is often surrounded with a sense of cleanliness and calm. Their home, when Sami is not there, smells of 'flowers, coffee and perfume' (40), and when faced with his pride and anger she responds 'by wearing her tolerant look' (46). Sami tries to emulate his father's academic standing in order to continue the legacy of success, but in failing, succumbs to his hedonistic surroundings. His body falls victim to the pains of an excessive and dangerous lifestyle that enables Sami to distract himself from his fading doctoral dreams and, much to his anger, Muntaha's increasing religiosity.

Sami hopes that he can discard his remorse for cheating on Muntaha, but finds that 'such guilt couldn't be swallowed immediately, not in his nauseated state' (177). His phrasing creates a close link between matters of the mind and conscience, and matters of the body. By using the word 'swallowed' to describe how he hopes to eliminate his guilt from his conscience, Sami intimates that his guilt be turned into a 'waste product' in order to fully initiate himself into a hedonistic lifestyle that separates him from Muntaha even further. After his act of infidelity, Sami embarks on yet another drug and alcohol binge. His behaviour is described as animalistic and out of control, showing his rejection not only of the morality and order of religion, but of his own sense of being human:

> Invisible even to himself, he reappeared at the bar. A fresh drink awaited. Down it went, whiskey and meltwater. He clawed money from his pocket and dropped it, and then he was out on the street, crowded night colliding with his cheeks, feeding himself spliff and flame, injecting smoke into the organism, sensing it pull him forward. (157)

Bestial imagery is employed through the words 'clawing' and 'feeding', and a sense of chaos is created through Sami colliding with people and being pulled forward.

The supposed rationality and progressiveness of a secular life is deemed questionable in this chapter as Sami finds himself unable to control his body. This is developed further:

> He rubbed more coke into his gums, and then he was so crazed by thirst and a desire for clarity that he kneeled, and bowed, and dipped his head into the canal. In among the who-knows-what, the mutant weeds and industrial acids, the human waste, the water not fit to drink when boiled, not fit even for twenty-first-century, hormone-boggled hermaphrodite fish. (175–76)

In Sami's brief moment of a craving 'for clarity', he kneels and bows, a movement mirroring an act of prayer in a mosque. He also dips his head into the canal, an act that could be seen to reassemble an initiation or ceremony into a religious community. Instead of emerging from the water refreshed and purer, he emerges in a state that is almost non-human. The water is filled with the strange: 'mutant weeds' and 'hormone-boggled hermaphrodite fish'; the

revolting: 'human waste', and the dangerous: 'industrial acids'. It is replete with that which is unnatural and impure, and symbolises Sami's self-styled 'baptism' into a hedonistic lifestyle of drugs and parties. In Sami's stubborn unwillingness to separate his personal relationships from his political views, he displaces the blame for his infidelity on to Muntaha, berating her for 'wrapping herself up in a scarf, saying prayers, mumbling mumbo-jumbo' and disrupting their 'secularist consensus' (177). Whilst Muntaha seems comfortable with her newly adopted religious lifestyle, for Sami, a crucial part of their marriage is having the same core political and religious assumptions. Sami strives for experiences that wrack him with guilt and cause him to lose all sense of self-identity, as he commits an act that results in 'a betrayal of himself as well of [Muntaha]' (176).

In the opening chapter of the novel, when Sami visits his family in Damascus, he claims that he cannot rationally understand the need for women to wear the hijab. He sees this garment as a sign of the 'end of civilisation' (3), a view influenced by his secular father. Sami believes that Muntaha is wrongly adopting a symbol of Muslim patriarchy and backwardness by wearing the hijab, and is therefore jeopardising his self-constructed identity as urban and fashionable. When Muntaha travels with Sami on the underground to visit her father Marwan, Sami endlessly worries about how they are being perceived by those around them, even though they are in the heart of a multicultural city surrounded by a mix of people, including a Jew, a black woman, and a couple of 'natives' (110). Sami feels that Muntaha's hijab encourages people to perceive them in a stereotypical way, as 'Muslims out on dark business, their trauma children and a string of austere relatives left behind in an unfurnished overcrowded room' (110). This description creates an image of a family that is "different" from and unfamiliar to the cosmopolitan commuters found on the London Underground. Sami himself observes stereotypes of Muslims, feeling that an outward portrayal of Islamic beliefs is embarrassingly contradictory to the modern, cosmopolitan atmosphere of London.

There is a degree of parallelism between Sami's relationship with Muntaha and his mother Nur's relationship with his father Mustafa. Mustafa was angered by his wife's decision to wear the hijab because he believed that it signifies a denial of rational thought and secularism. Similarly, Sami feels betrayed by Muntaha's decision to wear the hijab. Reflecting on his mother's choice, he makes connections between the hijab as a symbol and his mother's body. He thinks of the hijab as a thing 'that marked her as a female and a decaying thing. A woman, not a girl. The bearer of a body' (338). Sami associates the wearing of the hijab with an assertion of womanly sexuality rather than rationality, that the body is more important than the mind. Ironically, he blames a religious system and its patriarchies for Nur and Muntaha's adoption of the hijab, and yet he himself adopts a

misogynistic and controlling stance towards the two women, trying and failing to tell them how to perform their Muslim identities. For Sami, the hijab denotes neither a British Muslim identity nor that of a free woman. Instead, Sami understands the body wearing the hijab as being symbolic of the past and of an obsolete religion that has little use in contemporary society.

Sami creates this image himself, portraying his paranoia about the assumptions of strangers. He worries that the people in the train carriage see him as non-Western, and hopes that they can see how his skin actually 'bore the marks of nicotine, alcohol, insomnia, oversleep. Un-Islamic capillary damage. He hoped that was apparent, the un-Islamic part' (110). During his pursuit of academia, Sami's anti-Islamic stance resulted in stagnation and writer's block. He finds a kind of success elsewhere, in causing such a deep level of physical harm as to slowly change the look of his body, and piece by piece reworking his physical identity until he is no longer assumed to be Muslim. For Sami, Muslim heritage is embarrassing and something to be concealed, whereas for Muntaha it is something that should be celebrated within a community, and something to be proud of (92). Muntaha has therefore made herself a symbol of Islamic devotion in Sami's eyes, an image that risks damaging Sami's antithetical image of a secularist party-goer.

In contemporary Britain, some have criticised the perpetuation of a group rights policy for minority communities due to its potential to create separate, 'ghettoised' communities. Ted Cantle's 2001 report 'Community Cohesion', for example, laments the presence of separate communities living within Britain:

> Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges. (9)

Britain, rather than becoming a 'community of communities' under multiculturalism (Runnymede Trust 10), is reported by Cantle as a collection of disparate social groups. By forming a complex character such as Sami, Yassin-Kassab engages with this observation. He shows not only that these separate communities do not necessarily exist, or perhaps not to the extent that Cantle claims, but also that not all Muslims may actually *want* to be part of such a close-knit, insular community. Yassin-Kassab thereby problematises assumptions that Muslims living in the British diaspora wish to entirely segregate themselves from other ethnic groups. Rather, Muslim identities are portrayed as complex, being influenced by both cultural heritage and everyday interactions.

Although initially blaming Muntaha for his desire to distance himself from her, Sami starts to turn the blame inward and to punish himself for the damage that he has done to his body: 'Sami could take no pride in himself […] his body by itself was a humiliation. An empirically verifiable humiliation' (253). He attempts to regain control of his world by obsessively and dangerously controlling his body where he had earlier indulged it. He gets rid of lager and whiskey, because 'he fancied this left him unbolted, less bitter' (253) and tobacco, in order to eliminate 'the most immediately gratifying of foodstuffs' (253). He worried about 'preservatives, flavourings and other E-numbers, about genetically modified foods' (253–4); 'the smeary fingers of packing workers' that spread bacteria; and he 'repudiated sugar and salt, which effort made him less sweet, less sour, and more neutral, closer to the middle path' (254). As Claire Chambers explains, the necessity of finding a 'middle path' is in fact written within the Qur'an, specifically the need to avoid 'both permissiveness and asceticism' in everyday life ('*Good Muslim*' 149). By depriving his body of anything that he sees as dirty, unnatural, or excessive, he learns to become more tolerant of pain and therefore separates himself from any intimate human contact.

Contrastingly to his beliefs, Sami finds a middle path that leads him towards an Islamic way of life that is closer to Muntaha's. He becomes so concerned with self-control that he cuts down on sleep to only five hours per night and stops having an evening meal (254) as he realises the many ways through which he can rein in his body: 'He perceived a glimmer of power here: that he could organise the beast by setting its habits, that he could programme himself' (254–55). Again, and ironically, this high level of self-control is reminiscent of Islamic traditions in which both men and women should maintain a degree of shame about their bodies whilst striving towards modesty and cleanliness (Khuri 35–6).[2]

In Elaine Scarry's seminal text *The Body in Pain*, she argues that 'whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language' (4). Because Sami has separated himself from his comfortable, domestic environment, he no longer needs to share his pain, and therefore can increase it without justification or resistance. His inability to communicate with his mother and Muntaha translates into a desire to resist any kind of communication at all, except for a form of pain between his mind and his body. His obsession with gaining control, of scrubbing away every drop of sweat as it leaves his body (263), allows him to distance himself from relationships. Nonetheless, he soon realises that the body cannot be fully kept in check:

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[2] Khuri gets his argument from Sura 33, which states that 'men and women should guard their private parts' (33). Khuri interprets this as a general call for both men and women to maintain modesty, decency, and cleanliness.

> Sami, increasingly aware of basic facts. Of his body palpitating, processing, without his consent or control, twenty-four hours a day […] entirely indifferent to his ideological pursuits. Atheist, agnostic or Muslim, the body paid not the least attention, so busy it was producing aromas. (255–6)

Sami forces his body from one extreme to the other: from saturating it with drugs and alcohol in order to fit into a certain secular crowd, to ascetic deprivation of sustenance and rest. He describes practices of cleanliness such as the Muslim tradition of washing before prayer five times a day as 'old-time desert logic' (257). As such, he is reluctant to depart from his father's contempt for Islamic traditions and therefore, unlike Muntaha, struggles to create new ways of practising Islam in the diaspora.

Although the narrative primarily revolves around Sami, his wife Muntaha is an important character, particularly in relation to how the body is used to explore and express a Muslim identity. As the only female character in the novel that has a sustained and consistent presence, we witness how her female sexuality influences how others perceive her identity. Because of Muntaha's decision to wear the hijab, a rift forms between herself and Sami, and this encourages fellow school teacher, Gabor Vronk, to try and seduce Muntaha. Gabor grew up in England, but when thinking of his personal history, he claims he prefers to avoid 'as much of muddy contemporary England as he can' (132) and instead focuses on 'his Russian grandfather, Vronsky, and Saint Petersburg the city of his origin, city of orchestras and novelists' (132). Gabor's physical location in Britain does not offer him a sense of identity, but his collective memories of Russia do. He feels a perpetual affinity with his grandfather because he sees him as being of a 'pure' Russian identity rather than his own muddled and confusing British identity that he so dislikes. He reminisces over his grandfather, 'greatly deceased, but still in some way with him today. Certainly in his blood. Same genes: the height, the bulky head, the darkening brow. He is accompanied by him, or perhaps inhabited by him' (135). Gabor's identity, according to him, is simultaneously a biological and historical one. He is proud of his ancestral Russian identity, but wholly rejects his situational British one.

In a scene in which Muntaha visits Gabor at his art exhibition, the latter describes Muntaha in exoticising and sexualising language. When she moves, she is 'slipping' and 'dipping', and she wears a 'swirling hijab' (283). He studies her as if she were a piece on display in the exhibition: 'her skin had a recent surface darkness like the ghost of reddish brown on Assyrian wall paintings, museum faces ready to flake but kept timeless with sealant' (284). Gabor not only fantasises sexually about what is beneath Muntaha's hijab, but also approaches her with a colonial gaze. By describing her as a wall painting or museum

figure, he classes her, firstly, as an object of a voyeuristic gaze, and secondly, something that is different and foreign in a way that is sexually alluring and mysterious. Gabor's 'chase' of Muntaha continues, with his descriptions moving from her human beauty to a desire to measure and assess her in a scientific manner:

> She [Muntaha] was putting herself at a distance, and Gabor needed proximity. Proximity enough to measure her nipples between his fingers and thumbs, to weigh breasts and flanks, to annotate her curves and chart her, to claim her for science. To gather empirical proof of her. (288)

Gabor's attempt to measure Muntaha empirically, to categorise and contain her, is disturbingly reminiscent of the racist voyeurism towards the 'other' in nineteenth-century Europe.

The 'human zoo' of the colonial period, an exotic spectacle or ethnographic freak-show, was an event in which scientists could parade the 'other', often African men and women, in a circus-like environment in the name of research. Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, and Sandrine Lemaire explain that:

> Antropozoological exhibitions were the first points of mass contact between so-called exotic worlds and large swathes of the population of Europe […]. As such, they established a relationship with the Other which would last for several decades and which was founded on the twin processes for objectification and domination. By staging a world in which the divide between the civilized peoples and 'savages' was clear to see, they contributed to the legitimization of the colonial project and to interracial xenophobia. (104)

It is clear that '[s]cientific discourse, by legitimizing colonial domination through its theory of racial inequality, and by relentlessly rationalizing racism, created a truly horrifying vision of the world' (Blanchard, Bancel, and Lemaire 108). Gabor's interaction with Muntaha is borne out of admiration, but fast transforms into an attempt to impose gendered and ethnic superiority over Muntaha in order to categorise and objectify her in this colonial style. The dynamic between Gabor and Muntaha is reminiscent of 'the familiar discourse of rape between colonizer, and colonized country', expressed through images of 'rending veils, of exposing bodies and forbidden horizons "piece by piece"' (Kanneh 347). Although Gabor's attempted appropriation of Muntaha is not as violent as this, he does, in an Orientalist fashion, establish himself as an oppressive force determined to reveal the supposedly mysterious and highly sexualised body of an Arab woman.

After his advances toward Muntaha prove unrequited, Gabor begins to essentialise Arabs in order to justify his failure to seduce her. He blames his obsession with her on her

typically Arab ‘freakishness’, comparing Arabs with ‘aliens’ (291), and her rejection of him on her being ‘either sensuous or violent, or both at once’, as he assumes most Arabs typically are (286). Although he tries to convince Muntaha and even her brother Ammar that he has a genuine interest in Islam, the way he meticulously researches and interprets the Qur’an is suspiciously slanted towards sexually dominating Muntaha:

> There’s nothing prudish about Islam. Gabor had thoroughly researched it. The original faith doesn’t ask anyone to lie back and think of Mecca. It holds sex in high regard, despite the puritanism of some contemporary clerics who, out of touch with their own tradition, imitate Victorian Christianity […] Sexual pleasure is a marital right. The failure of a husband to pleasure his wife is legitimate grounds for divorce. […] If she’d [Muntaha] married Sami according to Islamic regulations she’d be free of him by now. So Gabor saw no cultural or legal obstruction to their first night of knowledge. It’s the tribal background that turns women’s bodies into suitcases of honour, and she’d liberated herself from that. (285)

As much as Gabor claims he admires Islam and respects Muntaha, he tries to dictate the terms of her ‘liberation’ to encourage a sexual union in which he can finally lay claim to the ‘exotic’ woman that he craves. By suggesting that Muntaha’s understanding of Islam is based on cultural conventions – her ‘tribal background’ – rather than Qur’anic teachings, he fails to see Muntaha as a subject in her own right, but rather forces upon her the burden of representation. The façade of successful multiculturalist and Islam enthusiast that Gabor maintains is gradually dismantled as his colonial-style view of Muslim women as oppressed and vulnerable is exposed.

For Gabor, Muntaha’s decision about whether to have a sexual relationship with him is based solely on her understanding, or lack of understanding, of Islam. Broadly speaking, he approaches her as symbolic for the supposed cultural oppression of all Muslim women. By attempting to pick apart Islam and to interpret it with his own agenda in mind, he fails to recognise that Muslim women can assert their own agency and are not willing only to be subjects of a fetishised gaze. Gabor turns from a friend to a man convinced of the need to ‘save’ Muslim women. As Abu-Lughod argues, the desire to ‘save’ Muslim women is partly borne through the conviction that Muslim women’s rights and freedom are ‘deeply compromised’ solely because they are part of Muslim communities (*Muslim Women* 17).

Because of this assumption, Muntaha’s later rebuttals of his advances are read by Gabor to be symbolic of her oppression rather than a genuine refusal by one person to another. Gabor assumes that his sexual advances are only spurned because Muntaha does not

feel able to explore relationships outside of her immediate Muslim Arab community. He thinks:

> She said no, and so prevented the story from moving into the universal territory we can all relate to. She said no, choosing to remain in her particularity. In her own ethnic group, in her religio-cultural space, in what they call a 'community'. She said no, and made the story a local one. Limited the story's scope. Her choice, not Gabor's. (293)

Gabor's Islamophobia, and his adherence to an understanding of multiculturalism as encouraging 'parallel lives' (see discussion of Cantle page 53), is exposed in this passage. Muntaha is transformed from a subject in her own right to simply being representative of a Muslim community and, according to Gabor, its refusal to assimilate into British culture. Once he has been rejected, his discourse turns from intimate to academic, and he use terms such as 'universal territory' and 'religio-cultural space' to distance himself from her and once again to study her as if she is an object. However, there is also a comic tone to this passage, which suggests that Robin Yassin-Kassab's voice is coming through as a way to mock Gabor. By beginning almost every sentence in this passage with a repetitive and accusatory 'she' or 'her', Gabor's reflection on Muntaha's decision is depicted as childish and unreasonable.

Gabor is mocked for his limited understanding of Muslim culture, but it could also be argued that Yassin-Kassab is reacting against the generalised desire for Muslim women to be depicted as 'liberated' from a restrictive religion. Many expectations have been placed upon Muslim women. As Wolfgang Wagner et al. put it, 'the veiled woman is at once to be feared, to be pitied, to be desired, to be educated and to be respected' (522). These are tropes that are all, in fact, enforced upon Muntaha by Gabor over the course of his interactions with her. Ultimately, once Muntaha rejects Gabor, he reverts to stereotypes of Muslims as archaic and inherently parochial. Indeed, Fedwa Malti-Douglas argues that an aspect of the West's obsession with Islam is its perception of how women are treated. She infers that 'the image of women languishing under the yoke of Islam titillates the Western observer and permits him to place himself in the superior position' (3).

Once Gabor realises that Muntaha will not have sex with him, he jumps to the conclusion that Muslim women have no agency under unyielding patriarchal structures. Gabor's perspective epitomises the West's continuing fixation with veiled women, as seen through President Bush's justification of the invasion in Afghanistan as a rescue mission for the 'poor, benighted "women of cover"' suffering under the authority of 'retrogressive patriarchal practices' (R. Ahmed 8). Although Muntaha proudly defends her religious beliefs, marriage, and bodily agency, she is still perceived by Gabor as adopting a stereotypical

Muslim identity, a perception that is out of her control to influence. He perceives Muntaha as a woman who is simultaneously desirable and powerful, but ignorant of her own sexuality. Through Gabor's descriptions of Muntaha as both a highly sexualised Arab body in need of liberation and as a piece of exotic art that can be studied, his hope for a relationship that appears multicultural and progressive is exposed as no more than an Orientalist, colonial desire for dominance. Throughout the Gabor chapters, Muntaha's own perspective on Gabor's treatment of her is not offered to the reader. This is significant as Muntaha's lack of voice reinforces their power dynamic as unequal and dominated by Gabor.

However, Muntaha is not a character created simply to act as a symbol of a modern Muslim woman. Her back story is developed, and we learn of her father, Marwan, and the bodily suffering that he experienced when he was arrested and tortured by the Baathist regime in Iraq. Marwan al-Haj was a 'minor poet', self-defined as 'secular and romantic', and worked on the editorial committee for *Revolution in Words*, a 'state-sponsored literary review for a coterie readership' (70). Marwan's arrest, imprisonment, and later exile for distributing poetry under the regime of Saddam Hussein is both fictional and far from fictional. We learn that Marwan was arrested around the time of the cultural blacklist of 1978 in Iraq, when Saddam Hussein ordered a 'restructuring of media personnel' (Jawad 1213). This involved:

> [A] shake-out of hundreds of journalists and writers employed by the Ministry of Information and Culture, in radio and television broadcasting, and in state publishing houses, who were either made redundant, transferred to obscure parts of the civil service, or forced to retire. Others were arrested, tortured, and forced to renounce their political beliefs. (Jawad 1213)

At this time, Nabeel Yasin, now known as 'The Poet of Baghdad', fled Iraq for London in fear of his life after being added to Hussein's blacklist for his controversial poem *Brother Yasin* and *Brother Yasin Again*. His life has been documented in Jo Tatchell's *Nabeel's Song*, but the original collection of poems was only printed 1,000 times and has been circulated, sometimes in the open and sometimes surreptitiously, all over the world (Tatchell n. pag.). The character of Marwan, it appears, may have been inspired by the story of Nabeel Yasin and the stories of the men who were arrested and tortured under Hussein's regime. By creating a fictional imagining of these historically significant instances of torture and exile through *The Road From Damascus*, Yassin-Kassab is able to demonstrate the relationship between the self's conception of identity and the infliction of bodily pain during a time of political, state-sanctioned violence.

In the torture chamber, the complexities of individual identity are reduced to perpetual bodily pain and a desperate desire for survival. Critical thinking – political, religious, and

spiritual – and empathetic human interaction are entirely removed from Marwan's sense of self. Indeed, locked inside a room with a regular torture schedule he is 'limited to the room and its contents; no other concrete embodiments of civilisation pass through the doors' (Scarry 41), and so his world is shrunk down to a body within a space:

> Through his body they had broken him. By splitting his lips and ears, smashing his nose, crushing his spine, and tugging out handfuls of his full hair, from scalp to pubis, they had taught him at once how physical he in fact was, despite his earlier disbelief, and also, or therefore, how expendable. (64)

Marwan's body is literally and metaphorically exposed. As a political prisoner, he is reduced from a being that thinks, to a being whose only thought is survival. This prevents him from believing that he is of importance and has any influence on the world around him, and so forces him to relinquish all thoughts of politics and philosophy. Furthermore, Marwan's restriction to a room that contains no cultural or social markers, no people or evidence of time, means that he is forcibly 'disorientated'. Connerton explains that embodiment, or being present in a place, is crucial for 'representing and remembering the places that surround us' (*Mourning* 101). Being disorientated, or unable to place themselves in their surroundings, removes the individual's sense of self. By being confined and tortured, Marwan loses all sense of agency. There is an evident parallel with Sami, who purposefully limits himself to a person who only focuses on the movement of the body in order to distract himself from his torn loyalties between his politics and his wife. Disoriented by his life in Britain, he focuses on his body rather than cultural and social understandings of the self.

Similarly, Sami's obsession with cleanliness is something that is also forced upon Marwan:

> Part of the lesson was cleanliness. Being next to godliness, this was a supreme virtue, essential for his development. [The torturers] washed away all the illusions concerning an expansive soul that had hitherto rolled about within him like lemonade in the belly of an overstuffed spoilt child. (64)

By comparing Marwan's soul to lemonade, the little regard that the torturers have for his sense of self is exposed as cruel and absurd. Furthermore, the correlation between literal cleanliness and the metaphorical image of the washing away of his soul shows how their idea of cleanliness is inhumane rather than divine. Marwan is not only meant to feel pain, but to be confined within his own conception of pain: 'they used his body as a door to his soul. They climbed in through it […] found the soul and kicked it down to size. […] Then they hoovered it up' (64–5). For Marwan, the repeated destruction of his body means the eventual eradication of what he describes as his soul. Although the torturers are reacting against

Marwan's supposed political beliefs, the pain that is inflicted upon his body cannot be separated from his mind, and therefore he experiences the torture not only as an attack upon his identity and beliefs, but as a direct attack upon his entire being. Through being tortured, Marwan loses any desire to engage in the discourse of politics, and rather turns to the routines and rules of religion to give his everyday life structure after he migrates to Britain in a state of physical and mental exhaustion.

Although as a child Muntaha was embarrassed by her father and his awkwardness (83), she grows up to assert her religiosity through her body by wearing the hijab. This act, it could be argued, shows the significance the memory of her father's torture has had on her present circumstances as means of resistance against the torturers who deprived her father of bodily agency. This relationship between beliefs and the body is, for Sami, a relationship that involves taking drugs and drinking copious volumes of alcohol to 'prove' on the surface of his body that he lives a very un-Islamic lifestyle. It is not until later that Sami understands that secularism and religiosity are not two binary oppositions, and that unlike Marwan and Faris, he has the freedom to create his own understanding of faith within a Western, secular framework.

Nevertheless, Yassin-Kassab shows that the individual can only control their own identity assertion to a certain extent. Even when he is with his drug dealer, known as 'Greek Chris', he is pinpointed as being specifically Arab-looking in an interaction that they have in a pub. Chris says to Sami, 'Kicking off again, your lot', to which Sami replies 'Football?'. Chris, we learn, is not referring to the soccer team that Sami supports, but to his assumed identity as an Arab: 'Arabs. On the news tonight. Settlers shooting up children and that. Tanks and planes against blocks of flats. It doesn't seem fair to me' (160). This discrepancy between Chris and Sami's understanding of what 'your lot' may signify highlights the difference between how Sami perceives himself, and how he is perceived. His identity is multifaceted, as one would expect, consisting of both ethnic and national allegiances as well as loyalties to everyday pursuits, such as a British football team. Because of his appearance, however, he forgets that to some his identity is reduced to only that of an Arab, and that significant differences, such as between Arabs and Israelis, will not necessarily be acknowledged in the diaspora. Although, to borrow from Stuart Hall, Sami shows that identity is 'never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions' ('Introduction' 4), his appearance as something other than British leads to assumptions about his identity, particularly his cultural and religious loyalties.

Ironically, Sami is arrested towards the end of the novel and taken in for questioning by the police for 'suspiciously' lingering outside a mosque. His interrogation takes place after 9/11, at a time when Muslims became regarded as a 'suspect population' (Bonino 5) partly due to public and media attitudes towards Muslims becoming increasingly negative and confrontational. In a farcical scene, the police not only assume that he is Muslim, but that he is part of some kind of extremist network. This incident, which is reminiscent of the arrests of Marwan and Uncle Faris, results in Sami realising that his attempts to create and control his own identity can only be successful to a certain extent. As much as he tries to assert a very British and secular identity, he is still victim to the prejudices and assumptions of those around him. Sami's mother Nur picks him up from the police station after the police realise their mistake and turn from interrogating him to obsequiously apologising. This gives him the opportunity to let go of past grudges and finally build a relationship with his mother, and ultimately to begin learning about the traumas of the family's past in order to construct his present identity.

Presumptuously, Sami decides by the end of his visit to Damascus that knowing about Uncle Faris 'would not help his thesis or his fraying life in London' (9). In fact, this proves entirely wrong, as discovering the truth about Uncle Faris is the biggest turning point for Sami in the novel. He learns that his Uncle Faris was a twenty-year old engineering student who was picked up by the *mukhabarat* and tortured for twenty-two years for his supposed involvement with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (5–8). The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood rebelled against the regime of Hafez al-Assad in 1982, culminating in the infamous Hama massacre that resulted in the death of up to 25,000 people (Conduit 211). Most of the acts of torture and murder were perpetrated by the Syrian government (Conduit 212). For Sami, learning about this aspect of his familial and cultural past initiates a process of self-identification independent from the shadow of his father and his anti-Islamic beliefs. The pains and markings of the body are a recurring motif throughout the novel, and Sami's reconnection with his mother forces him to acknowledge not only his problems with negotiating his physical identity, but how to deal with the inherited pain that has been passed down through the family. By witnessing his mother 'curling up, wrapping her arms around her waist as if there was pain inside which needed to be massaged' (341), Sami begins a process of empathising with his family and their inherited pain. Because of this, he is able to go beyond neat and simplified categorisations of progressive secularism and backward-looking religion and begin to understand the effect of history and memory on the individual.

Similarly, Nur's trauma from her brother's torture and her failed marriage translates into physical pain. As expressed by Elaine Scarry, quoted on page 54, it is not always

possible to convey the experience of pain through language. However, in this novel we see how pain from the past translates into the body in the present. Nur says to Sami, in a statement that pulls together the underlying thread of the entire novel, ‘you should be loyal to people over ideas’ (343). By making peace with his past – establishing a relationship with his mother, understanding her suffering, and finally letting go of his idealisation of his deceased father – he is able to rebuild his future with Muntaha and understand that her wearing of the hijab is not symbolic of rejecting rational thought and secular modernity. Instead, Sami gradually begins to appreciate the hijab as an ‘embodied [practice]’ that acts as a sign or expression of ‘reflexive female Muslim agency’ (Mirza 7).

In *The Road From Damascus*, Yassin-Kassab challenges binaries of insiders and outsiders, the obsolete and the progressive, and instead explores the complex spaces where British Muslims exist. Through the characters of Sami and Muntaha in particular, Yassin-Kassab explores the relationship between appearances and presumptions, and the role that the body plays in this relationship. While Sami uses his body as a battleground for waging his war between his anti-Muslim politics and his family commitments, he soon realises that his physical self is not something that he has definitive control over. He learns from Muntaha that religious belief can be negotiated on a deeply personal level, yet he also comes to understand that others will enforce their perceptions on a person based on his or her physical appearance. Stuart Hall argues that Britishness is the ‘empty signifier, the norm, against which “difference” (ethnicity) is measured’ (‘Conclusion’ 221). Yassin-Kassab shows in this post-9/11 environment that whiteness takes centre stage in British society, and regardless of religious beliefs (or lack of them), people like Sami will always be seen as the ‘other’. As Alana Lentin argues, ‘once an individual has been assigned to his/her cultural group […] any sense of hybridity or heterogeneity is lost’ (394). Sami’s pursuit of fashionable secularism is a meaningless one in a society that categorises their citizens into belonging, or ‘other’.

Sami and Muntaha in particular find themselves unable to construct their identities through their place in British society, or from the outside in, due to the ubiquitous practices of prejudice and exoticism. The colour of their skin, or the way they dress their bodies, is read as performing a particular Muslim identity. However, one of the ways in which they are able to negotiate their identities in the diaspora is through how they engage with their cultural and personal memories of, respectively, Iraq and Syria. For Muntaha, her father’s torture under Saddam Hussein’s regime results in forced exile, and by donning the hijab she is able to relinquish, to an extent, her family’s traumatic past and to express a British Muslim identity. Towards the end of the novel, Sami realises that ‘For Muntaha, her people, her ancestors, didn’t mean trouble. She was as she was, accepting her past, hopeful for the future’ (323). For

Sami, he is only able to find a medium between hedonism and asceticism once he departs from his domineering father's Arab secularism and finds a comfortable Muslim identity that allows him to embrace the present rather than to live in the past.

In this chapter I explored how two novels set in intimate urban spaces employ cultural memories of a pre-migratory history in order to scrutinise multicultural interactions and relationships. I also examined how the authors portray their non-Muslim characters as enacting insincere multiculturalism. Whilst the novels approach relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim characters, in both instances the enthusiasm of cross-cultural relations is reduced as non-Muslim characters construct their relationships through exoticism, a contemporary form of Orientalism that understands Muslims as both strange and fascinating. Homogenisations prove rife, as Samad's Bangladeshi heritage is reduced to the 'ball-park' of South Asian, and Muntaha is made symbolic of Arab Muslim women.

White Teeth's use of cultural memory is more overt than in *The Road From Damascus*. Samad Iqbal rejects the collective British memory of the Indian Rebellion as an embarrassment, and instead adopts an understanding of it that is shared by many Indian nationalists as the moment that sparked a war of independence. *The Road From Damascus* does not look back to such a clear moment in history, but rather explores the difficulties of Muslim life in the diaspora through the body. For Sami, his defining cultural memory is that of a secular Syria, where scientific reason and nationalist poetry was more important to society than Islam. Just as Samad's memory of Pande is challenged, Sami's decision to channel his father's anti-Muslim sentiment through his body is consistently challenged by Muntaha. Eventually, he uses his body as a vessel to look to the future, rather than to hold on to the past.

White Teeth and *The Road From Damascus*, I argue, are both novels that portray an urban multicultural reality that continues to hinge on an exoticising and 'othering' approach towards Muslims. It also shows members of Muslim communities that, whilst integrated into everyday society, approach their cultural memories of pre-migration life and national history as integral to how they understand their role in British society. However, these memories of the past do not necessarily have a community-building effect in either novel. Instead, retrospection proves to be both a help and a hindrance for the Muslim characters. Whilst it can help to negotiate a present-day Muslim identity, it can also prove to be impediment to healthy relationships and happiness. Ultimately, in both novels, multicultural London is both interrogated and problematised.

Chapter Two: Migration and Cultural Memory

In February 2004, Pakistani schoolgirl from Warrington Shafilea Ahmed was discovered murdered in Cumbria (Julios 55). Her parents Iftikhar and Farzana had killed her because, it was argued, she refused to agree to an arranged marriage back in Pakistan. However, Shafilea's entire life had been marked by 'domestic violence and parental abuse' (Julios 54), and her father had a reputation for 'violent and controlling behaviour' (Julios 56). It is interesting, then, that the judge presiding over the case approached the murder as an example of an 'honour' killing stemming from the family's Pakistani cultural heritage. When the parents were sentenced for Shafilea's murder, the judge said: 'You wanted your family to live in Pakistan in Warrington' (Julios 57), drawing a problematic and rather simplistic connection between long-term domestic abuse and Pakistani culture. The judge's claim that the parents were trying to maintain 'Pakistan in Warrington' is telling of the stereotypes that prevail of segregated Muslim communities refusing to adopt British culture, traditions and law.

Both Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* narrate the lives of migrants from South Asia who insist on living lives relatively segregated from other ethnic groups. Both families migrated to Britain and live in traditionally working-class and economically deprived areas, and whilst *Maps for Lost Lovers* revolves around the kind of 'honour' killing that I described above, *Brick Lane* narrates a less violent family situation but a claustrophobic and patriarchal one nonetheless. Both narratives consider family and domestic life, and how traditionalism and domestic structures are maintained or disrupted in post-migration South Asian families. Most significantly, both texts show individuals and families struggling to come to terms with their identities in a new homeland, and the role that their cultural, as well as personal, history plays in negotiating a sense of belonging.

The British press, as I discussed in the previous chapter, received *White Teeth* as a sort of great multicultural saga. I have complicated this assertion, both by highlighting some of the stereotypes that Smith occasionally perpetuates and by drawing attention to the novel's deeper concerns of everyday racism and parochial British historiography. *Brick Lane* and *Maps For Lost Lovers* focus less on close encounters in the multicultural metropolis than on the segregations that occur between ethnic minority communities, particularly Muslim communities of first-generation migrants. Whilst the novel *Brick Lane* received little judgement from the East End's Bangladeshi community when it was published in 2003, the film adaptation in 2007 triggered protests by the Sylhetis and threats of a book burning (Král

108). For the Sylhetis, who had not received a wide range of representations in film, the adaptation of *Brick Lane* offered a negative understanding of their community that they feared would become 'the norm, the reference, the gauge' (Král 108). At a panel discussion at the 2016 Bare Lit Festival in London, Robin Yassin-Kassab expressed his aversion to Nadeem Aslam's portrayal of British Muslims. He stated that whilst *Maps for Lost Lovers* is a good novel, it is 'profoundly unfair'. The characters are unlikeable and the narrative is imbued with violence stemming from the kind of stories found in the right-wing press. Nadeem Aslam, Yassin-Kassab continued, found his Muslim heritage oppressive, and whilst that was his individual experience, it does mean that he offers a problematic representation of an already badly represented community (Yassin-Kassab, 'Liberation' n. pag.). Indeed, Sarah Ilott argues that *Maps for Lost Lovers* 'presents simplified versions of self/Other relationships that play themselves out in damaging stereotypes', resulting in racial hierarchies and binary oppositions that are simply maintained (70–1).

The novels explored in this chapter differ from *White Teeth* and *The Road From Damascus* in the way in which they shape a multicultural society. Smith and Yassin-Kassab's characters accept their actuality within a multicultural society, and their everyday lives are punctuated with both positive and negative encounters with other ethnic and religious groups. In *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *Brick Lane*, in contrast, many of the characters live an isolated existence. In the former, Pakistani wife and mother Kaukab rarely leaves her home, repulsed by the lifestyle of the white British and fearing racial abuse. In the latter, Nazneen moves from Bangladesh to Britain's capital to marry an older man. Lack of social networks, capital, and confidence means she struggles to learn English and is hesitant to navigate the baffling streets of East London.

Maps for Lost Lovers engages with ideas of home and belonging in a diasporic British Muslim community by exploring the trajectory of the migrant experience through its central characters Shamas and Kaukab. Of particular interest is the analepsis to the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre perpetrated by the British army in Amritsar in northwest India. In analysing Aslam's representations of Jallianwala Bagh, I demonstrate the significance of this event to the everyday cultural clashes between the white and South Asian communities in Britain that the present-day narrative explores. By paying specific attention to how Aslam's text adopts tropes of historical fiction, I also explicate the role of cultural memory in how the first-generation migrants struggle to negotiate their identities in their host country.

While most critics discussing Ali's *Brick Lane* have focused on problems of authority, authenticity, and representation, I depart from these arguments by examining how Ali explores the importance of history – personal and public – when tracing the Bangladeshi

migrant experience. I am specifically interested in the ways in which the characters understand their identities as closely entwined with issues of class and gender. Unlike *Maps for Lost Lovers*, *Brick Lane* does not make explicit reference to the 1947 Partition of India or the 1971 war of independence that saw East Pakistan secede from West Pakistan and become Bangladesh. However, this does not mean that the novel is historically or politically disengaged. Ali's choice of the realist form and her decision to set the novel in the well-known street of Brick Lane sparks a debate about the Bangladeshi diaspora in contemporary Britain.

Brick Lane, similarly to *Maps for Lost Lovers*, narrates communities that exist within a multicultural society but portray very little cross-cultural interaction. Instead, and sometimes problematically, both novels consider how connections with an original homeland are maintained in the diaspora; how traditions and prejudices are rife within Muslim communities as well as between themselves and other social groups; and how memories of British colonial history play a significant part in shaping the lives of South Asian migrants today.

'You should remember that this isn't our country': Trauma and Migration in Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*

Nadeem Aslam was born in Pakistan and moved with his parents to Huddersfield in West Yorkshire when he was a teenager (British Council, 'Aslam' n. pag.). *Maps for Lost Lovers*, written 'over 11 impoverished years' (Chambers, 'Aslam' 137), was published in 2004. The novel explores the South Asian Muslim diaspora in the north of England, specifically a Muslim family living in a town that the South Asian residents have collectively named 'Dasht-e-Tanhaii', translating from Urdu as 'Desert of Loneliness'. The narrative revolves around the lives of Shamas and his wife, Kaukab, a middle-aged couple living in what Kaukab describes as a 'third-class neighbourhood' (328). Notwithstanding Shamas's prestigious position as director of the Community Relations Council, a group that tries to mediate everyday disputes between white and minority communities, they live in modest conditions. The novel employs an unusual style of contrasting images of urban brutality with those of nature and its exotic beauty, causing the narrative to move back and forth between testimonies of migrant struggles and memories of Pakistan.

Although the novel is primarily set in modern-day Britain, a flashback to British India in 1919 is the starting-point for my analysis of the novel from a perspective of memory. In

this flashback, Shamas's father loses his memory during the anti-British riot in Gujranwala (Aslam's home city), in what is now Pakistan. On 13 April 1919, General Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, ordered the shooting of hundreds of peaceful protestors at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar (Narain 9). This led to further outbreaks of violence in other districts of the Punjab, such as an RAF bombing in Gujranwala (British Committee n. pag.). On that same day in 1919, General O'Dwyer ordered General Dyer to travel around the city of Amritsar making a public proclamation that any meeting of four or more men would be deemed unlawful. Dyer has been criticised for not spreading the message far enough and missing Jallianwala Bagh, a well-known meeting place (Stationery Office 61–62). Therefore, when General Dyer heard about the meeting in Jallianwala Bagh, he opened fire at the crowd with no warning, and continued to fire even as the crowd attempted to disperse (Stationery Office 63; 68). Anger at this brutality spread around the Punjab. It is in Gujranwala that Aslam chooses to have Shamas's father Chakor lose his memory due to the injuries he sustained during a British attempt to quell the rioting. We learn that although he spent the majority of his adult life as the Muslim Chakor, his previous name was Deepak and his childhood was spent as a Hindu.

In the midst of this chaos, the narrator describes how Deepak and his sister Aarti 'heard the drone of the biplane engines and the tension singing in the strut-wires before they saw the machine itself, gliding steadily at an altitude of three-hundred feet'. Deepak immediately recognises it as a 'vie jaaj', or a 'ship of the air', simultaneously emphasising its intimidating size and its ability to invoke fear in the vulnerable workers in the orange grove (52). Rather than describing the explosions of the bombs, he describes the psychological trauma of the event:

> Uprooted, lifted high onto the contours of expanding air, Deepak saw the ground rushing under him and smelled oranges being cut open before he forgot everything, the last sensation being the flesh-eating heat of his hair on fire against his scalp.
>
> The bomb, like a foot stamped into a rain puddle, had emptied his mind of all its contents. (53)

Aslam, as he does throughout much of the novel, juxtaposes traumatic events with picturesque imagery. By describing the events of the carnage at Gujranwala through the senses (the smell of oranges bursting in the nearby grove) and the imagination (the image of splashing in a puddle), the trauma is described from a position of embodied innocence and physical vulnerability. This serves to highlight the contrariety of power between the British military and the Indian citizens, therefore making the violent retaliation all the more

inhumane. Deepak's final memory of his childhood is firmly rooted in a particular location and at a particularly controversial historical moment, rendering his subsequent loss of memory reminiscent of those who lost their identities during British colonial violence and, later, the trauma of Partition.

The Amritsar Massacre reveals much about British attitudes toward the Indian population pre-independence. During the rioting of April 1919, it was reported that Miss Frances Marcella Sherwood, a young British woman, was brutally attacked by a group of Indian men (British Committee n. pag; Narain 19). Savita Narain argues that the attack on Miss Sherwood was 'sensationalised' by imperialist writers in order to show how 'wild and lawless the crowd was' (19). Writing in 1964, British historian Arthur Swinson claimed that 'somehow [Miss Sherwood] managed to rise and ran on a little way, but the mob, howling and screeching like savages, returned to the attack' (28). The way that the Jallianwala Bagh massacre has been depicted in historical documents and academic books bears a striking resemblance to how Mangal Pande was described during the Indian Rebellion, an event that I discuss at length in Chapter One (see pages 34–7). In a similar derogatory manner to the ways in which the British historians that I quote in Chapter One depict Pande, Alfred Draper describes Indian rioters as 'frenzied' (65), and Swinson further claims that the crowd was 'excited' with a 'rapt look in their eyes which is the prelude to murder' (20–1). Like Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, *Maps for Lost Lovers* threads memories of British colonial dominance through a present-day narrative in order to provide a historical context for contemporary race relations.

Significantly, Helen Fein describes Miss Sherwood's attack as a 'rape' (29), stressing an important discussion about the intersections of sexual violence and colonisation. She argues that the rape of a white woman by an Indian man during the Raj would have been particularly unacceptable to the British, notably more so than if the rape had been executed by a white British man. This is because white women were recognised as 'the highest form of property', meaning that the act of rape represents 'an attack on the whole system of [colonial] domination' (Fein 29). Jenny Sharpe, through an examination of E. M. Forster's 1924 novel *A Passage to India*, argues that the supposed rape of a white woman by an Indian man must be examined within the framework of a '*system of colonial relations*' (120, italics in original). The white woman suffers because she is 'protectively cloistered behind an anachronistic code of chivalry and honour' (Sharpe 121), but the Indian male is deemed guilty by default due to his position as a second-class citizen. Violence against women who are part of the colonial system, such as Miss Sherwood and *A Passage to India*'s Adela, is

taken as evidence of the supposed 'depravity' of the native (Sharpe 124). This is the justification for the violence the coloniser then wreaks upon the 'perpetrators'.

The British colonisers at the time, particularly General Dyer, considered the attack on Miss Sherwood as an example of Indians' savagery, and their 'bestial' nature enough to justify brutal punishment for the men involved (Banerjee 24). *Maps for Lost Lovers*, however, employs this trope of the white woman as foreign, but through a child's focalisation. The novel tells us that '[i]n the India of the Raj, the clothes the white women wore were an announcement that they weren't going native' (48). Their large, extravagant skirts would have displayed the coloniser's desire to reinforce 'existing patterns of hierarchy and social difference' (Locher-Scholten 122). Even in monsoon season, Aslam writes, the British women insisted on staying in their 'rigidly swaying crinolines and ruched bustles' (48). This alien style of dress, and the memsahibs'[1] refusal to adapt to a new environment, piques the interest of Deepak and Aarti, who leave home that day in order finally to discover what is under those enormous swathes of fabric:

> What kind of tail does a white woman have? they wondered in excitement. Not dissimilar to a peacock's, capable of being jerked up to form a giant fan of five-hundred feathers? Or a small twitchy one, resembling a deer's, needled with white hair? (48)

Through their forms of dress, the white women of the British Raj consciously distinguish themselves from Indian women, sartorially displaying their unwillingness to assimilate into the country that their colonial empire occupies. As Emma Tarlo explains, 'the British sought to reinforce their separateness from the Indian population by rigorously adhering to British standards of dress' (*Clothing* 13). Deepak and Aarti's assumption that the women are hiding tails under their skirts contains several layers of meaning. Desiring to look under a woman's skirt of course holds sexual undertones, particularly in light of how white women were protectively hidden from the gaze of Indian men. The British authorities during the time of the Raj believed that 'the virtue of British women was a cornerstone of the empire' (Lahiri 140). The childhood gaze, however, suggests that the fascination is not so much sexual, but rather is a state of wonderment at the beautiful and unfamiliar. The children imagine the tails going from the mundane – the negligible tail of a deer – to the brilliant plumes of a peacock. This implies that the British, although living amongst them, are so foreign to the children that

[1] A memsahib is a Hindi word that literally means Mrs Master or Lady Sahib, and refers to European women living in British India. Susmita Roye and Rajeshwar Mittapalli explain that the memsahib's existence depends on the existence of a sahib, or master. She is therefore both powerful, existing within the 'matrix of imperial power', and disempowered, 'relegated to the periphery of authority' due to her gender (8–9).

they are barely human. This childlike fascination with what is under the women's skirts, and the intimation of the British coloniser as animal, overturns the stereotype of Indian as savage and highly sexualised, and instead casts a critical eye towards the British and their brutal military campaigns.

In response to the attack on Miss Sherwood, and in order to rebalance the power structure, General Dyer ordered a 'crawling order' to be put in place on the street where the attack occurred, meaning that any Indian that wished to walk on that street had to crawl (Stationery Office 81–2). Pakistani author Ghulam Abbas's 1950s Urdu-language short story 'White Man's Burden' is set in the aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. In his story, Abbas portrays two young Indian men responding to the crawling order by using it as an opportunity to have a race and place bets. In a similar way to *Maps for Lost Lovers*, the narrative is told through the eyes of innocent children who only know that the British soldiers are intimidating and that violence towards a 'memsahib' is the reason for the punishment (G. Abbas 225). By using an excessive military order to invent a new game, the two young men are cleverly able to exist within the hierarchical structures that the Raj propagates, whilst also refusing to be subdued by them. Watching the men racing, the British sergeant in charge is made to look a fool. Dyer's overt aggression – he describes his actions as giving the Indians a 'lesson' (Stationery Office 67) – shows his determination to assert British authority through humiliation and infantilisation. Rupert Furneaux succinctly sums up Dyer's imperialist attitude: 'Indians were naughty children to be punished' (qtd. in Narain 20).

Jennifer Yusin explains that historical scholarship has explored how the trauma and violence of the Partition of India is crucial to our understanding of events. Nevertheless, she argues:

> It has been […] the turn to literary representations and criticism and the collection of survivor testimony that has addressed memory, and specifically memory of the past and its influence on the present, as a crucial factor in beginning to understand the meaning of Partition history in those who actually lived through that momentous separation. (455)

Maps for Lost Lovers demonstrates how these traumatic memories, or even lack of memories due to the infliction of violence, carry through long after the Partition itself. After discovering that his original identity is Hindu, Chakor struggles to come to terms with this knowledge. Shamas recalls that some people treated Chakor as 'untouchable' after the revelation that he was born Hindu, and that 'as death drew near [Chakor] become delirious, asking Mahtaab to promise she would cremate him […] like a Hindu, instead of burying him in the ground like a Muslim' (81). Chakor's loss of identity is redolent of those who lost their identities, and even

their lives, during the Partition violence between India and Pakistan. His slow death from pancreatic cancer is significantly narrated alongside the description of another partition, that of the severance of East Pakistan from West Pakistan:

> On the day in December that Chakor vomited dark-brown half-digested blood, grainy like sand – the aorta had ruptured and spilled its contents into the stomach so that now his body was consuming itself – the Indian army moved into East Pakistan, and Pakistan surrendered after a two-week long war: East Pakistan was now Bangladesh – India had not only defeated Pakistan, it had helped cut it in two. (82)

Jonathan Greenberg, in his article on memory and partition, argues that trauma carries a physical meaning (damage to the body) and an emotional meaning (suffering from a distressing event). He writes, 'the analogy between medical diagnosis and psychological process is usefully extended to an analogy between an individual's physical wound [...] and a community's wound sustained by a partition of a nation's homeland' (92). Chakor's body begins to disintegrate synchronously with the disintegration of Pakistan, acting as a metonym of the 'splitting in two' of Pakistan after the British-enforced Partition in 1947. As Yusin explains, 'the geographical borders that separate and constitute nations in the subcontinent are also the indelible scars of trauma inscribed into the landscape of South Asian identity' (454).

However, instead of submitting himself to a slow death, Chakor commits suicide by self-immolation. This act is reminiscent of the Hindu practice of *sati*, and is performed in a Hindu temple that had 'fallen into disrepair since 1947 when the Hindus of Sohni Dharti had left for India' (84). His act of self-cremation is significant as it mirrors Hindu funeral rites rather than the Islamic tradition of burial. Cremation is an act that would, in the words of Sudhir Kakar, consign a Muslim to 'hell-fire' (37). Kakar also explains how during the Partition rioting between the Hindus and the Muslims in India, there were instances of Muslims being murdered by being thrown on pyres, an act that the Hindu and Sikh perpetrators knew contradicted Islamic tradition and law (36–7). This direct attack on a community's religious traditions was due to an 'us versus them' narrative that was generated between the Hindus and Muslims. The binarism was fuelled by a desire, in the atmosphere of growing tension, for Muslims and Hindus to 'mobilize their identity around their religious affiliation' (Kakar 52).

Whilst the disintegration of Chakor's cancer-ridden body is narrated alongside the dismemberment of Pakistan, his shocking and unexpected decision to cut out his tongue and set himself on fire suggests an act of surrender to the pragmatic reality of partition. In particular, the cutting out of his tongue is symbolic for the voicelessness, and therefore powerlessness, of those subjected to violence and uncertainty in the wake of partition and

post-colonial independence. To bring in Spivak's much-quoted assertion, a traumatised Chakor becomes the subaltern who both figuratively and literally 'cannot speak' (102). Nevertheless, Chakor's self-immolation could also be read not only as a desire to connect with the traditions and rites of his Hindu heritage, but as a final act of resistance, rather than surrender, against the British. *Sati,* or the self-immolation of Hindu Indian widows, was considered by British colonial administrators to represent the 'abhorrent and inhuman' face of Hindu society (Morton, *Spivak* 63). They were therefore able to 'justify imperialism as a civilising mission', believing that they were 'rescuing Indian women from the reprehensible practices of a traditional Hindu patriarchal society' (Morton, *Spivak* 63). Chakor's self-silencing and self-immolation could therefore be read as an act of martyrdom against the oppressive and paternalistic rule of the British Empire, and his bodily suffering analogous to the suffering of the nation.

While traumatic memories of the partition haunt the narrative, the trauma of *not* knowing what happened is just as pertinent. Shamas explains several times that his aunt Aarti was never found after the bombing of Gujranwala, despite Chakor and Mahtaab's attempts to track down both her and the rest of Chakor's family. Their search proves fruitless since they face the problem of, firstly, being unable to gain access to India because of its bifurcation from Pakistan and, secondly, not knowing whether or not Aarti even survived the partition violence (75). The lack of information about Aarti's fate shadows forth the unspeakable reality of violence against women during the acts of partition. Jill Didur argues that women's bodies were 'singled out as privileged sites of violence at the time of partition' (7). In other words, violence towards women was used by men as a weapon between the Hindus and the Muslims. Although Shamas does not explicitly express concern about this, his inability to find Aarti intimates that even if she did survive the Gujranwala bombing, she may not necessarily have survived the Partition. The mystery of Aarti haunts the novel with memories of violence and loss and, for Shamas, her absence reminds him of his detachment from Pakistan and the loss of his true family under the weight of more than one painful partition.

This idea of divisions continues into the present-day narrative and is shown through the contrasting ways in which Shamas and Kaukab react to the discovery of Chakor's previous identity as a Hindu. Shamas detaches himself from this difficult reality and retreats into a world of fantasy:

> And so as [Shamas] looked at the carpet of blossoms he couldn't help entertaining the thought that during the night Izraeel, the Muslim angel of death, had wrestled in the branches above with the Hindu god of death for our father's soul. Shamas looked up

> and imagined the branches twisting around the two supernatural beings, the flowers detaching from twigs and forming a thick layer on the ground. (82)

Whilst Shamas fantasises about an other-worldly battle for his father's soul, Kaukab worries about how the news that she married the son of a Hindu instead of a Muslim has affected her reputation. She accuses her parents of marrying her off to an 'infidel' and imagines Chakor's body being 'spat out repeatedly by the earth no matter how deep they buried it' (59), God supposedly refusing to let him have a proper Muslim burial due to his choice of anti-Islamic self-immolation. While Shamas can afford the luxury of musing over the future of his father's soul, Kaukab feels that her standing as a Muslim woman of deep morality and piety has been threatened by this news. Because she is the daughter of a Muslim cleric, 'born and brought up in a mosque' (42), she feels that her sexuality is representative of her worth as a Muslim woman. Kaukab's discovery that she married someone who she now deems not to be a true Muslim calls into question the fate of *her* soul, as well as that of Shamas's or his father Chakor's, a contentious point in their marriage that continues to be pertinent even in the diaspora.

The historical narrative that Aslam employs, whilst imaginative, is far from fictional. Through evoking these shared cultural memories, but through a distinctly present-day narrative, Aslam demonstrates how the trauma of colonial occupation and partition remains an issue for the South Asian diaspora in Britain. Not helping the matter, British Prime Minister at the time David Cameron travelled to Jallianwala Bagh in February 2013 to, as *The Times* put it, 'offer condolences' and 'express his regret' (n. pag.). British officials firmly denied any chance of Cameron offering a formal apology regardless of the fact that the families of those killed in the massacre in 1919 had 'expected more' (*The Times* n. pag.). As Narain has argued, the events at Jallianwala Bagh still remain a 'divisive factor between Britain and India', as does the British reluctance to issue a formal apology. This refusal is due to Britain's insistence that the massacre was because of the regrettable decision of one man (Narain 7), which neatly evades discussion about the moral implications of British imperialism more generally. Cameron's refusal to apologise, I argue, is emblematic of Britain's wider problem of refusing to acknowledge past atrocities conducted during the years of the empire.

Similar to how Zadie Smith portrays the 1857 Indian Rebellion in *White Teeth*, Nadeem Aslam employs historical memories that inform the lives of the characters in the present through engagement with their cultural memories. Kaukab, for example, maintains an understanding of morality that stems from the religious environment in which she lived in Pakistan. She disapproves of her son Charag's supposedly un-Islamic relationship with a

white woman named Stella, and pushes her daughter Mah-Jabin to stay in her unhappy marriage. Likewise, Chanda's brothers perceive her physical relationship with Jugnu, Shamas's brother, as being anti-Islamic and promiscuous, and murder her as punishment for transgressing Islamic traditions. In both instances, the migrant characters choose to follow a behavioural code that adheres to Pakistani cultural and religious traditions. Accordingly, they disregard common social norms of Britain, a characterisation that one could argue betrays a degree of stereotyping in Aslam's writing. Nevertheless, Aslam does not homogenise the entire Muslim community, but instead offers a novel that can 'animate and nuance the lived experience of a particularized Muslim community, thereby challenging multicultural and war-on-terror-affiliated discourses' (Moore, 'British' 3). Shamas, for example, keeps his distance from Muslim traditions, being instead enamoured with communism and perpetually mourning the fall of the Soviet Union (156). Preferring to move through British society with an eye to the future, he forever wonders how Muslim communities can integrate and work with white and other minority communities in order to achieve equality.

Although committing himself to being a political influence in his local community, Shamas still perceives his surroundings through sensory associations with home, domesticity, and familiarity. When out walking one day, he notes how 'a frozen buried clump of grass breaks under his weight and the cracking sound is the sound that Kaukab produces when she halves and quarters cinnamon sticks in the kitchen' (8). Although he is physically in a public space, his mind remains in a place of comfort and familiarity. This allows him to momentarily escape from the reality that his brother Jugnu and his lover Chanda may have been killed by their own family, and the repercussions that this event could have for the Pakistani community. By 'deliberately defamiliarizing the industrial, inner-city landscape inhabited by his characters' (Chambers, 'Representations' 180), Aslam shows how they have permeated their surroundings with quotidian comforts, allowing them to create a sense of home in their foreign, and often intimidating, host nation.

Kaukab similarly colours the world around her with associations of Pakistani cuisine and home comforts. When walking around the local convenience store, she sees not only items of food, but beauty and fantastical colours:

> naan bread shaped like ballet slippers, poppy seeds that were coarser than sand grains but still managed to shift like a dune when the jar was tilted, dry pomegranate seeds to be patted onto potato cakes like stones in a brooch, edible petals of courgette flowers packed inside the buds like amber scarves in green rucksacks. (31)

The imagery of colour and abundance is in stark contrast with the world outside of Kaukab's home, which is often described as bleak, and sometimes even threatening. Although Kaukab

and Shamas differ in their relationship with the past, their narratives both show a reluctance to acknowledge the fact that racial tensions are part of their everyday lives. In an interview with Claire Chambers, Aslam claims that his intention with *Maps for Lost Lovers* 'was to create the literary equivalent of a Persian miniature, in which there is a remarkable density of detail' ('Aslam' 141). Through this level of detail, readers gain insight not only into turbulent and problematic minority relations with white communities, but also into how memories of home are part of the everyday migrant experience. Certainly, as Aslam has asserted, there is more to immigrant life than 'worrying what whites think of us' (O'Connor 1). Whilst this use of colourful imagery may seem out of place in a text that revolves around a brutal double murder, it functions as an integral part of the migrant narrative. Chris Weedon argues that 'natural imagery and description are used both to recall aspects of the lost homeland and to suggest a new sense of place for second-generation children' (35). Indeed, the natural imagery is often seen through the perspective of Shamas and Kaukab as they try to ensure that their connection with home extends to their children's cultural memory.

However, Kaukab's cultural memory is potentially unreliable due to an idealised perspective of 'home' being created through the process of migration. In *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm claims that rituals and traditions are adhered to because the followers of the traditions 'seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (1). By retaining memories of Pakistan and encouraging her children to follow Pakistani customs, Kaukab attempts to pass on her cultural memories to future generations. However, as Greenberg has argued, refugees of partition violence often desire '[a]n idealized, frozen past' that becomes an 'object of longing', and an '[aspiration] of return' (97). This divide is not enacted along generational lines as we might expect. Instead, Shamas and Kaukab stand in contrast because of the way they approach their difficult past. The former attempts to remap a post-migratory identity, whilst the later idealises her life back in Pakistan. However, Kaukab's hope of preserving and transferring cultural practices down the generations does not easily play out in the migrant situation because 'British-born children of immigrants construct their identities in relation to their place of birth, consequently feeling no genuine association with their parents' homeland' (Kanwal 161). *Maps for Lost Lovers* therefore infers that generational differences are not the dividing factor. Instead, what divides the family is how characters engage with the past in order to construct their present-day identities.

It could be argued that the evocation of these images causes Shamas and Kaukab to, in a sense, remain in Pakistan rather than to attempt some kind of integration into Britain in the manner of their children. However, I suggest that Aslam's method of intertwining brutal

reality with fantastical imagery has the opposite effect. The Britain that Shamas and Kaukab see is, regardless of where they feel their ‘home’ lies, still Britain. While Aslam could have focused the narrative exclusively around the traumatic tales of difficult integration of South Asian Muslims into Britain, he also shows moments where they feel at home. In describing the natural beauty of the lake, Shamas does not imagine his environment but interprets it as reminiscent of Pakistan. Similarly, the ‘exotic’ South Asian ingredients that Kaukab cooks with can be bought locally, and are not only available in Pakistan. Therefore, Shamas and Kaukab are not necessarily escaping from reality, but are incorporating the sounds, smells, and tastes of their culture into their reality, which reflects the role South Asians have played in ‘transforming their localities’ (Chambers, ‘Representations’ 180). By integrating memories of Pakistan into their daily lives, Kaukab and Shamas are able to exist in a society that amalgamates Britishness with South Asian culture.

The way in which Kaukab yearns for her past back in Pakistan suggests a desire based on nostalgia. Dennis Walder defines nostalgia not only as a longing for a place, home, or time, but a longing for a particular experience. This experience, he argues, is often subjective, but is not limited to the individual; whole societies can experience nostalgia (4–5). He argues that the effect of individuals or even societies placing themselves in a particular time and place in relation to this lost experience means that a thread is constructed that ‘enables us to know, or think we know, who and what we are in the present’ (6). In other words, how we place our individual and communal identities in relation to the past affects how we frame our identities in the present. Kaukab in particular employs nostalgic memories of Pakistan that affect her diasporic identity, and reminisces partly in order to escape the difficulties of a multicultural reality. As Amartya Sen has noted, ‘increased global contacts and interactions, and in particular extensive migrations, have placed diverse practices of different cultures next to each other’ (149). Through everyday scenarios and dialogic relationships between South Asian characters, Aslam presents us with a community struggling to contend with the difficult realities of global migration.

Although Aslam’s characters imbue their surroundings with images of beauty, the narrative is very much ‘a mosaic of violence on a smaller, local level’ (O’Connor 1). For example, Kiran reports to Shamas that there is commotion at the local mosque because a pig’s head was discovered at the door (14). The pig’s head being placed at the door of the mosque is a sign both of grotesque violence and of extreme disrespect. Whoever placed it there, presumably a non-Muslim, is sending a very distinct message: that Muslim cultural and religious traditions will not be respected in a traditionally Christian land. Shamas further witnesses an incident in which a bus driver is a victim of racial aggression due to having

rightly asked a group of teenagers to vacate the bus as they had not paid their fare. In response, another passenger shouts: ‘Oi, Gupta, or whatever it is you call yourself, Abdul-Patel. Mr Illegal Immigrant-Asylum Seeker! Get back into your seat’ (178). In broken English the driver responds, ‘But, please, I lose my job if inspector comes suddenly now’ (178). Aslam pauses the dialogue to depict the two men looking at each other, ‘a border lying between them’ (178). This border, of course, is one of prejudice. They are in the same physical space, but culturally they are on different sides, and neither is willing to step down. In this passage, the reader feels sympathy for the bus driver and anger towards the abusive passenger, whose racial slurs are filled with stereotypes. ‘Gupta’ is in fact a surname of Hindu origin, and is not a first name, and ‘Abdul-Patel’ shows an ignorance of specificity: Abdul is a Muslim name, and Patel a Hindu one. By fusing these names, particularly with the bridging of the dash, the speaker homogenises South Asians in Britain. It is not Muslims that the abusive passenger dislikes, but anyone who appears not to be indigenous to Britain. Furthermore, by stringing together the words ‘Mr Illegal Immigrant-Asylum Seeker’, the passenger associates non-white skin with lawlessness, regardless of the driver’s public service position. David Farrier notes how the notion of asylum itself ‘articulates at once notions of sanctuary and illegitimacy; the “genuine” refugee and the “bogus” asylum seeker converge in the polyphony of official, media and vernacular voices’ (6). Indeed, the levels of discrimination in the text are multiple. Islamophobic sentiment is often shown to be closely connected to pervasive racial intolerance, and signs of assimilation such as speaking English or holding a job are not enough to denote national inclusion.

Aslam’s fictional town is recognisable in the socioeconomic realities of Britain. In Britain, Bangladeshis are the ‘poorest minority group’, whilst ‘approximately seven out of ten British Bangladeshi and Pakistani children live in poverty’ (R. Ahmed 4–5). Bangladeshis and Pakistanis in Britain have high rates of long-term unemployment, and because of this, ‘Muslims as a whole occupy an underprivileged position’ (Peach 29). The 2011 census shows that 61 per cent of Bangladeshi women are economically inactive; that 57 per cent of Pakistani men and 53 per cent of Bangladeshi men appear to work in low-skilled jobs; and that over half of both Bangladeshi men and women work part-time (Office of National Statistics). In comparison, the Hindu and Sikh population is significantly better off, holding a higher number of jobs in the white-collar sector (Peach 29) and a higher number of degree qualifications than Muslims (Peach 30). Although white residents are almost entirely absent from *Maps for Lost Lovers*, class distinctions between the various South Asian communities are at the forefront of local relations. Through Kaukab’s focalisation, we learn about the socioeconomic dynamics of the migrants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii:

> The whites were already moving out of here by the end of the 1970s, and within the decade the Hindus became the first immigrant group to move out to the rich suburbs, followed slowly over the next few years by a handful of Pakistanis. Doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers – all have moved out of the neighbourhood and gone to the suburbs by now, leaving behind the Pakistanis, the Bangladeshis, and a few Indians, all of whom work in restaurants, drive taxis and buses, or are unemployed. (46)

The gradual exodus of the white residents since the 1970s categorises what has been termed 'white flight'. Ash Amin defines 'white flight' as occurring when 'suburbs and estates dominated by an aspirant working class or an inward-looking middle class [are] repelled by what it sees as the replacement of a homely White nation by another land of foreign cultural contamination' (961). The racial prejudice inherent in examples of 'white flight' is directly against those that do not fit into the traditional notion of what it means to be British. Amin further argues that one of the causes of social segregation is the presence of 'strong overtones of Whiteness' in how we understand national belonging (960). By noting that it is the Hindu majority that has gained the most economic success in Britain, Kaukab demonstrates the ongoing presence of rivalries between Hindus and Muslims. However, by juxtaposing a religion (Hinduism) with a national group (Pakistanis) rather than another religion, such as Islam, she frames her understanding of economic and social success as something achieved only by the Hindus. The less fortunate South Asians – the Pakistanis and Bangladeshis – are left behind.

These ongoing tensions between the wealthy and the poor South Asian immigrants play out in a passage set in a local shop. Kaukab's daughter Mah-Jabin meets a wealthy Pakistani who was brought to the neighbourhood 'for amusement' by the wealthy relatives that she was meeting in the suburbs to show her 'how the poor Pakistanis lived here in England' (312). The relatives she is visiting are an example of the Pakistanis that managed to emulate the Hindus and move away from inner city poverty. Mah-Jabin overheard the woman express her fury at being called a 'darkie bitch' by a white man in the town centre, not primarily because it was an act of racial abuse, but because she feels humiliated at being associated with the poor Pakistani community:

> The man who called me that name was filthy and stinking. And he would not have called me that name if it had not been for the people in this area, who have so demeaned Pakistan's image in foreign countries. Imagine! He thought he could insult *me*, I who live in a house in Islamabad the likes of which he'd never see in his life, I who speak better English than *him* […] And it's all the fault of you lot, you sister-murdering, nose-blowing, mosque-going, cousin-marrying, veil-wearing inbred

imbeciles. (312)

Through this passage, we can see how the complex web of race, class, and religion functions in the novel. The white residents described do not seem to differentiate between the different South Asian residents, with their many religions, practices, and varying degrees of wealth. Nevertheless, Aslam offers us a more complex narrative of identity than simply white versus non-white. The South Asian woman, in her tirade against the Pakistani urban poor, shows less disdain for the local racists than she does for those who practise Islam in a way that, to her mind, contradicts British notions of decorum and decency.

The reputation of the Pakistani Muslim community is something that is always on the minds of Shamas and Kaukab. When Kaukab discovers that Mah-Jabin is in love with a local boy who has been sent to Pakistan to marry a cousin, Shamas warns Kaukab not to lose her temper, because:

> otherwise tomorrow the local newspaper would be carrying the headline BRITISH-BORN DAUGHTER OF PAKISTANI MUSLIM COMMUNITY LEADER BEATEN OVER MATTER OF MARRIAGE, bringing into disrepute, in one fell swoop, Islam, Pakistan, the immigrant population here in England, and his place of work, which was – in the matters of race – the officially appointed conscience of the land. (119)

To Kaukab, the way that they represent themselves as migrants has a direct bearing on the reputation of their family as a whole, and therefore also impacts on their children's futures within this traditional Pakistani system of honour, kinship networks, and reputation. For Shamas, by contrast, the family has a duty to stay in the neighbourhood in order to exert a positive influence on the community and to prevent the local Muslims from clashing with the whites. The imaginary newspaper headline that Shamas conjures up – 'BRITISH-BORN DAUGHTER OF PAKISTANI MUSLIM COMMUNITY LEADER BEATEN OVER MATTER OF MARRIAGE' – contains a telling mesh of identities. 'British-born' assumes that the daughter is more a part of the nation than the parents and is therefore less 'foreign', and the words 'daughter' and 'marriage' call into question the subservient treatment of women in Pakistani Muslim communities, something that Shamas realises is of widespread concern and controversial in nature. To describe Shamas as a 'leader' implies that he is perceived as an 'authentic Muslim representative' (Morey and Yaqin 91), expected to embody a certain performative kind of Islam that satisfies the white community but is not too different from their own beliefs. 'Beaten', of course, suggests a world of violence deep within the community. Shamas adopts the imagined point of view of the press by ventriloquising how his community is represented, showing the actions of himself and his family are not

personal, but would be presented as a reflection of Pakistani Muslims in general.

Because of Shamas's refusal to move out into the wealthier suburbs and his insistence on remaining in the neighbourhood in order to continue his work on the Community Relations Council, Kaukab berates him for supposedly ruining the future prospects of their daughter Mah-Jabin. She exclaims that 'no decent family was ever going to come to ask for the hand of a girl living in this third-class neighbourhood of people who are mill-labourers or work at The Jewel in the Crown and The Star of Punjab' (328). The description of Dasht-e-Tanhaii given by Kaukab here is revealing of the role of South Asians in a traditionally white working-class neighbourhood. Although South Asians were sought out to work in British mill towns due to a decline in labour after the Second World War, they did not enter a 'neutral political environment' (P. Jackson 191), but instead found a society resentful of migrants due to a long history of colonial exploitation. What the South Asian migrant workers did share with the white working class, however, was 'acute problems of social stigmatisation, low educational achievements [and] unpleasant housing and urban amenities' which all lead to a 'pathology of social rejection' (Amin 962). This is particularly true of the immigrants from rural Mirpur in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, who were given permission to emigrate to Britain in the late 1960s after the building of the Mangla Dam, and who now make up a significant percentage of the Pakistani presence in Britain (P. Jackson 196). The socioeconomic problems in the town are what spurs Shamas on to create a better reputation for the Muslims in the community, and therefore encourage a sense of belonging for the residents. Kaukab's only wish, in contrast, is to improve her economic and social status within the South Asian communities with which she affiliates.

Whilst Aslam does construct a socially deprived Pakistani community, he does not create a one-dimensional portrait of a community that has been victimised. One aspect of Islamic cultural tradition that Aslam is particularly contemptuous of is the treatment of women. Amina Yaqin argues that although Aslam does not entirely succumb to the 'stereotype of Muslim women as victims' (104) in his narrative, he still portrays Pakistani Muslims as being backward and oppressive in their treatment of women. She further argues that this is problematic due to Aslam's perceived identity as a kind of 'Pakistani spokesperson' who is believed to have an 'authentic' perspective of Pakistan (103). Indeed, in the town of Dasht-e-Tanhaii alone, a Muslim couple fall victim to an 'honour' killing by their family members; a young girl is murdered by a holy man during a violent and prolonged exorcism; and a well-respected imam is arrested for molesting young boys in the mosque.

However, on a more familial level, or one that does not cater to media caricatures of Muslims, we see a difficult relationship between Kaukab and her daughter Mah-Jabin as she

tries to encourage her to maintain traditional Pakistani codes of conduct. Whilst arguing about her mother's compliance in sending her to Pakistan to get married, Mah-Jabin throws accusations at her mother:

> You must be a moral cripple if you think what you did to me wasn't wrong. Didn't you once tell me that a woman's life is hard because you have to run the house during the day and listen to your husband's demands in bed at night? So why didn't you make sure I avoided such a life? Answer me… Answer me… Why do you people keep doing the same things over and over again expecting a different result? (113)

Mah-Jabin, as a second-generation immigrant born in Britain, does not share the same cultural history and identity as her parents. Because of this, she struggles to understand why her mother clings to traditions that are not universal, but are instead culture-specific. By asking her why 'you people' (a reference to Pakistanis and clear evidence of Mah-Jabin attempting to distance herself from her cultural heritage) repeat the same actions and expect different results, she is framing Pakistani traditions as immovable markers that cause suffering and are not subjected to critique by those who live by them. Mah-Jabin's claim that Pakistanis in Britain are 'doing the same things over and over again expecting a different result' echoes Albert Einstein's reputed definition of insanity. Aslam, by echoing these words, shows how British-born Mah-Jabin does not just resent Kaukab's adherence to traditional Pakistani customs, but is so distanced from Pakistan that its social customs seem entirely unintelligible and abnormal.

Whilst Mah-Jabin had hoped that her parents would relax their cultural traditions during the process of migration, Kaukab in particular maintains the traditions that were familiar to her in Pakistan. Although Kaukab wishes that her three children would follow Pakistani and Islamic traditions, she particularly hopes that by confining her daughter to the domestic space rather than the public, she can dissuade her from adopting a secular British lifestyle. Elizabeth Jackson, in her article on women and space, argues that whilst the confinement of women to the private sphere is often seen as a tool for 'upholding patriarchy' in the West, Indian feminists 'have drawn attention to the fact that women's mobility in public spaces is still curtailed by ideologies of respectability' (58). It is not Shamas, the patriarch of the household, who tries to retain Mah-Jabin in a traditional domestic role, but her mother. The migrant experience, however, complicates these traditional gender roles. When Mah-Jabin shouts at her mother: 'Why do you people keep doing the same things over and over again expecting a different result?' (113), she is essentially asking why Muslim women such as Kaukab refuse to relinquish traditional roles of gender and sexuality now that they are in a country that does not hold women quite so victim to notions of respectability.

Some critics have been more scathing about Kaukab's behaviour than others. David Waterman describes her as the most 'racist' member of the family (27), and Nadia Butt claims that Kaukab would rather be 'antagonistic to [her] host country' than make an 'effort to assimilate' like her children (155). From this point of view, Aslam's offers a one-dimensional depiction of Pakistani migrants as a self-ghettoising community. However, these readings of Kaukab's behaviour are rather simplistic because they discount the nuances of the migrant-host experience, particularly the structures of power between the non-white migrants and the native white residents. Being subjected to discriminatory aggressions in her daily life means that Kaukab cannot be racist or antagonistic herself, but can only react against these aggressions by retreating into a community where she feels a sense of belonging and commonality. Esra Santesso's reading of Kaukab as suffering from 'disorientation' is more insightful. Santesso defines disorientation in the context of Muslim migration to Britain as 'the temporary state of confusion and self-alienation felt by the Muslim immigrant upon arrival in a secular nation' (7). In the novel, Santesso argues, Kaukab is particularly 'characterised by permanent regret and bitterness' (175) as she struggles with the difficulties of raising her children as an immigrant. I would argue that Kaukab's fear of losing her faith and her inability to find a sense of belonging in Britain is what encourages her harsh attitude towards her children, particularly her daughter, rather than being impelled by straightforward mistrust of those outside of her immediate community.

Through *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Aslam undertakes the ambitious project of mapping a family's changing identity from the British Raj through to present-day multicultural Britain. By weaving memories of the British Raj and the Partition of India in to a present-day story, Aslam employs a historical narrative based in facticity but embedded into the fictional lives of characters. He does this in order to show that traumatic memories of British colonialism are passed on through generations of families that were victim to its violence. Without providing an optimistic ending, Aslam offers us hope for the future through Charag's decision to purchase the photographs of immigrants, taken upon their arrival in Britain, that were soon to be thrown away as the local photography studio closed down. Charag's decision to set up a gallery with the photos as a way to 'incorporate into [his] art the lives of the people [he] grew up amongst' (318) is an example of what Marianne Hirsch has termed 'postmemory', a type of memory that she deems particularly 'powerful' due to its 'connection to its object or source [being] mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation' (22). Although Kaukab and Shamas's children do not share with them the same cultural memories of Pakistan, Charag's desire to merge his immigrant identity with his love of art intimates a possibility of dialogue between secular

pursuits and religious identity that goes beyond what Amin describes as 'worrying assumptions of cultural fixity and homogeneity' (22), or the idea that Muslim communities and white communities will always be entirely separate, unchanging, and antagonistic.

'If you have a history, you see, you have a pride': Cultural Heritage and Female Agency in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

Monica Ali was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to a white British mother and a Bangladeshi father. After moving to Britain as a child, she was primarily raised in Bolton and studied at the University of Oxford (Gunning 94). Her first novel, *Brick Lane*, was published in 2003. An instant hit with the British public, Ali was listed by Granta as one of its best young authors, and the novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize the same year (Duff 88). *Brick Lane*, a novel named after the eponymous Bangladeshi area in East London, narrates the life-story of Nazneen, a young Bangladeshi Muslim woman who emigrates to Britain in the 1980s to marry Chanu, an older Bangladeshi man who works for his local council in Tower Hamlets. The novel explores the private and public presence of Bangladeshi immigrants through the perspective of Nazneen. While the novel is narrated primarily from within a domestic setting, we also learn about Nazneen's experience of mapping her route through an unfamiliar urban landscape. By interspersing the Britain-focused narrative with memories of Nazneen's childhood in rural Bangladesh and letters from her sister Hasina in Dhaka, Ali maintains a close connection between, on one hand, the need of the immigrant to reconfigure and reconsider herself as a British citizen and, on the other, the desire also to maintain transnational connections with the original homeland.

The novel is littered with historical, political, and cultural discussions, particularly from Nazneen's interactions with Chanu who attempts, with some resistance, to educate his daughters on important events in Bangladeshi history. He teaches them about the 1943 famine, for example, and important national figures such as the influential Bengali author Rabindranath Tagore and the artist Zainul Abedin, famous for his paintings of the famine. Because of this, the reader is also able to gain knowledge not only about Bangladeshis in Britain, but about Bangladeshi culture and history more broadly. In the British context, the narrative trajectory itself begins in the Thatcher years of the 1980s and follows through into the early 2000s, punctuating the narrative with politically significant events such as the 2001 Oldham riots and the rise of the far-right British National Party.

In the post-Second World War economic boom, close to 'two million immigrants predominantly from India, Pakistan and the West Indies had settled in the industrial centres around London and the West Midlands' (Schofield 210–11). As Peter Jackson notes, the north of England was similarly important during the post-war economic boom, with the textile towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire being predominantly populated by Pakistani-born communities (191). East London has a rich history of immigration, housing 'waves of Irish, Huguenot, Jewish, and then Bangladeshi immigrants' from the seventeenth century onwards (Brouillette 434). In the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to the east of the city, 'the third-generation Bangladeshi population "born and bred" in the area constitutes approximately one-half of the community' (Eade and Garbin 182). Because of this ethnic and religious diversity, Brick Lane has become 'at once an icon of multicultural exotica and an incipient threat posed by cultural and religious difference' (Alexander 203). Nonetheless, South Asian migration coexisted with the expectation of returning home, described in the Pakistani context as the 'myth of return', or 'the mythology that they [the migrants] are in Britain to save, invest, and eventually return to their villages back home' (Anwar ix). Many South Asian migrants hoped to achieve economic success and the accumulation of wealth in Britain so that an easier life could be experienced on return (Robinson 151).

In a specifically Bangladeshi context, Katy Gardner explains that many of the migrants, particularly those from Sylhet in the north east of Bangladesh, lived as cheaply and worked as hard as possible in order to procure economic gain during their supposedly temporary residence in Britain (46). Although arriving with the hope of achieving prosperity and a sense of financial security, the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets suffers from 'disproportionately high rates of unemployment, poor […] educational standards, overcrowding and particular health problems' (Eade and Garbin 182). Like many other ethnic minorities at the time of the second Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968, South Asians were excluded from any conceptualisation of British nationhood due to what has been termed 'new racism'.[2] This is a form of exclusion that differs from scientific racism in that it justifies itself by expressing concern for how 'responsible people' might be affected by an influx of 'outsiders' (Husband 83). Dilowar Hussain Khan, Chair of East London Mosque Committee, stated in an interview with Claire Alexander that when he lived in Wapping, only a mile and a half from Brick Lane, his windows were broken and he was physically attacked. In moving to Brick Lane, however, he finally felt safe: 'this little island we had, this was like a safe

[2] Katy Gardner explains that '[i]n 1968 a second Commonwealth Immigrants Act was introduced, this largely being an attempt to control the entry of East African Asians to the UK. For the first time, race was an explicit part of the legislation: the new restrictions did not apply to ex-colonial whites' (47).

haven' (211). By creating an island within an island, the Bangladeshi community is able to cultivate solidarity against potentially prejudicial and even violent outsiders.

Evidently, Brick Lane is a culturally, socially, and historically significant location for the East London Bangladeshi community, and Ali's decision to set her novel in this part of the city means that it has come under fire for its representation of real Bangladeshis. Unlike Nadeem Aslam, who predominantly managed to avoid fierce criticism of his portrayal of Pakistanis perhaps due to his setting *Maps for Lost Lovers* in an unnamed town, Monica Ali has come under fire for her supposedly false representations of an already stereotyped and socially deprived community. Although of Bangladeshi heritage herself, Ali comes from a relatively affluent background and is therefore perceived by some as unable to truly represent 'the working-class Bangladeshis of Tower Hamlets' (Gunning 94).

Yasmin Hussain, who writes from within the discipline of sociology, does not consider Ali to be bringing the Bangladeshi voice forward, but rather argues that the novel 'presents an image of Britain's Bangladeshi community which is a textbook definition and […] is not a book which is written from "within" the community it explores' (92). Fatema Jahan, who bases her reading of *Brick Lane* on how closely it ties in with her qualitative research into Bangladeshi Muslim women in Britain, argues that Nazneen's transgression of cultural and gender roles within her community is unrealistic, and that Bangladeshi Muslim women tend rather to find agency by living 'strategically, within these norms' (380). On the other hand, critics such as Jane Hiddleston have defended Ali, claiming that 'the novel clearly seeks to uncover subjectivities that have so far been deprived of a public voice' (59). Hiddleston further argues, in general terms, that too heavy a burden is put on the postcolonial author to accurately represent a community as a sort of spokesperson (70). By demanding accuracy and authenticity from the postcolonial author, we run the risk of demanding a direct reflection of a society and dismissing the possibility of creative and imaginative literary production.

Not only has the authorship and the content of *Brick Lane* come under fire, but also Ali's choice of the realist form. Hiddleston, on the one hand, argues that the fantastical and highly embellished opening chapter that chronicles Nazneen's birth calls into question the accuracy of her representation of the Bangladeshi community in London. Because this early episode is narrated in a style that is 'reminiscent of Rushdie's humorous exaggerations' (Hiddleston 61), we must question whether the diasporic chapters of the novel should be read as entirely realist. Yet I argue that reserving the fantastical style for the Bangladeshi setting and using an earnestly realist style for the chapters in England could suggest that Ali perceives Nazneen's life in Britain to be more crucial to her identity formation than her life

back in Bangladesh, a place that Ali insinuates is chaotic and superstitious. This would support the criticism against Ali that she is not truly representative of the Bangladeshi community, as her abrupt change in style suggests an adherence to colonial-style principles of Europe as developed and South Asian countries as backward.

Ali's use of literary realism itself has been criticised for not being a suitable mode in which to depict the hybrid society of multicultural Britain as compared with other forms, such as magical realism (Cormack 696). Magical realism as a subgenre allows an author to write from a marginal position that is oppositional to the 'privileged centers of literature', and thereby to challenge the dominant discourse that the centre may advocate (D'haen 194–5). This judgement is problematic, however, as it implies that postcolonial, or even non-white, Anglophone authors should limit themselves to a particular literary style, with realism being reserved as a specifically Western style. In response to this sort of criticism, Sara Upstone has argued that Ali is not using the realist form as it is usually defined in literary criticism, but is instead using '*utopian realism*' (165, italics in original). Utopian realism, as employed in Ali's novel, is a style that goes 'beyond reportage' of Muslims in Britain, instead gesturing towards what life could be like for Muslims in Britain and therefore offering a tentative 'promise of a renewed multiculturalism' (Upstone 170; 171).

Because of Ali's singular focus on her protagonist Nazneen, the novel has been described as a *Bildungsroman*, or a novel that takes the form of 'both a move away from rural origins towards the modern city and an upward movement from one social class to another' (Buchanan n. pag.). Ali's choice of this style has been criticised for suggesting that the protagonist abandon a communal past in favour of living an individualist life (Cormack 717). Yet this is not the case, as Nazeen's story is one of migration rather than social climbing. She moves across continents rather than a single country, and she does not rise in social rank but learns how to survive in a unfamiliar, working-class environment. Her decision to embark on a clothing business with her friend Razia, whilst adhering to Thatcherite principles of entrepreneurship, allows her to maintain her Bangladeshi cultural heritage through friendship with other Bangladeshi women.

In both *Brick Lane* and *Maps for Lost Lovers*, attention to the British class system is key to understanding how the main characters struggle with daily life in Britain, particularly when upward social and economic mobility is limited because of negative reactions to South Asian immigration. In *Maps for Lost Lovers,* Shamas wants to remain in the inner city in order to continue his work as a community spokesperson, while Kaukab wants to move out into the suburbs where the more affluent, and primarily Hindu, South Asians reside. In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen is relatively accepting of her limited social status, expressing greater concern

about the obstacles she faces as an individual. Chanu, however, struggles to come to terms with his inability to climb the social and economic ranks. The result is his oscillation between blaming Bangladeshis themselves, particularly the Sylhetis, for perpetuating already ubiquitous stereotypes, and resenting the intolerance and racial prejudice that permeates British society.

Unfolding from the 1980s onwards, the diasporic chapters of the novel explore Nazneen and Chanu's experience of 'a new, and arguably problematic, kind of Britishness deeply reliant on the Thatcherite discourse of entrepreneurialism' (Duff 88). Because Chanu and Nazneen arrive in Britain at a time when the individual's capacity for hard work was the key to success rather than the support of a welfare state, we see how the Thatcherite ideology of individual achievement and self-reliance is less straightforward when approached from the experience of South Asian immigrants. Although Chanu proves to be rather incompetent at his job at the local council, he is aware of the conservativeness of British society. He feels that his position as a South Asian in a working-class community further prevents him from succeeding financially. However, as Rehana Ahmed explains, '[w]hile Chanu does emerge as a victim of racial prejudice and discrimination to some extent, the narrative seems to withdraw from any overt suggestion of structural antagonism' (133).

Yasmin Hussain is highly critical of Ali's characterisation of Chanu, particularly his attitude to the other Bangladeshis in his community. She argues that Chanu 'sounds like an outsider commenting on the Bangladeshi community', and because of this, 'the novel is as much about class and its petty snobberies within the Bangladeshi community as it is about ethnicity' (103). Chanu's snobbery is almost neocolonial in its nature. He talks in a way that mimics the history books that he frequently peruses but never finishes, and he repeatedly mentions his degree from the University of Dhaka in order to establish himself as well-educated and middle-class and so, in his mind, more worthy of attention and respect from the British than groups such as the Sylhetis. His descriptions of the Sylheti migrants as 'Uneducated. Illiterate. Close-minded. Without ambition' (28) is shockingly and brutally classist. As with the class contempt that Aslam's wealthy Pakistani character articulates against her poorer counterparts (see page 79–80), Chanu blames the Sylhetis for the racialised prejudice towards Bangladeshis in Britain. He says, 'do not forget – the Bangladeshis they [the British] are mixing with are Sylhetis, no more, no less. They do not see the best face of our nation' (186). Chanu blames the general lack of mobility of Bangladeshis in Britain on the Sylhetis' tendency for low-paid labour and insular community ties. Whilst he acknowledges the British culture of racism in the 1980s, he blames the Sylhetis for tainting Bangladeshis rather than the British for their prejudiced approach to ethnic minorities.

The district of Sylhet was ruled over by the Moghuls from 1612 until the arrival of the East India Company in 1765. From the 1850s onwards, Sylhet began to produce tea, resulting in significant profits for the British rather than the Sylhetis, whose labour was dismissed in favour of workers from the surrounding districts (Gardner 37). In 1874, the British decided that the district of Sylhet should become part of Assam. After the Partition of India, however, a referendum in July 1947 resulted in Sylhet becoming part of East Pakistan, and later, in 1971, Bangladesh (Gardner 37). The complex history of this district means that it has taken on some characteristics that cause it to stand out as different from the rest of Bangladesh. An aspect that Katy Gardner highlights as being particularly significant is the difference in how land revenue was managed in Sylhet compared with the rest of Bengal. In Bengal, the landowners, or *zamindars*, had significant power over the tenants of the land, known as the *raiyat*. In Assam, however, there was no such middle-man, meaning the rent went straight to the British. The Sylhetis were therefore more 'free' than the tenants in Bengal and other districts, ultimately distancing Sylhet from the rest of Bengal because 'the political and economic structure laid down by the British in Sylhet was […] significantly different from other districts' (Gardner 38). Because of this, Gardner argues, the Sylhetis are distinctive in believing that to 'labour on another man's land' is 'humiliating and associated with low social position' (39).

The Sylhetis who arrived in Britain after the Second World War were predominantly *lascars*, or sailors from India or South East Asia who were recruited to serve in the British merchant navy (Ballard, 'South Asian' 202). Although coming from all over East Bengal, they were primarily from Chittagong, Noakhali, and Sylhet (Gardner 36). Nevertheless, they have somewhat lagged behind their more successful South Asian counterparts both socially and economically. These counterparts included the Gujaratis and the Doabi Punjabis (Ballard, 'South Asian' 202) who had previously settled in East Africa and therefore had 'richer resources of human capital', such as a strong educational background and valuable technical skills (Ballard, 'South Asian' 207). Therefore, when these Gujaratis and Punjabis arrived in Britain, they already had strong middle-class status (Ramji 716). This meant that they found success in the South Asian diaspora far more readily than South Asians from farming communities, such as the Sylhetis.

Nazli Kibria argues that because of Sylhet's long history of international migration to Britain, they developed a 'migration vision', or 'an understanding of international migration as both a possibility and opportunity' (80). Many Sylhetis consequently moved to Britain during the 1960s, working as hard and living as cheaply as possible in order to send money back home (Gardner 46). The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, however, meant that a

policy of free movement between the Commonwealth countries and Britain changed. Instead, non-whites from the Commonwealth had to have employment vouchers to work in Britain (Gardner 44–5). From 1962–65, therefore, the Sylhetis, who already had a significant presence in Britain, managed to increase their numbers by using their transnational networks to bring family members over from Bangladesh with employment vouchers (Gardner 45). They were still, however, excluded from the any sense of national belonging, often finding work in South Asian-run small businesses such as corner shops or 'Indian' restaurants due to being excluded from other forms of work because of widespread and deeply engrained institutionalised racism (Gardner 48).

Roger Ballard makes it clear that Sylhetis in Britain have not 'failed', but have rather 'not, as yet, been able to carve out trajectories of upward mobility' ('South Asian' 202). He further argues that:

> Not only have both these communities [the second community being the Mirpuris from Pakistan][3] continued to increase very rapidly in size, partly because of their members, [*sic*] relatively high fertility rate, and partly as a result of still ongoing processes of family reunion, but in residential terms their members are still overwhelmingly confined to inner-city areas. ('Transnational' 205)

One of the reasons why Chanu criticises the Sylhetis is because of their supposed inability to assimilate into a British environment: 'They know each other from the villages, and they come to Tower Hamlets and they think they are back in the village' (28). The framing of the place name Tower Hamlets in between the two instances of the word 'village' suggests that Chanu sees the Sylhetis as migrating in a cyclical way. In other words, they undergo migration in the hope of a new life, but revert to an established and traditional mode of living. The trend of maintaining community ties with Sylhet while living in Britain has been described by Nazli Kibria as an act of '*community transnationalism'* (82, italics in original). This is an important factor in how the Sylhetis in Britain navigate their way through everyday life amongst the white British and other South Asian members of society.

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[3] The connection Ballard draws between the Sylhetis of Bangladesh and the Mirpuris of Pakistan has roots dating back into the nineteenth century. As he notes in his 1991 article 'Kashmir Crisis: View From Mirpur', many Mirpuris emigrated to Britain after the construction of the Mangla Dam on the Jhelum river in the 1960s, a project that brought great benefits to Pakistan more generally, but had devastating environmental impact on the markets and fertile plains of Mirpur. However, in a similar way to the movement of the Sylhetis, emigration from the Mirpur region to Britain began significantly earlier. In the late nineteenth century, many Mirpuris worked as stokers on the British merchant ships operating out of Bombay, and were later employed to ease the British industrial labour shortage during the Second World War. Again, similarly to the Sylhetis, increasing numbers 'jumped ship', bringing friends and family over to Britain and therefore beginning a process of chain migration that eventually resulted in each respective group becoming a majority minority (514).

Kibria argues that although the Bengalis that came to Britain in the 1950s shared the common religion of Islam with their fellow West Pakistani residents, they always maintained a distance from other South Asian groups (82). Kibria refers to an interview with J. Rabbani, a restaurant owner in Manchester in the 1950s. He stated that:

> We were Muslim; we shared the religion but we did not feel any closeness. They [Pakistanis] saw us as their servants and at every opportunity they tried to cheat us. Also, we Sylhetis as you know, we Sylheti are very attached to the Sylheti language. Many of those who came in those days did not even know how to speak *shuddho Bangla* [standard Bengali]. [...] We stayed close to each other and kept away from others. (82)

The Sylhetis, therefore, are distinct from other Bangladeshi immigrants because of their unique history in Britain and India and the 'highly regional and localistic orientation' (Kibria 82) of the community, which maintained close ties with communities in the district of Sylhet rather than identifying with the new Bangladeshi nation post-1971 (Kibria 85).

Ultimately, Chanu, who is from Dhaka, argues that the Sylhetis refuse to be cosmopolitan, maintaining segregated communities rather than embracing the vastness and multiculturalism of London and in the process depriving themselves of opportunities for economic and social advancement. Strangely enough, Chanu expresses this disdain in front of Nazneen, herself from a village in the district of Mymensingh, a region in the north of Bangladesh that today supplies Sylhet with a 'steady stream of migrant labourers' (Gardner 37). While Chanu, on the one hand, is pleased with his arranged marriage to a girl from a village because of her adherence to traditional religious and family values, he is dismissive of Bangladeshis who refuse to assimilate into Britain. In his mind, Sylhetis in particular contribute towards the negative stereotypes of Bangladeshis that are prevalent in British society and impact on his chances of professional success. Although, as Yasmin Hussain argues, it is clear that Chanu's tirade against the Sylhetis is classist snobbery, I would argue that his classism should be approached with other aspects of his characterisation in mind. Littered around Chanu's well-rehearsed speeches is evidence of his battle with the uncontrollable nature of his body. The hair in his ears grows relentlessly, the callouses on his feet give him constant pain, and his stomach is ever-growing. Even when he is reading, he often falls asleep, 'the page marked with dribble' (78). By making stark the physicality of Chanu's existence alongside his intellectualism, Ali ensures that his description of the Sylhetis as 'dirty little monkeys' (28) comes across as more absurd than menacing.

Nevertheless, it is also important to consider why Chanu makes the Sylhetis the object of his ire as well as the white nationalist group 'Lion Hearts' that deliver anti-Muslim

literature around their housing estate. The reason for this, I would argue, is that Chanu wants to distract attention away from his own lack of upward mobility, despite his educational achievements back in Dhaka. He is unable to progress professionally when he works for the local council: 'I have been at the council for too long. Long service counts for nothing. The local yogi doesn't get alms.' (111) This Bengali proverb that Chanu cites – 'the local yogi doesn't get alms' – is defined by *The Book of Common and Uncommon Proverbs* as 'a wise man is only acknowledged after he earns his spurs outside his hometown or village' (77), whereas *Cultural History of Bengali Proverbs* simply paraphrases it as 'familiarity breeds contempt' (119). Chanu is therefore claiming that regardless of his hard work and loyalty, he is underappreciated as a public servant. Even though he acknowledges that his professional life is threatened by the 'racist society' (111) in which they live, he still claims to his friend Dr Azad that 'The problem is capital. If you don't have money, what can you do?' (111) Although Chanu acknowledges the disempowered position of South Asians living in Britain at this time, he struggles to relinquish his belief that things would improve if only he had greater wealth. In reality, his potential for success lies not only in financial gain but in the intersections of his race and class, something that contemporary Thatcherite discourse did not take into account when calling for the responsibility of the individual. Chanu decides to become a taxi driver, a job that allows him the freedom to be his own boss but has no potential for progression because, as Gardner explains, British Asians were often excluded from other forms of employment (48). In order to counteract his vulnerability as a South Asian in an intolerant British society, he shifts the blame onto the Sylhetis so that he can maintain his somewhat precarious status of middle-class and educated.

As discussed earlier, *Brick Lane* has been criticised for its allegedly unfair and damaging representation of Bangladeshis, particularly Sylhetis, in Tower Hamlets. However, Chanu is in some ways fiercely defensive of his community. Because of this, I would argue that Ali is not stereotyping the Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets, but rather she is showing how Chanu develops as a character, and how he reconsiders the role of Bangladeshis in Britain. Although attacking the Sylhetis, Chanu does show awareness of the shared experiences of South Asian migrants:

> behind every story of immigrant success there lies a deeper tragedy […] I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage […] I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. (113)

Although textbook-like, Chanu's speech demonstrates understanding of the broader historical and cultural issues that restrict upward mobility for the Bangladeshis. However, the fact that his eloquent and textbook-like speech about the migrant experience is met with a resounding 'crap!' (113) from Dr Azad's wife suggests that Chanu is partly to blame for any racial oppression or crisis of identity due to being unwilling to compromise his Bangladeshi identity in Britain. Whereas Chanu's relationship with his daughters involves teaching them about Bangladesh's history and culture, Dr Azad's wife has a deracinated relationship with her daughter. She gives the daughter money to go to the pub (111) rather than keeping her at home like Chanu's daughters, and therefore allows herself and her daughter to drift into British ways of life.

Chanu, however, is perpetually frustrated by the lingering colonial stereotypes around Bangladeshis that occupy the British education system. Angrily, he declares that 'All [Shahana] knows about is flood and famine. Whole bloody country is just a basket case to her' (185). Her lack of knowledge about Bangladesh is of great concern to him: 'If you have a history, you see, you have a pride' (185). Without a sense of pride in the ancestral home, he argues, his daughters are vulnerable to becoming more British than Bangladeshi. Ironically, whilst raging against British stereotyping of Bangladeshis, he quotes Warren Hastings, an eighteenth-century Governor-General of Bengal, as saying about the Bengali people: 'They are gentle, benevolent […] as exempt from the worst properties of human passion as any people on the face of the earth' (186). As well as being a rather patronising statement, the House of Commons in fact impeached Hastings in 1787 for immoral actions against the Bengali population during his time as Governor-General (Copland n. pag.). As we see repeatedly in the novel, Chanu is torn between wanting to affiliate himself with the educated classes in an almost neocolonial manner, whilst at the same time being staunchly defensive of his Bangladeshi cultural heritage.

On the estate where Chanu and Nazneen live, there is a constant undercurrent of tension between the Bangladeshis and the white residents. The white residents, angry about the influx of South Asian migrants, deliver leaflets around the estate claiming that the migrants are beginning to insist upon Islamic teachings and traditions in schools (251) and are enforcing modest dress for all women in the neighbourhood (257). The Bengal Tigers retaliate with even more leaflets. Chanu becomes caught in a dichotomy, between wanting to seem progressive and feeling the urge to defend his fellow Muslims:

> If he had a Lion Hearts leaflet in his hand, he wanted his daughters covered. He would not be cowed by these Muslim-hating peasants.

> If he saw some girls go by in hijab he became agitated at this display of peasant ignorance. Then the girls [Shahana and Bibi] went out in their skirts. (265)

However, Chanu is not caught between two opposing cultures – British and Bangladeshi – but between two possibilities of himself being seen as manipulated by cultural traditions. By putting the onus on his daughters to be representative of him and his beliefs, he evinces concern not only for himself but also for the future of how Bangladeshis in London represent themselves, caught between a desire for assimilation and an urge to maintain Islamic tradition. Ironically, he uses the word 'peasants' to describe both the racist far-right group the Lion Hearts, and also the local Bangladeshi community, suggesting that he sees both groups as backward and uneducated and therefore exposing his classist attitudes.

Intersecting both the themes of migratory history and class structures is gender. Through *Brick Lane*, Ali highlights issues of womanhood and female agency, an aspect that has been somewhat overlooked or dismissed in critical approaches, as Sara Upstone points out, as simply 'unrealistic [and] feminist feel-good' (166). It could be argued that Ali's decision to filter the narrative through the perspective of a female protagonist within a domestic setting depoliticises the text. By contrast, I would argue that this struggle consistently informs the actions and decisions of the characters within and outside of the home. Ali refrains from simply 'cataloguing racist attacks' (Hiddleston 68) in favour of a more subtle approach in which the characters' responses to everyday racist assumptions inform the entirety of the novel. Although, as I discussed previously, Nazneen's journey of individual progression has been criticised, it is evident that everyday aspects of Nazneen's life remained infused with social and political issues (Gunning 100). Indeed, Ali is able to interrogate the role of the Bangladeshi woman in the diaspora through Nazneen's relationships with other women, particularly Razia and Mrs Islam.

In an early scene, we see how women's habitual gossiping about other women is an integral part of everyday life on the estate, between fulfilling parenting duties and performing domestic work. When Razia and Mrs Islam visit Nazneen at her flat, Nazneen opens the door midway through their chattering about another woman's husband. This indicates how the women exchange a perpetual and uninterrupted flow of gossip of which the reader only receives snippets when Nazneen is present. They discuss a woman who jumped to her death from 'sixteen floors up' (27), speculating that it was because after twelve years her husband was unable to produce children. Since they live in such a close-knit community, they explain that 'everyone is whispering behind the husband's back' (27). Another Bangladeshi woman, we learn, has caused a scandal by going out to work: 'Her husband is working but still she cannot fill her stomach. In Bangladesh one salary can feed twelve, but Jorina cannot fill her

stomach' (29). Although all three women somewhat adjust their ways of life when in Britain, behind closed doors they still uphold and maintain traditional gender roles by discussing the shame of marital disharmony.

Furthermore, even though Nazneen and Razia are close friends, Razia is reluctant to discuss Nazneen's affair with Karim, responding with 'you don't have to tell me' (357) when Nazneen tries to confess to the affair. Later, when she tries to put into words how Karim makes her feel, Razia responds disinterestedly with 'mmm' (428). Nazneen is frustrated that her friend, who has assimilated into British life more than the other women, refuses sympathy toward Nazneen's situation: 'How irritating Razia could be sometimes! Who was it who made herself so English, anyway? With her British passport and tracksuit and Union Jack sweatshirt' (428). The difference between the two women's transgressions is that whilst Razia incorporates aspects of Britishness into her everyday life, she does not fully transgress a Bangladeshi cultural norm set down for women in the way that Nazneen does. Through their interactions, often behind closed doors, we can see how both women alternate between subverting and upholding cultural traditions that dictate how they function in their everyday lives.

In the early years of settling into British life in Tower Hamlets, Nazneen lies awake at night reminiscing about her childhood back in Bangladesh:

> And she drifted off to where she wanted to be, in Gouripur tracing letters in the dirt with a stick while Hasina danced around her on six-year-old feet. […] Amma scolded and cuddled, and smelled as sweet as the skin on the milk when it had been boiled all day with sugar. […] [T]hey walked around the lake to watch the fishermen pulling in great nets of silver fish, and saw the muscles knot on their arms and legs and chests. When she woke she thought *I know what I would wish* but by now she knew that where she wanted to go was not a different place but a different time. She was free to wish but it would never be. (45, italics in original)

In a similar vein to *Maps for Lost Lovers*, *Brick Lane* evokes sensory memories of childhood in order to depict it as a time of innocence, comfort, and familiarity, and in contrast to a difficult adulthood in Britain. By doing this, a clear contrast is also established between childhood and adulthood, with the former being a time of joy and the latter being a time of struggle. Because of Nazneen's change of place from the familiar to the strange, a straightforward and linear narrative of 'growing up' is not possible. Nazneen must not only negotiate her passage into adulthood and married life, but must also come to terms with this reality in light of her new identity as 'other' in Britain.

In the passage quoted above, young Nazneen is part of a community in which loved ones and natural beauty surround her. Upon awakening, though, she acknowledges that her understanding of Bangladesh was created through the eyes of a child, and as an adult, it is no longer a place that she can identify with. Her romanticised Bangladesh is juxtaposed with her sister Hasina's adult experience of Bangladesh as a violent and brutal place. Ali's decision to include an epistolary aspect to the novel has been criticised, particularly because the letters are written in broken English. Yasmin Hussain describes the letters as 'unconvincing' (96), and Cormack infers that 'it is hard to know exactly what we are reading – whether the letters represent inept attempts at English or are a free translation from illiterate Bengali' (715). Hiddleston further argues that the letters 'reinforce prevalent assumptions regarding the relentless subordination of women in postcolonial Islamic societies' (62). There is little reason for Hasina to be attempting to write in English, and if she were instead writing in Bengali, there is no reason for it to be so poorly written. Nonetheless, the very existence of the letters is important, since they establish a parallel narrative that shows how Nazneen's life could have been if she had not emigrated to Britain. Whereas Nazneen moves to Britain to enjoy relative freedom, Hasina struggles to survive in Bangladesh. She runs away from her 'love marriage' once her husband starts to beat her, moving to Narayanganj, south of Dhaka, to work in a garment factory. After rumours start to spread about an affair with a man named Abdul, Hasina is fired from the garment factory (159). When landlord Mr Chowdury, a man whom Hasina describes as a father to her, discovers the scandal, he rapes her repeatedly over a period of many months. She eventually becomes a prostitute – a local mill-worker named Hussain acts as her pimp – until a client named Ahmed proposes. Six year later she writes to Nazneen, having again fled from a violent marriage.

Through Hasina's letters we can see that she is the victim of violent patriarchal structures, a lamentable and ongoing aspect of women's lives in Bangladesh (Chowdhury 10; Khatun and Rahman 19; Zaman 37). Because of Nazneen and Hasina's correspondence, it is evident that Nazneen does not only engage with Bangladesh as a memory, but as a present that runs parallel to her own life in the Muslim diaspora. Their relationship constitutes what Yasmin Hussain has described as a 'transnational sisterhood' (93), suggesting that whilst their experiences as adults are vastly different, they both experience problems relating to female agency. Furthermore, by including Hasina's letters, Ali shows that Nazneen has not entirely abandoned her Bangladeshi roots. Instead, she has abandoned her romanticised ideals of Bangladesh developed in childhood but still maintains a deeply personal connection with her place of birth from a transnational and global standpoint. Although Nazeen has more bodily agency than Hasina, she still feels unable to verbalise her dissatisfaction with her

husband and her sexual desires, even to her closest friends. This is because her guilt of transgressing societal conventions of female sexual purity has translated from a Bangladeshi to a British diasporic context.

In drawing connections between Samad in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Nazneen, Devon Campbell-Hall argues that these characters' decision to have affairs symbolises a decision to move away from traditional Muslim beliefs about marriage and fidelity. She further argues that '[t]heir transgressive actions indicate a crucial change in their thinking, from an emphasis on communal considerations to a preference for the well-being of the individual' (178). Whilst Nazneen's affair with Karim does signal a move away from traditionalism and a rejection of her arranged marriage, she does not find agency through this relationship with him, but by choosing to end it. Nazneen's act of adultery is not triggered by a desire to rebel against the tradition of marriage or because of intense love for Karim, but because she needs to 'sense her own existence for the first time' (Hsin-Ju Kuo 179–80). In other words, she needs to transgress her prescribed role as an 'authentic' Bangladeshi woman, 'the real thing', as Karim describes her (385), his description of Nazneen highlighting his adherence to the principle of 'preserving and reproducing national culture through women' (Ku 177). In leaving both relationships, Nazneen refuses to be a symbol.

It could be argued that *Brick Lane*'s female characters are weak and stereotypical due to their traditional outlook (Y. Hussain 109). Characters such as Nazneen's mother, whose life is ruled by waiting for fate to runs its course, and Hasina, who is perpetually a victim, are rather one-dimensional. However, I would argue that the characterisation of Nazneen allows Ali to reverse some of these stereotypes of the silenced Muslim women. In refusing to give in to what Dr Azad calls 'Going Home Syndrome' (32; 456), Nazneen insists on finding a middle ground between her identity as a Muslim woman and her new identity as a member of British society. Furthermore, I argue that by offering an overly scathing critique of Nazneen's individualism, we risk overlooking how her gender intersects with her ability to engage in political activism in the Muslim diaspora. In particular, Cormack argues that Nazneen's

> rejections of fatalism and Karim represent liberation but also a move away from any potential political collectivity in which she might be able to recognize herself. The meetings of the Bengal Tigers represent at least some attempt to construct the political meanings of Islamic identity through discussion. (713)

Cormack's conclusion here is problematic. Nazneen clearly struggles to see a space available to her in the Bengal Tigers because of its structure of male leadership. The men who attend the meetings are distinguished individually – Karim, the Questioner, the Secretary – whereas the female attendees are always described as 'girls in hijab' (236; 237; 240) or 'the hijab

girls' (239), characterising them as participators or even simply onlookers rather than leaders in the male-dominated environment. After the 2001 Oldham riots, Nazneen notices that the 'hijab girls' have 'upgraded to burkhas' (279). This suggests that they, like many other young women, are undergoing a period of 'self-discovery' in which some Muslim women felt the need to 'identify themselves visibly as Muslim, partly out of solidarity with other Muslims around the world' (Tarlo, *Visibly* 197). Nazneen, unlike the 'hijab girls', is reluctant to be politically active during a time when Muslims were coming under increasing scrutiny from the British press and the government. Cormack's criticism of Nazneen as reluctant to be politically engaged with the position of Islam in Britain appears to be another way for Western voices to impose judgement about how Muslims choose to live in Britain, and suggests that the political can only be communal rather than personal.

Rather than being outwardly politically engaged, Nazneen most clearly associates herself with her fellow working-class women who are similarly trying to find enough economic stability so that her daughters do not only have to live on 'rice and daal, rice and dal', the repetition of these words suggesting a repetitive cycle of poverty (488). Understandably, her role as a mother takes priority over a politically Muslim identity. Nazneen is able to maintain communal structures through economic enterprise with fellow working-class Bangladeshi women, and is therefore negotiating her experience as a Muslim woman on her own terms rather than Chanu's or Karim's. So whilst the focus on domesticity and the narrow narrative voice could cause the novel to appear apolitical, the intense focus on how a Muslim *woman* experiences life in multicultural Britain, and how this is different to the men in the narrative, is a political area of discussion in itself. Nazneen's decision to leave both her lover Karim and her husband Chanu shows, in fact, her rejection of history and her determination to focus on the present. Karim sees Nazneen as symbolic of Bangladeshi traditionalism, and Chanu is a man who was chosen for her back in Bangladesh, not a choice that she made herself. By rejecting her personal history – her arranged marriage – and obsolete expectations of the traditional and static Muslim woman, Nazneen approaches Bangladeshi cultural heritage as something oppressive rather than something worth maintaining in the diaspora.

Using the example of the 2002 film *Bend It Like Beckham*, Sara Ahmed demonstrates how happiness, stemming from a colonial belief of empire as favourable for all, has been perpetually connected to Britishness. The openness of the football pitch where the Indian protagonist Jess wants to play is set up in contrast to the claustrophobia of the Indian home (135), and because Jess's search for happiness through playing football puts her in close contact with two white people, the film implies that 'freedom takes form as proximity to

whiteness' (135). While Jess's search for independence may initially seem positive, Sara Ahmed argues that happiness is established as a 'forward motion' (137), thereby implying that the past, in this case Jess's Indian heritage, must be left behind for the sake of progression. Similarities with Nazneen's movement from rural Bangladesh to urban London can be seen here, particularly Nazneen's decision to remain in London rather than return to Bangladesh with Chanu. This decision, and Nazneen's association of Bangladesh with childhood, frames Bangladesh not spatially as a *different* place, but temporally as a place that is in the *past*. London, in turn, is framed as a place of future possibilities and happiness. However, while Jess's search for happiness is coterminous with white people, Nazneen finds happiness by playing a part in diversifying the British landscape, refusing to give up her Muslim beliefs and helping to initiate a workforce with Razia and other local women. Moreover, by maintaining written correspondence with her sister in Bangladesh, she manages to create a transnational identity rather than choosing the future over the past. In Britain, she creates a new community with whom she can share a cultural past but who can also help her to create a more positive future through female empowerment and mutual support.

Nazneen's resistance to pressures to conform to stereotypes from multiple angles offers us a radical rethinking of how Muslim women can function in Britain. Upstone, in defending Nazneen's individualism, argues that she:

> does not crumble. She does not buckle under the weight of either South Asian patriarchy or British post-9/11 Islamophobia, or even under the combination of these pressures. Yet this is what popular reporting and dominant media discourse would prescribe for her, and it is what critics, therefore, expect. (167)

Towards the beginning of the text, we witness a scene where Nazneen is walking around London, lost and scared. In contrast, towards the end of the novel, she confidently navigates the streets of East London whilst searching for her daughter Shahana who got lost during the rioting between the Bengali Tigers and the Lion Hearts (468). Finding her way round the streets functions metaphorically, and while her geographical understanding of London improves, so does her ability to function within this previously foreign space.

Bangladeshi author Syed Manzruzul Islam also engages with the idea of walking around the city in his short story 'The Mapmakers of Spitalfields' (1997). His mysterious and eccentric protagonist, Brothero-man, is on the run from 'two men in white overalls' (61), evading them throughout the night as he confidently weaves through Brick Lane and the surrounding streets. Bit by bit, the narrator tells us, Brothero-man has walked through the streets of Spitalfields and Brick Lane, 'drawing the secret blueprint of a new city' (66). Similarly to Nazneen's transformation from house-bound to confidently navigating Brick

Lane, 'The Mapmakers of Spitalfields' shows the process of walking as 'an attempt to localise and contextualise the "nomadic", to ground it in a particularising and specific experience of difference: diasporic but also resident' (Bromley 128). In other words, these two texts both use the trope of walking around an urban landscape to demonstrate the need of the migrant to claim space in the host land, to map a future of permanency rather than a perpetual sense of home as elsewhere. Once Nazneen has mapped the city in her mind, she is able metaphorically to solidify her right to a presence in multicultural Britain, and to call it home.

While *Maps for Lost Lovers* looks back to a specific period of time, namely the violence committed during the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, *Brick Lane* does not engage with a specific cultural memory but instead offers a contemporary narrative imbued with British and South Asian history, and with personal memories of a time before Nazneen's migration to Britain. Britain's colonial history with South Asia is invoked in both novels, specifically the influence this relationship had on post-Second World War migration from Asia to Britain, and the problematic race relations that ensued. Issues of memory are approached from a variety of angles throughout *Brick Lane*. In one sense, the family feels that the children must 'remember' their cultural history in Bangladesh in order to resist absolute assimilation into Britain culture. However, this cultural memory is also used, particularly by Chanu, to divide the Bangladeshi migrant communities of East London into the success stories and the embarrassments. These divisions are based on class snobbery, and they expose the prejudices that exist within ethnic communities, not just between.

Both novels, however, offer representations of their respective South Asian countries and cultures that suggest a rather oppressive and violent way of life. While this framing may seem unfamiliar, and even offensive, to many South Asian readers, Aslam and Ali choose to narrate characters that find their diasporic lives perpetually affected by the negative aspects of their inherited cultures, traditions, and religion. The characters' segregated existence means that racial and cultural disharmony between South Asians and other groups is presented as secondary to antagonisms *within* communities. In *Maps for Lost Lovers*, there are instances of abuse from the white British population, such as a pig's head being left outside a mosque and racist language being used on a bus, yet the most severe violence – an 'honour' killing – is committed from within the Pakistani community itself. In *Brick Lane*, racial frictions are hinted at rather than made overt, and the women of the novel appear to be victimised by their Bangladeshi husbands rather than from aggressive racists (see R. Ahmed 133–34).

Whilst in *Maps for Lost Lovers* the seasons continue to change but the characters remain trapped in their respective pasts, *Brick Lane* offers us an understanding of the

importance of the past, but instead chooses to frame it as something to reconsider critically and realistically during the continuous development of identity formation after migration. The characters cannot be divided into simplistic camps of backward-looking first-generation migrants and integrated second-generation characters. Whereas some of the characters such as Kaukab and Chanu live with a perpetual desire to return 'home', many of them, such as Nazneen, as well as Charag and Shahana, find that their South Asian heritage becomes part of their history rather than their present. Therefore, easy binaries and definitions of how South Asians understand their British identities are avoided. Poignantly, Chanu teaches his daughters to recite Tagore's poem 'Golden Bengal', part of which is Bangladesh's national anthem. 'Chanu', the narrator tells us, 'was taking his family back home' (179). He later realises that he must return to Bangladesh, but for the rest of his family Bangladesh is a heritage, rather than a home.

Chapter Three: Colonial History and Race Relations in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*

In this chapter I discuss both the various debates surrounding 'the Rushdie affair' and carry out my own literary analysis of the novel. I place particular emphasis on the chapters set in 1980s London, and those that trace the 'Ayesha narrative' in India. My overall research question of how history and memory function in multicultral society leads to the majority of my discussion being focused on questions of multiculturalism and racism in the more contemporary chapters set in Britain. However, my final discussion of the Ayesha chapters allows me to examine how Rushdie explores hybridity, faith, and doubt, and what this says more broadly about cultural hybridity and contemporary multiculturalism.

In the first section, I outline the debates surrounding the 'Rushdie affair' of 1988, paying particular attention to aspects of debate about history, such as: literary representations of Islamic history, Britain's history of intolerance towards Muslims, Britain's sense of its historical commitment to liberalism and freedom of speech, and the role of Rushdie's personal and national history in the reception of the novel by affronted Muslim communities. In the second section, which focuses on how Rushdie explores British colonialism through the novel, I will move away from Rushdie's engagement with Islamic history to explore how he uses historical and cultural memories of the British Empire in order to critique contemporary neocolonialism. In the third section, I will evaluate Rushdie's anti-racist discourse in order to ask whether or not the historical conflation of non-white identities (and grievances) in the novel is a successful call for social cohesion. Finally, in the fourth section, I argue that the somewhat overlooked Ayesha narrative is an example of how Rushdie reimagines history in a way that is more successful than the inflammatory Mahound chapters. He does this in order to critique instances of puritanical faith and ideological immovability, and calls for a flexible understanding of social and cultural hybridity.

Looking Back to the Rushdie Affair

On 19 October 1988, Salman Rushdie wrote to the Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, criticising the latter's decision to ban *The Satanic Verses* 'under Section 11 of the Indian Customs Act, for being offensive to Islam' (Weller 16). It was the chapters in which a twentieth-century Indian movie star dreams he is observing a prophet, known as Mahound,

which sparked the most outrage internationally. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie describes Mahound as a young 'businessman-turned-prophet' (97) living in 'Jahilia'. It is generally agreed that he 'closely [resembles]' the historic figure of the seventh-century Prophet Muhammad (A. Ali 118). By writing a character that so closely resembled Muhammad, Rushdie has been accused of 'parodically ridiculing Islam's most sanctified figure' (Malak, *Muslim* 94). Nevertheless, as Malise Ruthven explains, the controversy surrounding the novel, at least in India, should not have been a surprise to Rushdie or his publisher. He was well aware that he had fame – even infamy – in India after the publication of his previous novels *Midnight's Children*, which was banned in India, and *Shame*, banned in Pakistan (De Baets 293). Furthermore, Penguin Books had employed Khushwant Singh, an established Indian author and journalist, to read *The Satanic Verses* prior to publication. Convinced that its publication would lead to 'considerable trouble', Singh contacted Peter Mayer, the Chair of the Penguin Group, to express his concerns (Weller 15). Nick Cohen, a supporter of Rushdie, claimed that knowing about the possibilities would not have stopped Rushdie from going ahead with publication because: '[l]ackeys working for a plutocrat's newspaper or propagandists serving a state or corporate bureaucracy guarded their tongues and self-censored, but not artists and intellectuals in free countries' (3–4).

The rioting and violence that ensued from the publication of *The Satanic Verses* resulted in casualties internationally, with an estimated nineteen deaths in India and Pakistan, two in Belgium, and thirty-seven in Sivas in Turkey due to an arson attack at the hotel aimed at the novel's Turkish translator Aziz Nesin (Ruthven 216). In Britain, Muslim community leaders voiced their outrage at the book, originating with the Islamic Foundation in Leicester, a group that maintains close links with Jamaat-e-Islami, an Islamist political party in Pakistan (Pargeter 25). On 14 January 1989, the novel was publicly burned in Bradford by a small group of Muslims (Parekh, *Rethinking* 299). This act attracted significant media attention and resulted in comparisons with the 'notorious Nazi book-burnings of the '30s' (Asad, 'Ethnography' 258). Because of the powerful fascist symbolism of book-burning, this incident was perceived as an Islamist act *against* free speech and democracy, rather than an act of free speech from a minority community *within* a democratic society.

The affair raises important questions about the concept of communities, particularly regarding whether viewing oneself as part of a supposed Muslim community in Britain is beneficial when combating minority issues. Emile Durkheim's famous book on the sociology of religion, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, examines the relationship between religion itself, and its social and communal aspects. He argues that a religious group is unified by shared beliefs, through the way in which they imagine the sacred world and its

relationship with the profane, and through religious practices (41). For Durkheim, a religion is a 'unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things [...] beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community' (44). Community formation through practices and rituals is particularly prevalent in Judaism and Islam, religions that could be described as orthopraxic, or action-focused. Protestantism, in contrast, is focused on correct beliefs and could therefore be described as orthodoxic. I would argue, as have many others, that the affair encouraged a greater sense of communal religious identity and self-consciousness amongst Muslims and therefore enabled them to be more politically active in British society (Allen and Isakjee 1852; Morey and Yaqin 46; Parekh, *Rethinking* 8; Ruthven 219). At the same time, these protests in Britain 'cast a long shadow over perceptions of Muslims and Islam in the decade that followed' (R. Ahmed 6), resulting in 'heightened Islamophobic feeling' (R. Ahmed 7). The Muslims who protested the publication did not only protest because they believed the book was blasphemous, but because it enabled them to unite as a community and to speak out against what was seen as a grievous insult to both their faith and their presence in British society. Whilst it is important to remember that not *all* British Muslims felt affronted by the novel's publication, the quick formation of protest movements within Muslim communities revealed a frustrated and disenchanted religious group.

However, the most famous retaliation to the novel was that of Shiah Iran's supreme imam, who was then Ayatollah Khomeini. Although the novel met with little interest in many Arab states (Malik, *Fatwa* 3–4), on 14 February 1989 Khomeini pronounced a *fatwa*, or a statement pronounced by a religious figure, on Radio Tehran declaring that Rushdie should be hunted down and murdered for writing *The Satanic Verses*:

> *I would like to inform all the intrepid Muslims in the world that the author of the book entitled The Satanic Verses, which has been compiled, printed and published in opposition to Islam, the prophet and the Qur'an, as well as those publishers who were aware of its contents, have been declared madhur al dam [those whose blood must be shed]. I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, whenever they find them, so that no one will dare to insult what Muslims hold sacred. Whoever is killed in this path will be regarded as a martyr*. (qtd. in Ruthven 216, italics in original)

Ayatollah Khomeini was the first contemporary Muslim theologian to attempt to establish an Islamic government, and his leadership has been interpreted with both admiration and disapproval. For some, he was 'the dark side of Islam' whilst for others, he was the man who resisted Western hegemony and depravity and restored the dominance of Islam (Moin 64). The general disdain for puritanical approaches to Islam throughout *The Satanic Verses* puts

Rushdie in direct opposition to the Ayatollah's beliefs. Indeed, Rushdie's own character of the dogmatic, inflexible Imam is the Ayatollah Khomeini's fictional counterpart (Werbner S64). This life-changing *fatwa* meant that Rushdie had to go into hiding for nine years, eventually moving to New York once it had been lifted.

Since its publication in 1988, *The Satanic Verses* has been scrutinised by writers and critics for how it approaches Islam and Islamic history. As Anshuman Mondal states in his monograph *Islam and Controversy*, the novel has primarily been criticised on two grounds, both relating to concepts of history (99–100). Firstly, it has been argued that Rushdie's engagement with the past is highly inaccurate and therefore does a disservice to Islamic history. In particular, the way in which Rushdie attempts to cast doubt on the original revelations received by Muhammad was the basis for accusations of blasphemy. Mahound's scribe, known as Salman the Persian, mirrors Rushdie's own doubting perspective. He began, writes Rushdie, to 'surreptitiously […] change things' in his transcription:

> If Mahound recited a verse in which God was described as *all-hearing, all-knowing*, I would write, *all-knowing, all-wise* […] if my poor words would not be distinguished from the Revelation by God's own Messenger, then what did that mean? What did that say about the quality of the divine poetry? (378, italics in original)

Because the Qur'an is considered by Muslims to be the 'literal, unmediated, exhaustive and final revelation of the divine will' (Parekh, *European* 13), Rushdie's reimagining of Islamic history through the suggestion of man's fallibility could be read in two ways. On the one hand, it could be read as a call for healthy scepticism towards historical sources, and on the other, as an attack on the core of Muslim identity.

Bhikhu Parekh, although not Muslim himself, argues that '[h]ad the book not stayed so recognizably close to history, its "gross inaccuracies" would not have mattered' (*Rethinking* 299). Parekh does later acknowledge that the book is a work of fiction rather than a historical account of the birth of Islam, and is therefore 'entitled to be judged by the criteria relevant to that genre including a considerable freedom of imaginative exploration' (*Rethinking* 320). Less forgivingly, Shabbir Akhtar wrote in 1989 that the novel is undoubtedly a historical rewriting of early Islam because of the sheer number of similarities with Muhammad and his life (5). The characters, he argues, are 'real historical personalities', and their rewriting should shock anyone, not just Muslims (5). Rushdie's decision to name the text's seventh-century prostitutes after Muhammad's twelve wives is particularly daring, and could be read as simply another way for Rushdie to mock the holy through sexual fantasy and the symbolic violation of his wives (Parekh, *Rethinking* 298). Although Parekh and Akhtar argue that Rushdie's use of real historical events is what makes the novel so

contentious, it is less the act of representation itself that is problematic, but how he represents early Islam. Even the inaccuracies that Parekh accuses him of may have simply been considered laziness or poor writing. It is the element of mockery and satire that has led to the novel being criticised as malicious rather than simply uninformed or erroneous.

Secondly, Mondal explains, Rushdie has been criticised because of his own personal history and heritage within Islam. Because of his position as 'an insider' (Akhtar 6), Rushdie has been accused of abusing his role as an author in order to perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes and reinforce traditional anti-Muslim sentiment in the West (Mondal 99–100). Moreover, because of Rushdie's status as an international author writing in English, he would have been aware that his novel would have a significant impact upon international readership. Ali A. Mazrui sums up the problem with Rushdie's insistence that his representation of Islam and Muslims is purely imaginative: '[i]f such fortunate writers can derive such benefits from the global village, should they not also recognize those special global responsibilities?' (114). However, the problem with Mazrui's assertion is, first, that many authors and scholars of literature would argue that global literary success and subsequent economic privilege should not dictate an author's creative output. Secondly, it seems rather unfair to place a burden on Rushdie to consider his 'responsibilities' when penning a novel simply because of his Indian heritage.

T. B. Irving is particularly scathing of Rushdie, claiming that '[t]his novel should not be censored but ignored' (175). According to him, this is partly because of the vulgarity and offensiveness of the Mahound character, and partly because of alleged historical inaccuracies that pervade the novel. These historical inaccuracies, Irving argues, stem from the fact that Rushdie is now more familiar with British secular society than he is with his own Islamic heritage. He claims that 'Rushdie is not in touch with contemporary Islamic terminology and thought, but rather with antiquated Orientalist jargon that he half-learned at Cambridge and in the television and radio studios of London' (182). This judgement highlights the 'burden of representation' that was placed upon Rushdie as an author who is of Indian Muslim heritage and a member of the fashionable London literati. Kobena Mercer defines this 'burden of representation' as when 'the artistic discourse of hitherto marginalized subjects is circumscribed by the assumption that such artists speak as "representatives" of the communities from which they come' (214). Therefore, *The Satanic Verses* was read by some critics as being particularly derisive as it came from a writer who existed within the religion that he was satirising. In this sense, the concept and importance of 'community' resurfaces. While Rushdie's loyalties appear to lie in the literary community, others approached him as being a dissenting and disrespectful member of the Muslim community. However, few

seemed to consider Rushdie, who felt out of place in British high society whilst also being critical of Islamic traditions, as someone who resisted definitions of community loyalty.

In terms of problems with religious representation, it was Rushdie's fictional depiction of both Mahound and his wives that caused the most consternation. Amir Hussain explains that whilst Muslims do not encourage representations of Muhammad within human or animal forms, this does not mean they are entirely opposed to any visual and descriptive depictions (274). Today, postcards with images of the Prophet can be bought in Iran, multiple paintings of 'Muhammad's Night Journey to Jerusalem and his ascension to heaven' can be found in both Sunni and Shiah traditions, and 'elaborate calligraphy' describing the Prophet is often found in Muslim homes (A. Hussain 290). Nevertheless, many followers of Islam believe that depictions of holy figures, especially the Prophet Muhammad, should be wrought in a respectful way: '[n]o pictorial representations are allowed; mention of his name warrants, among the pious, the invocation of divine blessing on him, his family and companions' (Akhtar 2).

Furthermore, Parekh argues that creating literary representations of a community is difficult in itself because of the need for accurate and fair representation. He uses the hypothetical example of a novel about the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz, and the fury that would prevail if the victims were presented in a way that suggested that they were 'deserving [of] the mindless brutality inflicted upon them' (*Rethinking* 318). Doing this, he argues, would take 'unacceptable liberties with Jewish collective memories' (318). Whilst Parekh acknowledges that *The Satanic Verses* was not offensive to quite that degree, he does maintain that people have a right to express outrage, and that 'no literary work can be exempt from moral and social responsibility and norms of decency' (*Rethinking* 318). Parekh is not suggesting that the novel should be banned in a country that purports freedom of speech as integral to its foundation. Rather, he argues that authors cannot simply *expect* works that may be deemed offensive to be readily accepted by the community in which it offends.

Although the British media portrayed Muslim anger towards Rushdie's representation of the Prophet Muhammad as irrational and antediluvian, critics have noted a double standard. Bhikhu Parekh explains that Christians have also struggled with visual representations of Jesus. Films such as *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1935), *Quo Vadis* (1951), and *Ben-Hur* (1959), which all engage with life amidst the rise of Christianity, 'only feature a hand or a foot [belonging to Jesus]' (*Rethinking* 302). Furthermore, Amir Hussain notes that there was an outcry in Christian communities at the release of Monty Python's *Life of Brian* and Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (291). Ultimately, the Muslim outcry in Britain against *The Satanic Verses* was framed as evidence that immigrants, who had brought

Islamic traditions with them from regions such as South Asia, were refusing to embrace supposedly Western traditions of freedom of speech.

Although many of the Muslims who protested against the publication of the book believed that it was an act of Western anti-Muslim sentiment, Rushdie himself, or at least his narrator, claims that the novel is writing back against Western hegemony by appropriating language on behalf of the oppressed. He names the Arabian prophet Mahound, a name for Muhammad that was used in medieval Europe to associate him with 'the devil on Earth' (Mondal 113). This move was deemed particularly offensive because it rekindled a history of negative cultural associations of Islam from Europe (Morton, *Rushdie* 62–3). However, the novel's omniscient narrator who self-reflexively comments on the narrative explains that to 'turn insults into strengths, whigs, tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the name they were given in scorn; likewise, our mountain-climbing, prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the Devil's synonym: Mahound' (94–5). Through this swift connection between Islamic history, eighteenth-century British politics, and present-day race relations, Rushdie suggests that throughout history those who are discriminated against or persecuted can reclaim agency by taking back power through language.

However, there are several problems with the narrator's explanation. Firstly, associating racism against black people with members of political parties (whigs and tories) undermines the abhorrent extent of Western racial prejudice. Secondly, as Mondal argues, '[t]he standard term of racist abuse in the United States was not "black" but "nigger"' (117), betraying a misunderstanding of the history of race relations in the US. Thirdly, it is strange that an author who himself has claimed that he is '*not a Muslim'* and is instead 'a secular, pluralist, eclectic man' ('Good Faith' 405, italics in original) would try to speak for all Muslims by claiming that using the word Mahound is reappropriative. As Mondal asks: 'Why? What would [Muslims] profit by it?' (117). The concept of renaming and therefore recreating an identity is something that Rushdie approaches from his personal history. Whilst Rushdie admits that he had been away from India for so long that he 'almost qualified for the title of *farangi* [foreigner]', he still felt that he 'had a city [Bombay] and a history to reclaim' ('Indian Writer' 76). This type of reclamation is what he has attempted to do through his novels, particularly *Shame, Midnight's Children,* and *The Satanic Verses*.

In his autobiography, *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie tells of his grandfather's 'mouthful' of a name: Khwaja Muhammad Din Khaliqi Dehlavi. Rushdie's father Anis decided to rename himself Rushdie due to his appreciation for Ibn Rushd, the twelfth-century Spanish-Arab philosopher (23). Inheriting the name, Salman Rushdie interprets it as an important part of his secular identity, standing for 'intellect, argument, analysis and progress, for the freedom of

philosophy and learning from the shackles of theology' (23). Rushdie creates a dichotomy between the intellectual and secular pursuits, which he associates with freedom and the possibility of creating new knowledge, and the theological, which he sees as being obsolete, uncompromising, and intellectually unproductive. Not often used as a modern-day insult or a reclaimed name for Muhammad, the name Mahound therefore appears more Orientalist than it does reappropriative.

Beyond discussions of Rushdie's struggle with a burden of representation, the novel has also instigated general discussions about the ethical responsibility of the author. Mondal's chapter on Rushdie focuses on a key question: was Rushdie writing in good faith, or was he abusing history? While Stephen Morton argues that Rushdie's use of historical questioning allows him to interrogate the Ayatollah Khomeini's theological basis for Islamic revivalism (*Rushdie* 66), Mondal claims that Rushdie in fact perpetuates this puritanical understanding of Islam as 'inherently Islamist' (108). For example, in the chapter 'Return to Jahilia', Gibreel 'found himself spouting rules, rules, rules', from 'how much to eat, how deeply they [Muslims] should sleep', to which sexual positions were acceptable and which types of meat could be eaten. 'It was', the narrator tells us, 'as if no aspect of human existence was to be left unregulated, free' (376). Whilst Rushdie's parodying of the Ayatollah Khomeini implies a desire to move away from an Islamist conception of the faith, Mondal criticises the novel's perpetuation of the idea that Islam is based on a set of extreme and ultimately arbitrary rules (110). In writing the scene quoted above, Rushdie maintains the stereotype of Islam as inherently totalitarian for the consumption of a Western reader. Rushdie himself, however, argued that *The Satanic Verses* is 'a work of radical dissent and questioning and reimagining' ('Good Faith' 395).

What Rushdie did not realise is that his use of historical fact as a 'starting-place' ('Good Faith' 409) for creative literary production would create further discussion about the difficult relationship between Islam and 'the West'. Whether in good faith or not, these discussions often led to a reinforcement of the dichotomies that Rushdie was attempting to diffuse. Nevertheless, Rushdie continued to defend the fictionality of the text, writing: '[Mahound] is surrounded by fictional followers […] this entire sequence happens in a dream, the fictional dream of a fictional character […] How much further from history could one get?' ('India' n. pag.). However, Rushdie *did* become extremely close to history. He achieved this not only by questioning ancient historical sources within the text, but by writing a book that itself created history and signaled a crucial moment in the political awakening of British Muslims.

The reaction to the burning of *The Satanic Verses* in Bradford was met both with furious calls for the defence of liberal traditions of freedom of speech and with calls for Muslim voices to be properly acknowledged in a supposedly multi-religious British society.[1] Many critics, such as Tariq Modood, Talal Asad, Anshuman Mondal, and Shabbir Akhtar, whilst not supportive of Khomeini's call for violence, have shown frustration at the reaction of traditionally white liberal elites. For example, Tariq Modood suggests that the 'liberal intellectuals' saw instances of book burning in cities with a high Muslim population such as Bradford as 'a call to arms on behalf of the Enlightenment' (*Still Not Easy* 13). Talal Asad claims that the liberal reaction to the political mobilisation of British Muslims was 'out of all proportion to what has actually happened' ('Multiculturalism' 462). Unimpressed with what Rushdie described as his attempt to encourage a 'dissent from orthodoxy' in Islam ('Bonfire' 29), Shabbir Akhtar dryly states that '[o]ne looks in vain in [Rushdie's] unprincipled prose for the reverent yet iconoclastic doubt which might set the agenda for the Islamic Enlightenment' (6).

One of the most notable responses in defence of Rushdie was Fay Weldon's *Sacred Cows*, originally published as a pamphlet by Chatto & Windus in 1989. Although discussing other topics of the day, including feminism, the pamphlet heavily discusses and defends *The Satanic Verses.* Firstly, Weldon criticises the Qur'an whilst showing reverence for the Bible: '[t]he Bible, in its entirety, is at least food for thought. The Koran is food for no-thought. It is not a poem on which a society can be safely or sensibly based' (6). The hyphen between 'no' and 'thought' emphasises what Weldon regards as a lack of space for human interpretation of the Qur'an through creative and critical discussion. Her description of the Qur'an as a 'poem' rather than a religious text betrays a secular approach toward Islamic traditions, one that she shares with Rushdie. Morton notes that whilst Rushdie's choice of a 'hybrid literary form' implies a desire to amalgamate a range of cultures, histories, and traditions, he inadvertently creates a hierarchy. Morton argues that Rushdie's choice of the novel as a form for opposition shows how he is approaching Islamic scripture as an 'aesthetic object' rather than an account of revelation, which is how it would be approached by Muslims (68). Both Rushdie and Weldon suggest that a reader considers Islamic history as ambiguous and even contentious

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[1] Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland's *The Rushdie File* (1989) showcases the wide variety of national and international responses both to the publication of the novel and to the pronouncement of the *fatwa*. They quote, for example, Anthony Burgess' letter to the *Independent* on 15 February 1989 in which he states that the *fatwa* is 'a declaration of war on citizens of a free country and as such it is a political act. It has to be countered by an equally forthright, if less murderous, act of defiance' (102). A more balanced article from the same publication but written by an anonymous author, however, suggests that if Britain wants to aim for good race relations, Muslim beliefs must be treated with respect and 'the offence of blasphemy should either be extended to embrace other major religions or abandoned' (123).

through reimagining the events via a literary form. These authors therefore prioritise a secular understanding of Islam that will naturally be at odds with a religious understanding. In contrast, Weldon infers that the Bible has the potential to be used to build a successful society. This is because, she asserts multiple times, the Christian tradition is more open to questioning than Islam.

Directly comparing the Bible with the Qur'an, however, is overly simplistic. Whilst both are ancient texts, the ways in which they regard their prophets is different. As Shabbir Akhtar explains, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad are all 'seminal figures'. Christians, however, have been more tolerating of attacks against Jesus, which Akhtar argues has become commonplace in secular Western societies. Muslims, in contrast, are not only supposed to revere Muhammad, but must emulate him in their everyday lives (Akhtar 2). So while Weldon uses a direct comparison of the Bible and the Qur'an in an attempt to undermine the modern-day applicability of the latter, she simply does it in response to certain fundamentalist interpretations of the Qur'an such as those professed by Ayatollah Khomeini rather than an everyday understanding. Furthermore, Weldon argues that British Muslims are 'probably on the verge of losing their faith: they'd have to be, living in this advanced and intelligent society of ours: that's why there's this sudden outburst. Last throes of a daft religion' (9), thus perpetuating a binary understanding of a developed West and an obsolete East. Whilst it is difficult to tell when Weldon is speaking in earnest and when she is being sarcastic, her tendency to refer to Islam in a tone of wry ennui and to dismiss it as an unreasonable religion suggests that she has no real understanding of the many reasons why some Muslims may have found the novel so offensive.

Secondly, Weldon criticises the British government's policies of multiculturalism, arguing that these policies are detrimental to social cohesion and result in ghettoisation. She instead calls for a society based on the North American model of a 'uniculturalist policy' in which cultural and religious difference is subordinate to national loyalty: 'let the child do what it wants at home; here in the school the one flag is saluted, the one God worshipped, the one nation acknowledged' (32). British multiculturalism, in contrast, calls for 'the recognition of group difference within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity' (Modood, *Multiculturalism* 2). So whilst both policies call for a degree of national loyalty, multicultural policy does not *erase* identities and difference for the sake of unification, but instead tries to make them *part* of how we define our shared national identity.[2] The shared identity that Fay Weldon is referring

[2] This point in itself has been contested. For example, Homi K. Bhabha argues that the creation of diversity, which is key to a multicultural society, in fact erases cultural 'difference'. The 'difference'

to is, if applied to the British context, a secular, liberal, primarily white identity that prioritises freedom of speech over an awareness of cultural sensitivity. The protests over *The Satanic Verses*, therefore, were seen as a deviation from the dominant secular discourse and a sign that policies of multiculturalism were taking precedence over liberal values of freedom of speech and artistic representation.

By speaking out about their anger, I would argue that the Muslims involved in the protests *were* in fact working towards social cohesion by insisting on being recognised and acknowledged as British citizens. They could therefore begin to make their political presence stronger, have a say in British social life, and be better able to translate 'community responses' (Allen and Isakjee 1862) in the face of the production of other offensive material such as the 2012 film *Innocence of Muslims*. In response to the accusation that the Muslims who were protesting were going too far by questioning what materials should be considered blasphemous, Akhtar argued that:

> What matters here is not simply that Rushdie has falsified established historical records or even that he has written a satire about things sacred. There are wider issues too which hinge on the fact that we live in a society that is often described as multi-racial […] It is unwise for us, in such a context, casually to allow our idolatry of art to obscure issues of great social and political concern. (6–7)

Whilst in hiding, Rushdie received most of his support from the literary community (S. Sharma 145) and very little from the British Asian community that he claimed to represent. Because of this, and his subsequent move to the United States, Shailja Sharma argues that 'historical allegiances gave way to loyalties of class and profession' (145). Rushdie's move towards the literary community was solidified in his role as president of PEN's American Centre from 2004 to 2006. Whilst he was reluctant to associate himself with Islam, Rushdie also became part of the loosely-defined group called the new atheists. This movement started with anti-religious texts written by authors with a scientific background such as Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchins (Bradley 20), but subsequently trickled into the literary.

William W. Emilsen explains that although new atheism is not a single movement, there are attitudes towards religion that thinkers within the movement, such as those listed above, generally agree on. Firstly, they believe that 'belief in God is irrational in an age of science' and secondly, that religion in general is 'dangerous, poisonous and evil' (523). Whilst atheism is in no way a new concept, Emilsen argues that the 'new' in new atheism

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of other cultures, whilst allowed to exist, must fit comfortably within the host society's 'own grid,' or conception of what is 'normal' (Rutherford 208).

comes from the particular focus on Islam as a religion that is subject to the most vitriolic criticism (524). By extending judgement from Islamism to Islam in general, Emilsen argues that '[t]he new atheists' hostility towards Islam verges on cultural and racial supremacy and ignores the fact that millions of Muslims throughout the world (including in the so-called West) live peaceful and compassionate lives' (528). Eventually, Rushdie would lose faith in his project of amalgamating the secular and the sacred in favour of fervently defending the secular tradition of the right to offend.[3] This stance led to those who were wounded by Rushdie's depictions of Muhammad and early Islam being seen as irrational, backward, and anti-West, ultimately perpetuating the dichotomy that he originally tried to dismantle.

The problem with groups, such as the new atheists, claiming that they can offer a significantly more enlightened perspective on religion than Muslims is that they too espouse a kind of fundamentalist discourse. Those Muslims who called for the book to be banned were, as Homi K. Bhabha explains, not 'a million miles away' in another 'social and cultural world', but form an intrinsic part of British society (Rutherford 215). Because of this, the binary of the 'archaic, almost medieval' Muslim from another land and the enlightened, often atheist, Westerner disintegrates. The British Muslims that protested were framed as 'mad fundamentalists' (Weldon 8). The term fundamentalist originally denoting the American evangelical movement that entailed 'complete confidence' in the Bible and an adherence to the concepts of heaven and hell (Marsden 3). Islamic fundamentalism, according to those who disagreed with calls to ban *The Satanic Verses*, should not be allowed a place in British society. For example, the political activist Abbie Hoffman stated in support of Rushdie that the protests were 'a new form of terrorism […] terrorism against an idea, and it's intolerable in the modern civilised world' (Doyle n. pag.). This shows how the protests were framed as an organised and inherently anti-West movement. *The Satanic Verses* itself, Robert Spencer explains, is 'anti-fundamentalist by definition' due to its concern with complex histories and hybrid identities (10). Anshuman Mondal highlights how 'free speech absolutists' could also be described as fundamentalist in their beliefs because of their disdain for any kind of cultural relativism. These two types of fundamentalist are not necessarily the same, he explains, but there is 'a similarity in their structures of thought' (33). Out of this comes the potential for a lesson to be learnt about the dangers of adopting fundamentalist positions on issues of multiculturalism. These positions drown out the voices of British Muslims attempting to participate in creating a society that welcomes difference.

[3] For example, Rushdie asserted that 'we should not need to talk about freedom of speech in the west. It should be like the air we breathe' when he was invited to speak at the 2015 Frankfurt Book Fair, much to the anger of the Iranian ministry of culture (Flood, 'Challenge fears' n. pag.).

‘Ours always was a peaceful land […] [o]ur industrious island race’: British Colonialism and the ‘England-returned’

Salman Rushdie presented his paper entitled ‘The Indian Writer in England’ at a seminar held during the Festival of India in London in 1982. He opened his paper by describing a black and white photograph of his childhood home in Bombay (now Mumbai), explaining how it made him realise that ‘it’s my present that is foreign, and […] the past is home’ (75). When he returned to the house to see it ‘in CinemaScope and glorious Technicolour’ once again, it was the moment at which *Midnight’s Children* was conceived, ‘when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past to myself’ (76). When writing *Midnight’s Children,* a novel that imaginatively explores India’s history from the moment of independence and Partition in 1947 to the 1975 Indian Emergency, Rushdie wanted to ‘unlock the gates of lost time so that the past reappeared as it actually had been, unaffected by the distortions of memory’ (Rushdie, ‘Indian Writer’ 76). Instead, he recognised that the novel was not only *about* memory, of India’s past, but written *by* his own memory of life in India.

Therefore, whilst the novel may not be factual, it is true in the relativist sense of imagination as stemming from one’s personal histories and memories. Those histories and memories, of course, produce particular perspectives on world events. *The Satanic Verses*, while often seen as Rushdie’s ‘British’ novel, also has substantial elements of both imaginative and historical exploration into the relationship between Britain and India, specifically through the character of Saladin. On the one hand, Saladin grapples with negative memories of his time in India and confrontations with his difficult and authoritarian father Changez Chamchawala. More significantly, he also has to reevaluate cultural memories of Britain that he has inherited as a legacy of the colonial presence of Britain in India. In this chapter section, I explore how Rushdie constructs a highly anti-colonial novel through the characterisation of Saladin, and the latter’s eventual postcolonial awakening and return to India.

Central to the novel is the theme of ‘newness’, asserted in various refrains but following the general principle of ‘to be born again […] first you have to die’ (1). This recurring phrase signals the need to discard personal histories for the sake of creating new beginnings and therefore assuming a renewed identity. Rushdie claims that newness still carries with it the baggage of history. This is shown throughout *The Satanic Verses* as a text that ‘rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world’* (‘Good Faith’ 394, italics in original). Whilst metaphorically ‘dying’ for the sake of newness implicitly intimates that one

abandons an original identity and adopts a new one, I would argue that *The Satanic Verses* demonstrates the complexity within this phrase.

Rushdie's idea of newness does not correspond with the concept of complete originality, but rather suggests an engagement with history, both personal and cultural. Saladin Chamcha's attempt to become an Englishman, for example, is complicated by memories of his childhood in India and his reluctance to accept the reality of Britain's colonial past and racist present. Whilst the novel's two protagonists Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha are falling towards Britain after the explosion of the jumbo jet the 'Bostan' the narrative voice asks: '[h]ow does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?' (8). Using the idea of 'birth' to indicate newness implies that just as any child is born with a history – the culture or religion of its parents, for example – newness must emerge as part of that history. In writing the novel, Rushdie claimed that he was 'not attempting to falsify history, but to allow a fiction to take off from history' ('Good Faith' 408). This suggests that new ideas, or newness in general, can be created out of history. Furthermore, his self-identification as 'a secular man's reckoning with the religious spirit' ('Good Faith' 396) establishes Rushdie's position as an author engaging with a personal history stemming from his childhood in India.

In a symbolic act of newness or rebirth, Salahuddin Chamchawala decides to change his name to Saladin Chamcha, a simplified version of the long name that is clearly 'foreign' to the British ear. Amusingly, Chamcha means both 'spoon' and 'sycophant' in Urdu. Through this double meaning, Rushdie gently mocks his protagonist. The narrator describes his name-change as a 'mutation' that happened in Bombay 'long before he got close enough to hear the lions of Trafalgar roar' (37). Here the lions of Trafalgar metonymically represent the broader pull of the old colonial metropolis. His use of the word 'mutation' rather than, for example, re-birth, to coincide with the ongoing trope of newness, foreshadows his later sense of disconnect from British society and his metamorphosis into a satyr, a human–goat hybrid. Indeed, Saladin spent many years 'dedicat[ing] himself with a will bordering on obsession to the conquest of Englishness' (265). While the use of the word 'conquest' infers a reversal of the colonial violence that Britain inflicted on India, Saladin's specific desire for 'Englishness' signals that he wants to abandon 'Indianness' rather than to diversify the British landscape. As Wendy Webster explains, however, 'racial thinking in Britain was shaped by the geographical separation between empire and metropolis' (144). This meant that black and Asian people were considered subjects of the Empire rather than British. After 1945, when post-war migration was growing, black and Asian migrants to Britain were seen as 'threatening to collapse boundaries between empire and metropolis' (Webster 144). Even into

the 1980s, Saladin's determined mimicry of Englishness proves fruitless because of Britain's distrustful and prejudicial approach towards its non-white, Commonwealth subjects.

Saladin's obsession with Britain, but specifically the colonial centre, enables Rushdie to criticise the way in which contemporary Britain engages, or does not engage, with its colonial history. Saladin, when on the jet that has been hijacked by Sikh terrorists, sees his physical movement from India to England as representing a deeper transformation towards an English identity. While watching a woman pace the aisles of the jet, not yet knowing that she is one of the hijackers, the narrator explains Saladin's thoughts:

> Under the influence of the remembered dream he conceived the notion that the baby was in fact a bundle of dynamite sticks, or some sort of ticking device, and he was on the verge of crying out when he came to his senses and admonished himself severely. This was precisely the type of superstitious flummery he was leaving behind. He was a neat man in a buttoned suit heading for London and an ordered, contented life. He was a member of the real world. (75)

By establishing a dichotomy of India as disordered and superstitious and Britain as ordered and rational, Saladin adopts obsolete and Orientalist stereotypes that are reminiscent of colonial beliefs of Western superiority.

My concern, however, is how Rushdie is using this Orientalist and anti-Indian discourse. Whilst Rushdie's Mahound chapters have been criticised heavily on these grounds, his 1980s chapters provide an anti-colonial perspective that is more in line with Rushdie's anti-racist work. In his 1982 essay 'The New Empire Within Britain', Rushdie argues that 'Britain is undergoing a critical phase of its post-colonial period […] [a]nd racism is only the most clearly visible part of the crisis, the tip of the kind of iceberg that sinks ships' (129). Acutely aware of the need for toleration in a broadly multi-racial society, Rushdie creates characters who engage critically with Britain's long history of racial intolerance. One way in which he does this is by creating Saladin, a character that could be described, borrowing from Paul Gilroy, as 'the half-different and the partially familiar' (*After Empire* 137). By escalating his 'half-difference' from his brown skin and occasionally imperfect English to the extreme of half human and half animal, Rushdie highlights the absurdity of British fear of the 'other'.

When Saladin is hospitalised because of this metamorphosis, he describes his surroundings as follows:

> His nose informed him that the sanatorium […] was also beginning to stink to the heavens; jungle and farmyard odours mingled with a rich aroma similar to that of exotic spices sizzling in clarified butter – coriander, turmeric, cinnamon, cardamoms, cloves. (171)

From an initial read of this description, it may appear that Rushdie is perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes of a strange and exotic East. Conversely, he consigns his neocolonial Indian protagonist to the receiving end of these stereotypes. He does this in order to criticise his stubborn Anglophile tendencies. The problem of olfactory racism is discussed in Claire Chambers' interview with British-Punjabi poet Daljit Nagra, the latter explaining the difficulty of growing up Indian in a primarily white area and being subjected to mockery about 'the smell of curry' in the air, which was a 'racist taunt in the [19]70s' (93). In parallel with his metamorphosis into a goat-like creature, Rushdie subjects Saladin to these exaggerated smells in order not just to witness, but to empathise with the problem of racist homogenisation within South Asian communities in Britain.

Nonetheless, Saladin's awakening to the reality of life in Britain functions to encourage empathy in the reader and to provoke an understanding of Britain's long history of imperialism and notions of racial superiority. When Saladin and Gibreel first tumble onto British land – Hastings, to be specific – they find refuge at the house of an elderly lady named Rosa Diamond. Eventually the police arrive and assume them to be refugees. While Gibreel is respectfully ignored due to his English garments, a metamorphosed Saladin is dragged out of the house to a police van, beaten, mocked, and forced to eat his own excrement. The police use language that separates Saladin from a collective British identity: "[i]n this country […] we clean up our messes" (165). Their use of 'we' in particular signals a sense of belonging for the police, but not for Saladin. Derek Gregory describes this kind of 'us verses them' dichotomy that is created by previously colonial powers as an example of 'split geographies'. Instances that reinforce this dichotomy, such as the patriotic American and the vicious terrorist of the War on Terror, Gregory describes as functioning as 'the violent return of the colonial past' (11). Saladin is victim to police brutality in a multicultural setting that continues to relish in colonial discourse.

This idea of cleanliness is ironic, as British history is far from 'clean'. Rather, it contains within it a 'messy' history of colonisation, slavery, and brutality. Britain's lack of acknowledgement of its own history is a recurring trope throughout the novel. Sisodia, a film producer, has a stutter that Rushdie uses to comic effect in the face of British obliviousness: "[t]he trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they dodo don't know what it means" (353). The 'hiss hiss history' is reminiscent of a snake, connecting British imperial history with Biblical ideas of evil. Rushdie himself makes this symbolic connection, describing those who have emigrated as 'postlapsarian men and women' having partly 'fallen' from their Indian heritage into Western life ('Indian Writer'

79). The ‘dodo don’t’ reminds the reader of the well-known extinct bird the dodo, a play on words about the death of the British Empire.

When the local nightclub Club Hot Wax is raided by police in a racially-motivated search for the notorious serial killer the ‘Granny Ripper’, Inspector Stephen Kinch is interviewed on television. He says:

> These kids don’t know how lucky they are […] They should consult their kith and kin. Africa, Asia, the Caribbean: now those are places with real problems. Those are places where people might have grievances worth respecting. Things aren’t so bad here, not by a long chalk; no slaughters here, no torture, no military coups. People should value what they’ve got before they lose it. Ours always was a peaceful land […] Our industrious island race. (470)

The inspector displays ignorance of British history, not appreciating that many regions within the places that he mentions – Africa, Asia, the Caribbean – were colonised by Britain, and so the ‘grievances’ that he refers to are partially the fallout of British colonialism. Winston Churchill in fact adopted the phrase ‘island race’ in his 1964 book *The Island Race*. The inspector, in echoing the words of the imperialist prime minister, reiterates parochial attitudes towards British supremacy in a postcolonial setting. The use of the word ‘race’ itself suggests a Britishness that is both white and native. By describing Britain as a ‘peaceful land’ and its people as an ‘industrious island race’, the inspector therefore reiterates colonial attitudes and appeals to nationalist sentiment. In contrast with the postcolonial, hetereogenous history that Rushdie offers, the inspector calls on ‘an exclusively “domestic” narrative as a representation of Britain’s past’ (Burton 194).

As I have discussed above, Rushdie employs a mocking narrative to expose the inadequate ways in which Britain deals, or refuses to deal, with its colonial history. Those in authority, such as the police officers and immigration officers, create an ‘us versus them’ narrative through, for example, violently beating Saladin, whom they perceive to be a refugee, and targeting London’s black community in the wake of the ‘Granny Ripper’ murders. By doing this, they create a dichotomy between whiteness and belonging, and non-white skin and exclusion. However, Rushdie not only explores this problematic history but also asks how those who straddle the binary – Saladin, for example, with his Indian heritage and his elite British education – can function in this postcolonial environment. In discussing cultural mixing in multicultural societies, Homi K. Bhabha argues that ‘[t]he process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation’ (Rutherford 211). *The Satanic Verses* calls

for this newness not through ignoring colonial history, but through acknowledging and challenging it.

However, rather than recognising a hybrid identity, Saladin strives for assimilation into British society whilst simultaneously trying to abandon his Indian heritage, a part of his history that he sees as vulgar and embarrassing. When visiting his father Changez in their home city Bombay, he watches how the latter 'stood in the doorway looking at his son, his nose and lips curled, by the withering sorcery of the years, into a feeble simulacrum of his former ogre-face' (67). Ageing in his antiquated home, Changez is no longer the monster-figure of his younger years, but has become a powerless imitation of a man who once terrified Saladin. However, when Saladin discovers that his father is sleeping with the former's childhood *ayah* Kasturba, he berates him for going against what he sees as British values of decorum and decency:

> 'In my mother's house,' Chamcha cried melodramatically, losing his battle with himself. 'The state thinks your business is corrupt, and here is the corruption of your soul. Look what you've done to them. Vallabh [the ayah's husband] and Kasturba. With your money. How much did it take? To poison their lives. You're a sick man.' He stood before his father, blazing with righteous rage.
>
> Vallabh the bearer, unexpectedly, intervened. 'Baba, with respect, excuse me but what do you know? You have left and gone and now you come to judge us.' (68)

Saladin's position as the 'England-returned' (45; 47) frames the tense exchange. The England-returned were 'young men and women from India who studied at institutions of higher education across the British Isles and then returned to India' (S. Mukherjee 1). Rushdie's use of this trope, as well as its use in Indian fiction written in English more generally, has been criticised as failing to reflect the realities of life in India due to being too focused on the intellectual figure who returns to India (Mee 713). Nevertheless, Rushdie's use of the 'England-returned' figure in this context is illuminating as it shows the extent to which colonial concepts have infiltrated Saladin's way of thinking. Saladin returns to India expecting to face the humiliation of his father's actions and to reaffirm his dislike for Indian society, but finds that he is the one perceived as excessively traditional. In refusing to accept that his father is having a sexual relationship with his *ayah*, Saladin not only adheres to obsolete codes of sexual conduct, but also to the colonial idea that masters should be separate from their domestic servants or those who are from a lower social class. It is, therefore, Saladin who refuses to relinquish historical traditions rather than his Indian family whom he so belittles.

Another significant moment in this revealing scene is when Changez shows Saladin and Zeeny the 'Chamchawala art collection', which included 'a large group of the legendary *Hamza-nama* cloths' (70). The *Hamza-nama* (also spelt *Hamzanama)* is a series of paintings depicting the 'heroic tale of the adventures of Hamza, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad' (Schimmel 266). The project began in 1558, and was worked on by dozens of artists from the Mughal Empire for fifteen years under the orders of 'two of the Safawid Shah Tahmasp's principal painters, 'Abdu's Samad and Mir Sayyid 'Ali' (Schimmel 266), Persian 'grand masters' active in the sixteenth century (Ratti 191). Rushdie's narrator explains:

> The Mughals had brought artists from every part of India to work on the paintings; individual identity was submerged to create a many-headed, many-brushed Overartist who, literally, *was* Indian painting […] In the *Hamza-nama* you could see the Persian miniature fusing with Kannada and Keralan painting styles, you could see Hindu and Muslim philosophy forming their characteristically late-Mughal synthesis. (70)

Unlike in Renaissance Florence, Manav Ratti explains, there was 'no great emphasis of celebrating individual genius' (191) in the style of the much-lauded grand masters of sixteenth-century Europe, such as Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci. Instead, the Mughal Empire under Safavid Shah Tahmasp of Iran produced hybrid, eclectic work that combined Iranian and South Indian influences. Indeed, Rushdie's inclusion of this artwork in *The Satanic Verses* is significant because it represents 'the creative powers of dreaming, genuine and robust philosophical inquiry, tolerance, inclusivity, and creativity itself' (Ratti 191).

In the midst of the Rushdie affair, Rushdie continued to affirm that the novel is a celebration of 'hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs' ('Good Faith' 394). By including a scene where Saladin studies a cultural, historic, and artistic object – the *Hamza-nama* – Rushdie exemplifies his distaste for cultural and religious hybridity and exposes the character's narrow-mindedness. Saladin studies the painting, noticing how:

> A giant was trapped in a pit and his human tormentors were spearing him in the forehead. A man sliced vertically from the top of his head to his groin still held his sword as he fell. Everywhere, bubbling spillages of blood. Saladin Chamcha took a grip on himself. 'The savagery,' he said loudly in his English voice. 'The sheer barbaric love of pain.' (71)

Through his Orientalist tone, it is clear that Saladin feels unable to appreciate the cultural heritage of the *Hamza-nama*. Instead, he sees it in binary terms as representing Eastern

savagery whilst starkly contrasting with his largely fictional perception of England as a place of civility.

Although, as I discussed in detail in the first part of this chapter, Rushdie has been accused of unethical and damaging representations of Islamic history, his portrayal of British history is undoubtedly less inflammatory. Rushdie argues that his critical perspective on British colonialism and racism is explored through literary form and language so that 'the experience of formerly colonized, still-disadvantaged peoples might find full expression' ('Good Faith' 394). However, as I move on to discuss, Rushdie's broad exploration into British racism is not without its problems.

'[W]e are other than what we would have been if we had not crossed the oceans': Migration and Racial Difference

When the police raid the Club Hot Wax during their search for the notorious 'Granny Ripper', they uncover a collection of wax figures. One by one, these are brought out into the street under the bright lights of reporters, who describe them as grotesque, bizarre, and possibly being used as part of witchcraft ceremonies. Being brought out alongside them is the young Anahita Sufyan, daughter of Muhammad and Hind Sufyan, who is similarly perceived as 'grotesque' for her supposed involvement with drugs and drink. Whilst the framing of the raid allows a reader to witness it through the focalisation of the critical eye of the media, an earlier description from within the nightclub explains how the figures are not part of an occultist practice but are instead symbolic of historically significant non-white figures:

> See, here is Mary Seacole, who did as much in the Crimea as another magic-lamping Lady, but, being dark, could scarce be seen for the flame of Florence's candle […] Abdul Karim, aka The Munshi, whom Queen Victoria sought to promote, but who was done down by colour-barring ministers […] the black clown of Septimius Severus […] George IV's barber dancing with the slave, Grace Jones. Ukawsaw Gron-niosaw, the African prince who was sold for six feet of cloth. (301)

By listing these historical figures from as far back as Septimus Severus, the Roman emperor from Libya, to Abdul Karim, the Indian Muslim attendant of Queen Victoria, to the Jamaican philanthropist of the Crimean War, Mary Seacole, Rushdie demonstrates the long and 'ever-repeating erasure' (Kuortti 157) of non-white identities from the grand narrative of British history. The figures listed here are transcontinental, and their symbolic presence in the nightclub that plays the 'hybrid music of hip-hop and hindi-pop' (Kuortti 155) shows that Rushdie perceives the historical erasure of non-white identities as a collective discontent

across black and Asian communities. In this section I explore how Rushdie constructs his anti-racist stance as well as his anti-colonial stance that I discussed in the previous section. Nevertheless, I not only assess how Rushdie narrates contemporary British racism, particularly through the experience of migration, but also whether his conflation of all non-white identities in the struggle against racism is a help or a hindrance to the movement.

One of the ways in which Rushdie explores the black British and British Asian experience is through the struggles and challenges of migration. The flight of the 'Bostan' itself is symbolic of mass movement of peoples across the world, and its explosion emblematic of the disjointed and challenging lives of migrants upon arrival in their new country. The explosion happens in British airspace, before the migrants are fully on British land, suggesting that identities are literally and metaphorically 'up in the air' and so open to change and hybridisation. Rushdie describes the aftermath of migration with a lengthy mixture of metaphysical and literal consequences:

> [M]ingling with the remnants of the plane, equally fragmented, equally absurd, there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home*. (4, italics in original)

Whilst some consequences could be more generally applied to migration – 'broken memories' and 'lost loves', for instance – some of Rushdie's examples can more clearly be associated with the move 'from Indianness to Englishness' (41). '[S]evered mother-tongues', for example, highlights the need for the migrant to abandon a local language in favour of a global one, in this case, in order to integrate into Western life and achieve economic and social success. Furthermore, 'extinguished futures' hints not only at the deaths of the passengers, but also refers to the struggle for opportunities for migrants in Britain.

Moreover, Rushdie mockingly describes the treatment received by immigrants once they arrive in Britain:

> [T]here had been more than a few migrants aboard, yes, quite a quantity of wives who had been grilled by reasonable, doing-their-job officials […] a sufficiency of children upon whose legitimacy the British Government had cast its ever-reasonable doubts. (3–4)

By creating compound adjectives strung together with what read like excuses – 'doing-their-job' and 'ever-reasonable' – Rushdie appropriates the official language used to justify prejudiced and distrustful actions towards immigrants, such as unsubstantiated racial profiling

at airport security points. Instead, he turns this discourse into a comical and mocking gibe at British bureaucracy.

As discussed in the previous section, newness, or recreating oneself, is shown to be a difficult feat for the migrant characters. Central to the novel is Saladin and Gibreel's metamorphosis from human to non-human. Whilst Gibreel transforms into the angel Gabriel and dreams that he is in seventh-century Arabia observing Mahound, Saladin remains in the twentieth century and becomes a satyr. Saladin lifts his hand to his head to discover 'there at his temples, growing longer by the moment, and sharp enough to draw blood, were two new, goaty, unarguable horns' (145). By noting that Saladin's new horns are sharp enough to draw blood, a sense of danger is invoked, and the use of the word 'goaty' makes him appear laughable. Moreover, the presence of the horns themselves shows him to be grotesque and horrific. As a fellow victim of metamorphosis later tells Saladin, '[t]hey describe us […] That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct' (174). Saladin's appearance as dangerous, laughable, and grotesque is a reflection of how British society perceives the non-white immigrant not only as unfamiliar and different, but as having the potential to be a dangerous threat to national unity.

The omniscient narrator explains how 'most migrants learn, and can become disguises. Our own false descriptions to counter the falsehoods invented about us, concealing for reasons of security our secret selves' (49). Rather than other cultures, races and religions being included in the idea of a British nation, the migrant must be in a constant state of mutability to satisfy the demands of a supposed national identity. Whilst Rushdie shows how migrants feel a need to defend themselves against quotidian forms of prejudice, such as when a 'quartet of white youths' spit on Saladin's food in the Shaandaar Café (456), he also illustrates the relative powerlessness felt by the novel's migrants. Regardless of how the non-white migrants of the novel adjust and perform their identities in British society, the power of mainstream racism changes how they are perceived not only by society in general but also by themselves.

As we see particularly through Saladin, the migrant becomes both outwardly disgusting and disgusted by itself. This demonstrates how desperation to belong to the ultimately fictitious British national ideal results in the migrant succumbing to self-hating tendencies rather than insisting on the presence and acceptance of cultural difference. Homi K. Bhabha argues that Saladin 'has become the "borderline" figure of a massive historical displacement – postcolonial migration – that is not only a "transitional reality", but also a "translational" phenomenon' (320). In other words, the process of migration is both an act of literally moving across borders, and of translating the self into a new hybrid reality where

cultures commingle and coexist. So whilst Gibreel the movie star is 'halfway to the divine' ('Good Faith' 397), dehumanised but reborn as angelic due to his status and material wealth, Saladin is translated into the fearsome and the grotesque. Partially familiar because of his British education and partially different because of his brown skin, Saladin, because of his position as hybrid, is approached with caution, distrust, and horror. By morphing into 'the discriminatory sign of a performative, projective British culture of race and racism' (Bhabha 326), Saladin is representative of two things. Firstly, he represents the reality that those who are 'different' are the ones who must have their identities scrutinised rather than the prejudicial majority. Secondly, he shows how this 'difference' is seen symbolically through the metamorphosis as enough to prohibit basic human empathy, as emphasised by the gradual mutation from human to animal.

Through narrating multiple migrant experiences, Rushdie is able to counteract Saladin's Anglophilia with an imaginative, but nonetheless realistic, narrative of everyday racism. Whilst Saladin chose to emigrate to Britain in order to fulfil his fantasy of assimilating into a life of neocolonial Englishness, Muhammad and Hind Sufyan, the owners of the Shaandaar Café, were forced to flee Bangladesh after Muhammad (who is often referred to simply as Sufyan) 'had to go and join the devils themselves, the Communist Party' (256). Saladin admonishes himself if his English is ever punctuated with Hindi phrasing, and makes an effort to not betray his roots through his language. Muhammad and Hind, however, speak in broken English: 'Please forgive, – the unexpectedness et cet, isn't it?' (252) and punctuate their conversation with Bengali: 'may I present,' says Muhammad 'my Mrs; – my Begum Sahiba, – Hind.' On seeing Saladin complete with horns and hooves, Hind exclaims: 'What friend? How friend? […] Ya Allah, eyes aren't next to your nose?' (252). They make a living from cooking South Asian food for the local community, and over time Hind has mastered 'the dosas and uttapams of South India', 'the soft meatballs of Kashmir' (253), 'the highly spiced dishes of Hyderabad and the high-faluting yoghurt sauces of Lucknow' (254).

Similarly to Nazneen and Chanu in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, the Sufyans have two daughters whose upbringing in England has caused them to be dismissive of their Bangladeshi heritage. Hind, unlike her husband and children, connects with her life back in Bangladesh through devouring large quantities of South Asian food: 'her body began to alter, because all that food had to find a home somewhere, and she began to resemble the wide rolling land mass itself, the subcontinent without frontiers' (254). By gorging on foods from all over South Asia, Hind 'espouses the cause of gastronomic pluralism' (Bhabha 320), an act that symbolically represents her reluctance to let go of the borderless pre-1947 subcontinent.

After the trauma of post-partition migration, Hind internalises this trauma through the act of eating, and she does this in order to counteract her difficult post-migratory identity:

> she was no longer just one, just herself, just Hind wife of teacher Sufyan; she had sunk into the anonymity, the characterless plurality, of being merely one-of-the-women-like-her. This was history's lesson: nothing for women-like-her to do but suffer, remember, and die. (258)

Trapped on what she describes as 'this devil-island' (258), she resents her lost status and sense of belonging in Bangladesh, and instead feels essentialised as just another migrant obsessed with remembering the past and unable to envision a future. Hind's feeling of invisibility and loss of individual identity recalls criticisms of multiculturalism as bad for women. Remaining in a domestic setting and frustrated by her lack of purpose in life, she expresses anger at being included in a 'plurality' of migrant, working-class women who are presumed to have no agency and little purpose other than remembering the past. Rushdie uses the trope of gorging on food several times to suggest a moment of boundary crossing. Whilst Hind devours vast amounts of South Asian food to escape her difficult life in England, Gibreel frantically eats mounds of pork and ham at the moment he crosses from a religious to a secular life (30), and Pamela shuts herself away in a hotel room with 'venison and […] a bottle of Chateau Talbot' (188) when her present struggles push her back to her upper-class roots.

What is most important in this section, however, is how Hind's overeating of South Asian dishes is, to an extent, a way to maintain a cultural connection with her home. Anita Mannur uses the term 'culinary citizenship' to describe 'that which grants subjects the ability to claim and inhabit certain identitarian positions via their relationship to food' (29). Therefore, Hind does not only hold a nostalgic relationship with the food of her homeland, but instead uses it to signal an enduring national identity. The safety that she finds in cooking is presented in stark contrast with her life in Britain:

> [T]hey had come into a demon city in which anything could happen, your windows shattered in the middle of the night without any cause, you were knocked over in the street by invisible hands […] and every day you heard about this boy, that girl, beaten up by ghosts. – Yes, a land of phantom imps. (258)

Evidently, supernatural forces do not commit these crimes, but Hind uses this dry tone to demonstrate how crimes committed against migrant citizens are conveniently invisible by those who are supposed to protect them. This deliberate blindness, or the supposed invisibility of racial hate crimes, is shown to have a traumatic effect on non-white migrant communities.

Mishal Sufyan tells Saladin of ‘a Sikh ancient shocked by a racial attack into complete silence’ (291), rendered speechless as he is by his position of unbelonging. Ironically, Mishal quotes the Sikh man’s wife as saying ‘*O, ignore him, he never says a dicky bird*’ (291, italics in original), her use of the cockney rhyming slang phrase ‘dicky bird’, meaning ‘word’, suggesting her assimilation into the local culture. Furthermore, Mishal tells him of a local Bangladeshi man who rearranges his furniture every evening to mimic a ‘single-decker bus on its way to Bangladesh’ (292), and makes his family play along with his homesick fantasy. The ‘ghosts’, the silence of the Sikh man, and the Bangladeshi man’s fantasy suggests such longing for a pre-migration home and disillusionment with Britain that these men’s ability to function in society is compromised, ultimately resulting in their feelings of erasure from public space.

Having nowhere else to go, Saladin is taken in by the Sufyans and eventually becomes involved in the local black activist movement. Much to Saladin’s dismay, his horns and shocking appearance cause him to become a devil-like totem of black power and anti-colonial sentiment. One of the ways in which this activism manifests itself is through Jumpy Joshi’s appropriation of Enoch Powell’s famous ‘River of Blood’ speech, originally delivered to a Conservative Association meeting in Birmingham on 20 April 1968 (Powell n. pag.). In this speech, the British politician argued that ‘decent, ordinary fellow Englishmen’, a phrase that he uses repeatedly to support his argument that he is speaking for the average working-class white man, feel that they are becoming disenfranchised in their ‘own’ country. The answer to this, argues Powell, is to stop immigration and encourage re-emigration as much as possible. Himself alluding to Virgil, Powell’s famously inflammatory statement: ‘I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I see “the River Tiber foaming with much blood”’ (n. pag.), warns of the alleged danger of uncontrolled immigration to Britain.

Using this same refrain, Jumpy Joshi pens a poem with the title ‘The River of Blood’. His friend Hanif Johnson reads out lines from the poem, much to Joshi’s anger: ‘He says a street is a river and we are the flow; humanity is a river of blood, that’s the poet’s point […] “In our very bodies, does the river of blood not flow?”’ (192). In comparison with Powell’s use of the imagery of the river of blood, Joshi uses the metaphor of this river also being a street, a place where people from different cultures and backgrounds live side by side. Moving the metaphor from the home to the body, Joshi suggests that we are part of human processes of movement, and that we are all connected through the running of blood in our bodies, regardless of skin colour.

However, Jumpy Joshi’s well-meaning call for a racially colour-blind political reality that emphasises a shared human nature reads naively in the context of the rest of the novel.

As Brown et al. explain in a North American context, just because a society has relinquished laws that allow for racial discrimination does not mean that skin colour no longer holds significant consequence for a person's social status and quality of life (64). For example, when the 'Granny Ripper' murders begin, it is the non-white locals who are targeted as possible culprits. Eventually, and much to the shock of police officers, the killer is found to be a 'bland, pale man of medium height and build, fair hair flopping over hazel eyes', a discovery that leads to a cover-up operation (468). The narrator explains that:

> The detention and interrogation of "tints" intensified accordingly, as did the incidence of snap raids on establishments "suspected of harbouring underground occultist cells". What was happening [...] was that everyone, black brown white, had started thinking of the dream-figure as *real*, as a being who had crossed the frontier, evading the normal controls, and was now roaming loose about the city. Illegal migrant, outlaw king, foul criminal or race-hero, Saladin Chamcha was getting to be true. (296–7, italics in original)

As tensions increase, Hanif refers to the river of blood metaphor again: '"The ol' poetry not going great, bra," he commiserated. "Look like that river of blood get coagulate"' (296). Whilst Joshi feels that his poetry is an appropriation of racist sentiment and a regaining of power, it becomes increasingly futile as police brutality against black residents intensifies.

A local activist, Sylvester Roberts, changes his name to Uhuru Simba (meaning 'freedom' and 'lion' in Swahili) to become closer to his African roots. Eventually, and mysteriously, he dies whilst in police custody on suspicion of conducting the Granny Ripper murders. Before his death, Uhuru Simba's mother recites what he said in court when he was on trial for the murder. To an audience of outraged members of the community, she quotes her son:

> I concede at once that we shall ourselves be changed; African, Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Cypriot, Chinese, we are other than what we would have been if we had not crossed the oceans [...] We have been made again: but I say that we shall also be the ones to remake this society, to shape it from the bottom to the top. (428)

With the aim of forming a collective movement against British racism and police brutality, Simba calls for an understanding of the inherent 'newness' of post-migration identities, but also for an insistence on the hybridity of British culture as a result of this movement. However, Simba conflates a myriad of non-British immigrant identities, suggesting that despite their differences, experiences across groups are comparable.

Rushdie expressed his anti-racist ideas in 'The New Empire Within Britain', where he reproached the white British for believing that 'even British-born blacks and Asians are thought of as people whose real "home" is elsewhere' (132). However, Rushdie's form of anti-racism is somewhat problematic due to the way his South Asian protagonists, particularly Saladin, talk about black British people. After Simba's speech quoted above, the group – Hanif Johnson, Mishal Sufyan, Jumpy Joshi, and others – continue to discuss British racism. Saladin notices how the authorities are referred to as 'the Man,' and thinks:

> [H]e didn't like the use of such American terms as "the Man" in the very different British situation, where there was no history of slavery […] [a]s if all causes were the same, all histories interchangeable. (429)

Whilst Britain's history of slavery is different to that of North America, Saladin's reluctance to partake in anti-colonial and anti-racist activism means that he stands apart from the others as unwilling to engage with Britain's problematic history of race relations.

Although the novel encourages a move towards a collective, anti-racist stance, Ali A. Mazrui asks: 'are there elements of negrophobia' in the novel? (115). Anti-black sentiment is evident, for example, when Rushdie describes the Muslim Bilal as 'an enormous black monster' (103), a description read by Mazrui as a disrespectful way to describe 'the first great voice of Islam' (115). On top of Saladin's disregard for the African American civil rights movement and Rushdie's questionable description of Bilal, there are a number of other instances of problematic descriptions of black characters. Hanif Johnson, for example, is a relatively well-off and educated Indian lawyer who imitates Jamaican national language on becoming involved in primarily black activist politics.

When Gibreel is navigating London and arrives at Angel Station, he meets the sister of Hyacinth Phillips, who had been Saladin's nurse at the sanatorium. This sister, Orphia Phillips, is embroiled in a love triangle with boyfriend Uriah Moseley and rival Rochelle Watkins, all of whom work low-paid jobs for the London Underground. This episode is narrated mockingly and for comic effect, using black London dialect to narrate the petty squabbles. Gibreel's advice to Orphia about confronting Watkins – publicly and at work – eventually results in a strangely naive Orphia being dismissed from her job. Gibreel leaves the station without taking responsibility for the damage caused, and the incident having a minimal impact on the ongoing narrative. Because of the questionable way in which Rushdie characterises and narrates his black characters, he undermines the anti-racist sentiment of the novel. As Antoinette Burton has argued, '[i]n Britain […] brown and black were thrown together and thought together' (200), and this kind of approach is evident to an extent in *The Satanic Verses*.

Prior to the writing of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie argued in 'The Indian Writer in England' that his life in England had caused him to feel a sense of dissonance from India and had left him questioning his authority to write about India. Nevertheless, he concludes that 'literature is not in the business of copyrighting certain themes for certain groups' (79). After receiving criticism for his portrayal of Islam, he averred in 'In Good Faith' that when writing *The Satanic Verses* '[w]hat I did not do was conspire against Islam; or write – after years and years of anti-racist work and writing – a text of incitement to racial hatred' (410). Although previously renouncing any need to justify his decision to write about India in *Midnight's Children*, the backlash against *The Satanic Verses* meant that Rushdie reversed his position and attempted to argue that his anti-racist background meant that his authorial intention had been misunderstood.

However, Tariq Modood has argued that Rushdie's stance is problematic because by just acknowledging 'a concept of racism that sees only colour-discrimination as a cause and material deprivation as a result', Rushdie is glossing over the unique position of Muslims whom Modood argues suffer from the 'double disadvantage' of racism as well as cultural/religious prejudice (*Still Not Easy* 28). Indeed, the 'narratives of black pride in the 1970s and 1980s' that Rushdie's novel propagates were later recognised as being unable to capture the Asian experience, which led to the breakdown of a common 'black' identity. The subsequent rise of a Muslim identity was seen to be divisively perpetuated by a 'conservative, mosque-centered leadership' and as bypassing the 'progressive politics of the anti-racist left' (Birt 11).

Whilst Rushdie engages with the shared racial concerns of non-whites in Britain, he does not recognise the rise of Muslim identity politics over 'black' identity politics, nor does he acknowledge the disadvantaged position that many Muslims in Britain inhabit. British Muslims live in a secular society that has historically associated Islam with 'tyranny, religion, authority, and violence' (Asad, 'Free Speech' 21). Yet Rushdie could not understand the fury that the Mahound chapters of his book incited amongst Muslim communities in Britain and further afield. The reaction to *The Satanic Verses* shows that a broad sentiment of anti-racism cannot prevent the novel being interpreted with outrage by certain communities. While it has been acknowledged that the novel was perceived as offensive to Muslims, there has been little discussion of how it also questionably portrays black British people.

'[T]he tree was burning […] consuming histories, memories, genealogies, purifying the earth': Faith, Doubt and Hybridity

During a 1988 interview on the BBC Radio programme *Desert Island Discs*, Salman Rushdie claimed that politicians 'have got very good at inventing fictions which they tell us as the truth. It then becomes the job of the makers of fiction to start telling the real truth' (qtd. in Malik, 'Foreword' vii). Although fiction is just that – fictional – writer and broadcaster Kenan Malik further argues that it goes beyond the 'truth of facts […] or of science'. Instead, it allows us to explore 'the truth of human experience, and in particular the experience of change and transformation, of dislocation and belongingness' (Malik, Foreword vii). Whilst political and media discourses often encourage a binary perspective on society – Islamic values versus British values, for example – fiction has the potential to reveal a truth of human experience more complex than a series of simplistic, and often dangerous, dichotomies. Whereas in the previous two sections I explicitly focused on how Rushdie explores memories of British colonialism and the ongoing aftermath for race relations in the 1980s chapters, in this section I focus on what I term the Ayesha narratives, namely 'Chapter IV: Ayesha' and 'Chapter VIII: The Parting of the Arabian Sea'. Although Rushdie's use of the magical realist style has been acknowledged throughout this chapter so far, in this section I wish to scrutinise the genre of magical realist fiction in more depth. In particular, I look at how Rushdie uses this style to reimagine a historical event through blurring the borders between reality and fiction for the sake of espousing the broader, global 'truth' of cultural hybridity.

Magical realism, particularly when used in postcolonial fiction, has been widely discussed both in terms of its success as a literary style and of its potential pitfalls. Definitions vary, from being a 'voice' of the postcolonial world to a crude method of exoticising (Warnes, 'Naturalizing' 1). Complex and debated as it is, it is a style of writing that has contributed to the literary brilliance and international success of authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Toni Morrison, Ben Okri and, as I discuss here, Salman Rushdie. The style itself, however, is not without its critics. Eva Aldea explains that 'many postcolonial readings of magical realism see it as a problematic, if not failed, mode of writing, escapist and ineffectual at best, and neo-colonial and exoticizing at worst' (147). As I touched upon in Chapter Two, Monica Ali's tentative steps into the magical realist style in the analepsis sections about Nazneen's Bangladeshi childhood, juxtaposed with a clearly realist style in the majority of the text, problematically frame Bangladesh as obsolete and superstitious in contrast with a forward-thinking and modern London. One of the purposes of

magical realism, however, is to blur such binaries, and although magical realism is only briefly used in the novel, Ali to some extent reinforces stereotypical oppositions.

Stephen Slemon explains that 'in magical realism this battle [for a discourse of truth] is represented in the language of narration by the foregrounding of two opposing discursive systems, with neither managing to subordinate or contain the other' (410). In other words, while it is tempting to rationalise literary instances of magical realism for the purpose of uncovering a certain 'truth' from the novel, the magical elements prevent domination by the realist elements. The magical elements are too incredible to be plausible, but the realism is steeped in such inexplicable and fantastical events that it cannot be taken at face value or without a degree of doubt. Therefore magical realism is an indivisible but multifaceted whole that, in a postcolonial context, refuses to let Western hegemony claim superiority to alternative belief systems. This is explained succinctly by Holly E. Martin:

> Commonplace binary configurations […] commingle and coexist on an equal footing. Neither aspect is more important nor more characteristic of reality, and consequently, the coexistence of these opposites destabilizes or displaces the usually accepted hierarchies normally found within binary relations. (21)

Christopher Warnes distinguishes between two types of magical realism. The first is 'faith-based', where the magical or supernatural event is metonymic of a broader, and often non-Western, worldview (*Magical* 14). The second type, which he describes as 'irreverent strands' cannot be explained away or claimed to stand for something. Instead, this type of magical realism highlights problems or ideas, such as 'the incapacities of binaristic thinking' (Warnes, *Magical* 14). In other words, the former style reduces supernatural events to alternative but nonetheless absolutist truths, whereas the latter resists these truths. Warnes explains that *The Satanic Verses* employs the second type. For example, in the well-known moment when two Indian men Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha morph into an angel and a devil, respectively, they do not simply represent something evil, different or strange. Instead, their metamorphosis is a metaphor for British racism and intolerance (Warnes, *Magical* 15).

The Ayesha narrative begins not with Ayesha but with the imam exiled in London's wealthy district of Kensington (211). In his rage against time and history, the imam declares the goddess Al-Lat/Ayesha the enemy of Islam, and renounces the time of *jahiliyyah*, or the pre-revelation age of ignorance. He says, '[h]istory the intoxicant […] the greatest of lies – progress, science, rights […]. History is a deviation from the Path, knowledge is a delusion, because the sum of knowledge was complete on the day Al-Lah finished his revelation to Mahound' (210). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the real Ayatollah Khomeini was a

'dogmatic cleric with rigid views on Islam and the West derived from a hermetically sealed religious tradition' (V. Martin ix). Rushdie's use of magical realism in this scene is used for both comic effect and for more serious criticisms of the imam. Demanding that Gibreel fly him to Jerusalem, the imam 'leaps high into the night air, twirls himself about, and settles on Gibreel's shoulders, clutching on to him with fingernails that have grown into long, curved claws' (218). As well as this comically mocking portrayal, Rushdie shows a more threatening side through the use of magical realism. After battling the goddess Al-Lat and winning, the imam had 'grown monstrous, lying in the palace forecourt with his mouth yawning open at the gates; as the people march through the gates he swallows them whole' (221). This surreal image shows the imam in a significant position of power: 'the people', in this instance of Jerusalem, are described as marching towards the palace, suggesting an effort to infiltrate the city's centre of theocratic power. The imam 'swallows' the people 'whole', illustrating both the powerlessness of the people and the dangerous, almost inhuman power of the imam. Using this style of 'irreverent' magical realism, Rushdie encourages the reader to be critical of Iran's Khomeini and his abstemious approach to Islamic practice and belief.

The Ayesha narrative continues to use magical realism, but with a more philosophical angle that questions the big ideas of faith, secularism, and hybridity. For the sake of clarity, I offer a brief overview of the Ayesha narrative: in a small village called Titlipur, a young girl named Ayesha appears in a local land owner's garden devouring butterflies. Claiming to be sent messages from God through the angel Gibreel, she is believed to be a reincarnation of a local holy woman 'known only as Bibiji' (223). Bibiji was renowned for being followed by streams of butterflies, creatures that return upon Ayesha's claim of holy revelation. Ayesha claims that Gibreel has instructed her to take the hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca with the villagers. Without the use of transport or any kind of modern means of movement, Ayesha declares that the Arabian Sea will open for them, and they can walk through to Mecca. When they arrive, the pilgrims enter the Arabian Sea and many of them drown. Rushdie's narrative of Ayesha and the pilgrims is based on a true story,[4] in which, 'in February, 1983, thirty-eight people – all Shiah – entered the Arabian sea at Hawkes Bay in Karachi' (A. Ahmed 120). The procession was led from the small village of Rehna Sayyadan near the Chakwal district in north-east Pakistan (A. Ahmed 121) by Sayyad Willayat Hussain Shah, who believed that the sea would part and allow them to proceed through the Arabian Sea, up to Basrah in south-east Iran, and then inland towards the holy city of Karbala (A. Ahmed 120). As in Rushdie's

[4] In his interview with Ameena Meer in 1989, Rushdie acknowledges that he knows that this incident did actually happen in real life, and describes it as 'the most extraordinary image of faith that I'd come across in years' (63).

version of the story, the small village suffers from poverty and drought, and is divided hierarchically into 'Sayyads, the upper social group, and Arain, the lower' (A. Ahmed 121), a point not specified in Rushdie's version but made clear through the description of Mirza Saeed the wealthy *zamindar* and Ayesha, who makes dolls for a living and is often seen only in a threadbare sari.

Academic and writer Akbar S. Ahmed wrote a real-life account of the events that I outlined in his article on the 'Hawkes Bay Case'. Although Rushdie's fictional imagining closely adheres to what really happened, the way in which he uses this story differs greatly from how Ahmed uses it. The latter's discussion, understandably, is a sociological approach to an event that shocked the region. Specifically, he discusses it in terms of the psychological factors that ultimately led to an act of group suicide. The village girl who led the pilgrimage, the real-life version of Rushdie's Ayesha, was called Naseem. Ahmed argues that '[i]t is commonplace that highly gifted but disturbed individuals adapt religious idioms to consolidate their social position or to dominate their social environment' (128). According to Ahmed, Naseem's impoverished social position and her role in the underappreciated Shiah community encouraged her to adopt a leadership role through the medium of religious revelation. Because Ahmed is exploring the incident through the perspective of sociology and psychology, any theological or supernatural interpretations are explained away in favour of a more secular understanding. Rushdie's narrative, however, offers a different but equally valid 'truth'. Rather than removing questions of spiritual intervention, he encourages them, regardless of his own broadly secular position.

Nevertheless, as Christopher Warnes explains, readers are often tempted to reduce magical episodes to realist explanations (*Magical* 11). The novel's inherent structure of a beginning, a middle, and an end as well as the real-world backdrop means that the reader is tempted to explain away the cause or meaning of magical realist events rather than accepting them as they are. Whilst Ahmed's study may satisfy our desire for rational causation through his discussion of the psychological factors involved, Rushdie refuses to explain away the supernatural and instead encourages readers to relinquish a single-minded understanding of what we mean by truth. In comparison with Ahmed's article, Rushdie's use of the 1983 Hawkes Bay incident does not only lead to a discussion of the motivations of the pilgrims, but opens broader questions about faith, doubt, and hybridity. Whilst magical realism is employed throughout the entirety of the novel, it is worth examining its use in more detail in the Ayesha narrative. This is because a reader is presented not only with the events themselves, but with the events as seen from the perspective of a doubtful man. Not only is he

doubtful, but he is doubtful from a secular, materialist position, a characterisation that many Western readers could probably recognise in themselves.

Through characterising the real Naseem as the fictional Ayesha, Rushdie focuses on the figure of the religious prophet in order to explore the power of belief. As Warnes argues, Rushdie is using a type of magical realism that 'elevates the non-real to the status of the real in order to cast the epistemological status of both into doubt' (*Magical* 14). In an interview with Ameena Meer, Rushdie claimed that he 'was trying in the novel, to face up to, not just the nature of revelation, but also the power of belief' (A. Meer 112). This is explored both through the faithful following of the pilgrims and how readers react to the spiritual elements in the narrative. Our hope for the pilgrims' safe passage across the Arabian Sea is raised by the presence of the mysterious crowds of butterflies, but crushed at the end when we learn of their drowned bodies 'floating to shore, swollen like balloons and stinking like hell' (518). By reimagining such tragedy, Rushdie is exploring religious faith in order to show both its power and its danger. At first it may seem that he is only exploring the power of Islamic belief, but it is apparent that Rushdie uses the movement of the pilgrims to critique other acts of faith or belief.

Mirza Saeed, the wealthy Westernised *zamindar* in the village, spends the entirety of the chapter mocking religious fervour as irrational. However, he surprisingly uses faith-based language to argue fervently for unlimited loyalty to materialism and secularism as *alternatives* to religion, an act reminiscent of sentiment expressed by the new athiests. When the head of the village has to bury his deceased wife by the side of the road during the pilgrimage, he begins to lose his faith in the cause. He asks Mirza Saeed, who is driving alongside the pilgrims in his Mercedes, whether he can join him in the car. Mirza Saeed agrees:

> Unwilling wholly to abandon the project for which his wife had died, unable to maintain any longer the absolute belief which the enterprise required, Muhammad Din [the Sarpanch, or head of the village] entered the station wagon of scepticism. 'My first convert,' Mirza Saeed rejoiced. (495)

Mirza Saeed's use of the term 'convert', a word that signifies a change from a believer to an unbeliever, shows how he does not understand the sceptical thinking that the pilgrims experience, but instead promotes secularism as a binary alternative to religious faith. When trying to persuade his dying wife Mishal to abandon the gruelling journey in favour of a comfortable flight to the West to visit doctors who could cure her cancer, he says: 'I'll take you to the top clinics in Europe, Canada, the USA. Trust in Western technology. They can do marvels' (499). Again, his use of the word 'trust', similar to faith, and 'marvels', similar to

miracles, implies an unwavering faith in the possibilities and superiority of secular Western traditions.

What accompanies Mirza Saeed's faith in secularism is also his faith in material wealth (primarily in the form of Western imported goods) and in the superiority of European cultural traditions. To try and entice the villagers away from the pilgrimage, he uses the temptation of his comfortable Mercedes station wagon filled with cold Coca Cola and material comforts. Furthermore, he tells the pilgrims tales or fables from European traditions, such as how the Greek goddess Circe 'turned men into pigs', and about the 'pipe-player who lured a town's children into a mountain-crack', in reference to the pied-piper, a character in a German folk tale of the middle ages (498). He tells the pilgrims these stories in translation and then recites them in English, even though none of them can understand it. Because of its status as an international language, and one that is associated with Western powers, the villagers are enamoured with his recitation. These tales almost act as prayers, performed in an unfamiliar language but understood as sacred in importance. Like Ayesha with her tales of Gibreel's revelation, Mirza Saeed attempts to awe and subdue the pilgrims with his enviable knowledge of Western languages and traditions. Whilst he believes that he is free-thinking and superior to the pilgrims because of his lack of religious faith, he in fact maintains a binary position by being dismissive of faith and entirely supportive of secularism.

Rushdie uses the narrative to critique dangerous social binaries by showing how people use the pilgrimage, which is symbolic as an example of pure faith, for their own political and economic gain. Described by the local police as a '"communal" march' rather than a pilgrimage (488), the procession is politicised and used by opposing Hindu and Muslim groups as fodder for attacks. They have stones thrown at them by 'town youths' known to have connections with the 'Vishwa Hindu Parishad', a Hindu right-wing nationalist group (489). Their Islamic pilgrimage is dismissed because, certain leaflets claim, 'Padyatra, or foot-pilgrimage, is an ancient, pre-Islamic tradition of national culture, not imported property of Mughal immigrants' (502). Rather than being critical of extreme demonstrations of faith, Rushdie draws attention to how religion and politics clash through sectarian violence and undermine acts of genuine belief. Furthermore, the pilgrims become famous and are used by local companies to have walking advertisements. Instead of encouraging more people to take the hajj, the pilgrims are viewed in terms of possible commodification for profit.

A particularly significant change that Rushdie has made to the original Hawkes Bay story is that he has changed the Muslim sect that performed the pilgrimage from Shiah to Sunni. As Akbar S. Ahmed explains, the actual group of pilgrims who travelled from Karachi was Shiah. We know of the change in sect because firstly, the Sunnis of Titlipur choose to go

to Mecca in Saudi Arabia rather than the Karbala in Iran, a more Shiah place of pilgrimage ('Karbala' n. pag.); and secondly, the fact that their leader is called Ayesha, a name which connects her with Muhammad's supposedly favourite wife who, being accused of adultery, became a provocative figure who divided the early Muslim community (Walker and Sells 64). Using this name for a faithful Muslim and a leader of an entire community is controversial. It shows how a name in itself is powerful enough to divide the opinions of a religion, particularly a name which reminds some Muslims of this early incident which proves that 'women should be kept out of politics' ('Aishah' n. pag.). Vali Nasr, in his book about Shiah-Sunni tensions, explains how this hostility is 'deeply embedded in popular prejudice' (22), and how Shiahs have been dismissed as 'provincial' and 'uncouth', that shaking hands with one is 'polluting', and that they are given 'derogatory nicknames' (23). Although Nasr describes the Shiah-Sunni tensions as 'a struggle for the soul of Islam' (20), he also highlights the importance of this tension that goes beyond the purely theological: 'Religion is not just about God and salvation; it decides the boundaries of communities' (Nasr 23).

Akbar S. Ahmed uses this religious rift in his study of the Hawkes Bay incident to explain, through sociological lexicon, the reason for Naseem's supposed revelation and the subsequent willingness of the people of their village to walk into the sea. He claims that the Sunnis 'dismissed the matter as yet another Shiah aberration from Orthodox Islam' (120) and therefore did not accept Naseem's revelation as being valid. However, Ahmed also argues that the reason that the pilgrimage gained so many followers was because they were 'responding not to one leader in their immediate community but to the concept of leadership in Shiah society' (129). As I discussed earlier, Ahmed is not necessarily arguing that sincere faith is irrelevant in the motive for the pilgrims, but is attempting to rationalise the experience, showing how it is a way for an undermined, discredited sect to prove their devotion to Islam and the closeness which they too can have with Allah. Rushdie's decision to rewrite the Hawkes Bay incident through a Sunni instead of a Shiah sect is another contribution to his focus on breaking down binaries and beliefs of purity. Whilst many aspects of the novel could be described as irreverent, this section is particularly sympathetic towards religion. Rather than dismissing faith as irrational as Mirza Saeed does, Rushdie employs a more nuanced and balanced perspective. He does this by condemning the ways in which sectarian conflict and close-mindedness can overshadow sincere and personal religious faith.

Throughout the novel, Rushdie is particularly critical of religious leaders, such as Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, and the proud, determined Ayesha does not escape his critique.

Although she is portrayed as cold and stubborn, Rushdie does not suggest that she is representative of Islam as a whole, but of oppressive religious leaders. The real exploration of religious faith is through the loyal villagers, desperate for a miracle, and the sceptical Mirza Saeed, who cannot understand why anyone would chose faith over things. Although Rushdie's reputation of being anti-religion has grown since the novel's publication, this part of the novel espouses the *benefits* of the hybrid self, and of being both faithful and sceptical.

In this chapter I explored how integral history, particularly British colonial history, is to understanding Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* beyond the controversy that it caused in the late twentieth century. Whilst many academic studies of the novel have primarily focused on Rushdie's portrayal of Islamic history, I aimed in this chapter to revive this historical approach to the novel, but with an alternative focus. More specifically, I explored how Rushdie presents other instances of history, such as the erasure of historical figures in British society; the perpetual violence of colonialism and race struggles of the 1980s; the remarkable Hawkes Bay Incident of 1983; and the relationship between the England-returned Saladin and his past in India. Whilst the first part of this chapter was an exploration of the Rushdie affair, I focused on the various intersections of historical concern, particularly Rushdie's own history in India; Britain's belief in its integral and historical commitment to liberalism and freedom of speech; and how postcolonial Britain cannot deny its anti-Muslim sentiment that stems from a colonial fear of the 'other'.

I argued that by focusing on more recent discussions of history, primarily colonial but touching on many other periods too, we can depart from the common debate about whether or not Rushdie's portrayal of Islamic history was offensive, and instead ask how he uses *other* historical events to explore the often traumatic experiences of Britain's BAME residents in the 1980s, before the time of state-mandated multiculturalism that we see in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. The novel itself, of course, did not only explore history but *made* history. Indeed, it has become a strong influence for contemporary literature and has sustained discussions about cultural relativism and freedom of speech into the twenty-first century. Through my discussion, Rushdie's limitations have also emerged. While his exploration of Britain's problem with its colonial history and its multicultural reality is compelling, his desire to reappropriate the language of the West through his portrayal of Mahound exposes a lack of understanding about the difficulties faced by Muslims in Britain. Furthermore, the exploration of his black characters occasionally falls into stereotypes, something that he both tries to combat yet occasionally performs himself.

Overall, it is evident that *The Satanic Verses* is a novel in which history must be seen as integral as to British multicultural relations. Both racism left over from Britain's imperial

days and its lack of understanding of how this imperial history functions in the present day is exposed. As we see in my discussion of novels published into the twenty-first century, this historical amnesia is still a pertinent social problem.

Chapter Four: Genealogy and Culture-Crossing

In the texts considered in this thesis so far, memories of traumatic and culturally significant events are primarily remembered and revisited through literary techniques such as flashbacks, or through reminiscences amongst characters. I have argued that the authors deploy these strategies in order to, firstly, both create a sense of comradeship and shared history between migrant communities and explore how history and cultural memory divide migrant communities. Secondly, the texts draw meaningful links between imperialist historical violence and present-day multiculturalism. Thirdly, they question and rewrite accepted versions of history from a position of postcoloniality.

Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* are different from the previous texts I have discussed, specifically because of their use of form. Whilst the characters do discuss and debate historically significant events, both Soueif and Aboulela adapt these events to create a historical narrative in its own right. Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* is punctuated with flashbacks to the 1919 Amritsar Massacre, but these moments function as dramatised memories rather than comprising a distinct historical narrative. *The Kindness of Enemies* and *The Map of Love* are most closely connected, in terms of their fictionalisation of history, to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie reimagines events that are significant to Islamic history, such as the early days of Islam in seventh-century Arabia, in order to humanise these events and explore the meanings and manifestations of religious faith.

However, *The Map of Love* and *The Kindness of Enemies* differ from Rushdie's novel in that they delineate an investigative protagonist – Amal al-Ghamrawi in *The Map of Love* and Natasha Wilson in *The Kindness of Enemies* – who uses historical research to guide the narrative back in time in order to learn something about themselves and the present day. Natasha Wilson's research into the Caucasian War, especially the Murid War of 1830–1859 between the Russian Empire and the people of the Caucasus Mountains, leads her to gain the friendship of Oz and his mother Malak. Of particular interest is the role of Imam Shamil, who united the people of the Caucasus under Islam during the Murid War. In the present-day narrative, when Oz is arrested for suspected terrorist activities, Natasha is forced to confront Britain's increasing Islamophobia and to reconsider her own Muslim identity. Similarly, by tracing her family line back to Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century, Soueif's Amal al-Ghamrawi learns of her great-aunt Anna Winterbourne's progress from indifferent aristocrat to Egyptian nationalist. This return to the past encourages Amal to rethink her

present. She decides to return to her village of Tawasi and become more engaged in Egyptian politics, and to be openly critical of Israel's expansionist project into Palestinian territories.

The characters in *The Map of Love* and *The Kindness of Enemies* are not simply spurred on to research the history of the Russians in the Caucasus or the British in Egypt, respectively, but by an interest in history itself. It is their personal investment in genealogy, or the tracing of family lineage and inheritance, that prompts them in their historical journeys. Indeed, genealogy is one of the ways in which my chosen novels engage with history and memory, and viewing a present situation as connected to a significant event or character in the past is a trend that emerges across the thesis. Mangal Pande is repeatedly invoked as a proud connection to a revolutionary history against the British in *White Teeth*, and the discovery that Chakor was born a Hindu and therefore his upbringing as a Muslim was a deviation from the linear progression of religious and cultural inheritance causes uproar in *Maps for Lost Lovers*. However, Charag's purchasing of early photographs of South Asian migrants to the region, I previously argue, moves this genealogical line away from the trauma of the 1947 Partition and reinstates it amid the arrival of early Muslim communities of Britain. Even in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie's interrogation of the early days of Islam could be read as a critique of Muhammad as Islam's 'forefather'. In *The Kindness of Enemies*, Oz evokes Imam Shamil, the leader of the Caucasus resistance, as an anticolonial jihadist hero. Although lacking evidence of a genealogical connection, Oz constructs much of his Muslim identity around the myth of Shamil. In *The Map of Love,* Amal lauds her great-uncle Sharif al-Baroudi as a passionate Egyptian nationalist martyr to such an extent that she has intimate dreams about them crossing the boundaries of time and of her union with him on her grandmother's bed (446).

In both texts, a sense of spatial dislocation contributes to the need to find comfort in familial continuity and genetic associations. Although Amal only moves from her village of Tawasi to Cairo in an act of country to city relocation, other members of her family struggle with greater instances of dislocation and displacement. Her mother, for example, is forced to flee Palestine and move to Egypt during *al-Nakba*, or 'the disaster' of 1948, when the State of Israel was created (117). Amal's father, whilst proud of his son 'Omar's musical success in New York, struggled to accept his son's life as 'anchored' in another country (118). For Malak, Oz, and Natasha, migrating to Britain and grappling with the post-9/11 climate of suspicion towards Muslims causes them to find greater comfort in their religious and genealogical roots than in their present situation. The characters in both novels find this comfort in the face of loneliness and non-belonging by tracing their genealogy and attaching themselves to an identity stemming from a historical figure. In this chapter I explore how

both Aboulela and Soueif reimagine and research the past in order, firstly, to interrogate cross-cultural relationships in colonial situations, and secondly, to champion women's voices as speaking out against colonialism, racism, and state violence.

'Here I was conscious of being African in the Scottish countryside, of the need to justify my presence': Colonial Oppression and Postcolonial Hostility in Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*

Leila Aboulela was born in Cairo in 1964 to a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother, and lives between Abu Dhabi and Scotland (British Council, 'Aboulela' n. pag.). This experience is likely to have influenced her creation of Sudanese-Russian protagonist Natasha Hussein (later Wilson) in her 2015 novel *The Kindness of Enemies*. Natasha works as a lecturer in history at the University of Aberdeen, and from childhood to adulthood struggles with her dual identity. As a child, she read her dark skin, inherited from her Sudanese father, as a disconnecting factor between herself and her white Russian mother. Into adulthood, she begins to understand the political danger that her dark skin – accompanied by a Muslim and Arab-sounding surname – can put her in during a time of post-9/11 suspicion in Britain.

While Aboulela structures *The Kindness of Enemies* around two intersecting narratives – one in twenty-first-century Scotland and Sudan, and the other during the Caucasian War of the early to mid-nineteenth century – these strands are closely connected. Both narratives explore individuals coping with complex hybrid identities due to acculturation through mixed marriages, migration, and even kidnappings. Like Aboulela's earlier novels *Minaret* and *The Translator*, *The Kindness of Enemies* centres on a female protagonist struggling with her Islamic heritage whilst living in the largely secular West. *The Kindness of Enemies* is broad in its scope, exploring political, social, and historical conflict. However, as with Aboulela's earlier fiction, the novel employs a deeply personal approach to the Muslim diasporic experience.

In 'A Cold But Fertile Ground', Aboulela writes that it was the unfamiliarity of the British landscape, the 'silence of the muezzin, the absence of the words *insha'Allah* and *alhamdullilah*; the absence of faith' (xi) that first encouraged her to start writing fiction. Her calling, she felt, was to 'put Islam in British fiction' ('Cold' xi), and her specific experience at a creative writing class in Scotland led her to understand the Scottish need to champion 'their own Scottish culture and traditions', which many in the group felt were framed as subordinate to the 'metropolitan literary tastes of London' ('Cold' xiii). Witnessing her

fellow writers creating fiction about 'the unemployed, the working classes, the young drug addicts', Aboulela felt that:

> [T]his meant there was space for other marginalized characters – those who were marginalized because of religion, those who were immigrants or asylum seekers. The Muslim woman in her hijab, the reluctant Sudanese immigrant, could now claim a place in literature written in English. ('Cold' xiii)

Geoffrey Nash claims that Aboulela's fiction does not engage in writing back to a dominant discourse, but rather constitutes 'an exercise in acculturation to globalisation conducted from within the territory of the dominant discourse(s)' (*Anglo-Arab* 143). Aboulela's fiction is not generally described as writing *back*, but since her desire to write fiction only emerged during the act of migration, she is able to champion a Muslim voice by writing *within*. Rather than partaking in a binary understanding of writing literature – from one culture to another – Aboulela chooses to infuse her English-language writing with intimate remnants of her past in Sudan: 'I wanted to show the people around me that an African city could be as atmospheric as London, livelier than Brighton, more beautiful than Edinburgh' ('Cold' xi). *The Kindness of Enemies* is a novel written from within the dominant discourse, being both written in English and having a Westernised Muslim woman working within a British institution as the protagonist. Whilst Aboulela does not necessarily pen a novel of writing back, she remains critical of the society in which she writes.

Similarly to the texts that I have discussed so far, Aboulela's novel uses historical and cultural memory as part of a present-day narrative in order to comment on the role of Muslim migrants living in Britain in the post-imperial age. Natasha teaches a student at the university named Oz, whose nickname, stemming from Osama, came about in order to blur his Muslim identity and hide his outwardly Arab roots. Oz's ancestor (or supposed ancestor) Imam Shamil was known as 'one of the most charismatic and powerful of Caucasus leaders' (Grant 38) during the 1830–1859 Murid War between the Muslim tribes of the Caucasus region and the Russians. The cultural and familial memory of Imam Shamil is passed down both through conversations between Malak and Oz, and through Islamic teachings about Shamil as a 'Sufi [hero]' (Bennigsen 83). Even in the modern-day chapters, Shamil remains a force of great influence. For Oz, Shamil is inspirational in his unapologetic act of jihad against the Russian imperial forces and refuses to let his understanding of Islam be defined by imperial powers. For Natasha, her academic research into Shamil's life encourages her not towards jihad, but rather to reconsider her Muslim identity through Sufistic practices.

What causes *The Kindness of Enemies* to stand apart from the previous novels that I have discussed is the way in which it weaves historical events into a narrative in its own right.

Aboulela does this by creating a fictionalised account of the story of the handing over of Shamil's son Jameleldin to the tsar during the Caucasian War and the subsequent kidnapping of Anna, Princess of Georgia, by Imam Shamil. This narration of cross-cultural experience between the Muslim mountain dweller and the Georgian aristocrat serves as an exercise in historical fiction. However, the historical narrative also runs alongside the present-day action in order to inform our understanding of events. Through this fictional rendition, Aboulela encourages readers to take a critical stance towards the society portrayed in the present-day narrative, particularly the post-9/11 atmosphere of distrust towards British Muslims. Cultural close-mindedness within institutions such as universities, the police, and the press, particularly demonstrated through their unwillingness to comprehend the nuances of sincere Muslim faith as distinct from Islamism, are enacted and ultimately challenged through the historical and contemporary plot lines that run parallel throughout the novel.

In this chapter section I begin by outlining the complex social and political context of nineteenth-century Russia that Aboulela uses to frame her historical chapters. I then move on to examine the historical narrative itself, specifically the cross-cultural relationships that form between the Muslims of the Caucasus region and the Russian aristocrats, asking what this narrative is communicating about the power dynamics between the imperialist state and the individual. I finish this section by exploring the gendered aspect of these historical chapters. I am especially interested in how Aboulela imaginatively rewrites Anna's story, which was originally published in 1857, in order to expose the suffering of both Russian and Muslim women under their respective patriarchal societies. In the second half of this chapter section, I discuss Aboulela's contemporary narrative, particularly how she draws connections between the oppression of the Caucasus peoples by the Russian Empire and quotidian feelings of distrust directed at British Muslims. I conclude this section by asking how Aboulela uses techniques of historical writing and familial memory to explore the lives of British Muslims who exist within a society that, whilst postcolonial, approaches the Muslim subject as 'other' and in need of state surveillance and perpetual suspicion.

Before moving on to my own analysis of the novel and its cross-period form, it is necessary to outline the historical period that Aboulela is using to frame her story. The legend of Imam Shamil, who is introduced to the narrative through Malak and her son Oz's possession of his sword, takes place on the 'contested ground' (Sanders et al. 1) of the Caucasus region, a mountainous terrain bordering Russia to the north, and Turkey and Iran to the south. The region, particularly Georgia, Armenia, and Albania in the north and Ossetia in the south, was originally exposed to Christianity under the influence of the Byzantine Empire (Petro 228). However, as the Byzantine Empire declined, Islam was introduced to the region

through the Persian and then the Ottoman Empires. By the seventeenth century, most of the people in the North Caucasus had converted to Islam (Petro 229). Because of its complex history, the Caucasus is known for its 'astonishing ethnic and linguistic diversity', and it is arguably more diverse than any other region on earth (Petro 228).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Imam Shamil attempted to unite his people, the Muslim tribes of the Northern Caucasus, against Russian imperial expansion (Hahn 31). Russia embarked on a process of 'advancing the frontier line' and 'extending their homogenizing legal and administrative codes to [the] peripheral regions' (Mostashari 2). They also attempted to modify the society of the Caucasus Muslims, imposing traditionally Russian state structures such as hereditary nobility and bonded peasants (Mostashari 3). Gordon M. Hahn argues that North Caucasian identity has been 'deeply intertwined with Islam as a symbol of the "otherness" to Christian Orthodox Russians' (31). Other scholars even suggest that it was the 'severity of Russian policies that caused the mountain people of the Caucasus to adopt Islam *en masse*' (Petro 228, italics in original). The Islam practised in the region is deeply influenced by pagan customs, particularly multi-deism and the worshipping of saints. It is therefore 'frowned upon' in many parts of the Muslim world as an aberration from the Prophet Muhammad's 'insistence on monotheism' (Hahn 99).

During his long military resistance against Russia, Imam Shamil was able to unite the different groups of the North Caucasus by preaching that Islam was superior to local tribal customs. He thereby unified clans and gave them 'a common, religiously inspired purpose', namely the creation of a theocracy to be run under sharia law (Petro 229). Because of the central importance of Islam to resistance against imperial aggression, Shamil's campaigning was deemed an act of jihad (Broxup 99; Mostashari 3). The aspects of the Caucasian War that Aboulela focuses on are the handing over of Imam Shamil's son Jamaleldin to the Russian tsar and the subsequent kidnapping of Anna, a Georgian princess (although Georgia had technically been annexed by Russia at this point). Shamil's young son was brought up with a Russian education and military training (Grant 38)[1] and Princess Anna experienced first-hand the hardships of the Muslims whose land was everyday under threat, resulting in an unlikely cross-cultural experience between an imperial aggressor and rural communities.

In an attempt to bring his son back to his homeland, Imam Shamil kidnapped two Georgian princesses, along with their children, attendants, and a French governess. However,

[1] There appears to be some disagreement regarding the exact age of Jameleldin when he was handed over to the Russian army. Whilst Bruce Grant claims that he was twelve years old at the time, a historical chronicle entitled 'The Shining of Daghestani Swords' written in the mid-1850s by Muhammad Tahir al-Qarakhi under the direct supervision of Imam Shamil puts him at the more vulnerable age of eight years old (38).

this move was detrimental to his reputation, the kidnapping of women and children being seen by his compatriots as 'beneath him' (Grant 37–8). Although two Russian princesses, Anna Chavchavadze and Varvara Orbeliani, were kidnapped in real life (Verderevsky iv), only Anna is kidnapped in Aboulela's fictional rendering of events. This seems to be because Aboulela wanted to focus intimately on the nuances of a cross-cultural relationship between a Russian and a Muslim, rather than on the relationships between the Russian aristocrats themselves.

The relationships that form in the historical chapters – between Anna and the Muslim tribes of the Caucasus, and between Jameleldin and the Russian aristocracy – serve to dramatise Aboulela's interest in cross-cultural encounters. In order to narrate this meeting of different cultures, Aboulela concurrently exposes the prejudicial attitude of the Russian aristocracy towards its colonised territories. One of these territories is Georgia, which was swallowed up by the Russian empire in 1801 and used as a 'launching pad' for invasion into the surrounding regions of the Caucasus (Rich 32). Anna and her husband David, it is revealed, are actually Georgian (49). Nevertheless, they had integrated into the Russian aristocracy and would therefore appear complicit in Russia's 'systematic policy of terror' towards the Islamic resistance (Rich 33). David is enthusiastic in his adherence to Russian authority, and disparages his and Anna's Georgian identity. He says to her, 'I've tried for years to loosen your attachment to it [their house in Tsinondali in Georgia] and convince you to move to Petersburg. You've chosen the edge of civilisation so you must accept its hazards' (49). By describing their location as the 'edge of civilisation', David uses imperialist language to refer not only to their distance from the imperial metropolis of St Petersburg, but also their closeness to the invading Muslim resistance.

David makes his views on the Muslim way of life clear, arguing that Russian conquest will be highly beneficial to the society of the Muslim tribes: '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' (49). David's imperialist standpoint locates Muslim communities in an uncivilised past and in need of Russia's supposedly progressive assistance, rather than simply as a different society with alternative customs and traditions. It is this broadly Western and imperialistic way of thinking that Aboulela encourages readers to critique through her narration of Anna's life with Shamil and his wives. She has previously expressed her frustration towards Britain's colonial, and postcolonial, conviction that 'West was best, Africa a mess' ('Cold' xi). This call for a general understanding of the universal applicability of Eurocentric principles is explored through Anna's interactions with her

imperialist husband and Shamil.

It is Anna's conversations with Shamil that help her to negotiate her complex identity of being Georgian under the rule of the Russian Empire. Anna tries to maintain the pretence of being truly loyal to Russia, lauding the imperial nation for the progress that it has supposedly brought to Georgia. However, Shamil encourages Anna's critical sentiment towards Russia and its tsar. Her anger towards the annexation of her country, she remembers, has not been well received:

> As a child her instinct had been repelled by the loss of the Georgian throne; Georgia distinctive, whole, should not be swallowed up. Her questions were at first received with indulgent sighs and then disapproval – it was unbecoming for a young princess to express dissatisfaction with the king's will. (183)

She confides in Shamil, explaining that her husband's acceptance of the annexation of Georgia has caused a rift between them, David often commenting that she is 'too Georgian, too traditional' (183). Reluctant to succumb to the authority of the Russian Empire and unsure about developing a relationship with the Muslim tribes of the Caucasus, Anna occupies a liminal space between the supposedly backward cultural identity of Georgian and the imperialist identity of the Russian aristocracy. By narrating the annexation of Georgia by an imperialist force from Anna's perspective, Aboulela tacitly critiques the 'clash of civilisations' binary that situates Muslim cultures as archaic and Western powers as progressive. Her discussion of Anna surpasses the nineteenth-century context and makes broader claims about power and oppression in society.

Aboulela portrays the act of crossing borders and cultures as being potentially productive, even when it occurs under strained circumstances. One of the consequences of Anna's kidnap, for example, is that it encourages her to be outwardly critical of the expansionist history of Russia. However, the acts of border crossing that Aboulela narrates are also shown to be deeply traumatic, particularly when Shamil's son Jameleldin is removed from his community to live within the Russian court. Struggling to adjust to the unfamiliar environment, he finds comfort in a nanny who 'reminded him of the peasants of the lowlands; she knew how to talk to him – not in the Avar language, but words didn't matter' (54). Everyday modes of communication, specifically language, are impossible for Jameleldin. It is because of this that he employs personal memories, such as those of peasants from the Caucasus, in order to sustain him in the imperial centre.

During his early days at the Russian court, he describes this unfamiliarity of language as an 'assault of newness' (54), embodying the emotional violence of being separated from his community. He finds that food is not food, and speech is not speech (54), exemplifying

the close connections between cultural memories of cuisines and language and the senses of hearing and tasting. The food is, in fact, food, and the speech is speech, but the tastes and sounds signify cultural norms and traditions that are unfamiliar and therefore have little meaning for Jameleldin. Cultural encounters in this sense are, therefore, traumatic rather than productive.

Jameleldin eventually acculturates to his environment, and understands that his cultural memories of the Caucasus must become personal and private, and cannot be shared amongst his new community of the Russian aristocracy. However, he struggles to relinquish memories of the Avar language. Whilst he is no longer situated in the community that speaks the language, the memories, or 'ghosts of a previous life' (56), of the language still form a crucial part of his identity. In his mind he often remembers the voice of an elderly man speaking in Avar. The man says: '*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*' (56, italics in original). Jameleldin, aware of the need to integrate himself amongst the other men at the royal court, thinks of the Avar language as: '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' (56). Although the trauma of separation dissipates during adulthood, Jameleldin's experience in the Russian court allows him to learn about Russian society, but in turn forces him to suppress his religious and cultural identity until it exists only as a memory.

When Jameleldin absent-mindedly recites an Avar phrase, the Russian officers ask him with 'good-natured curiosity' what language he is speaking. After telling them it is the Avar language, he notes 'bafflement in the eyes of the two officers and the expected drawing back' (126). Feeling uncomfortable around Jameleldin because of his outward display of a non-Russian identity, the officers 'draw back', signaling Jameleldin's perceived identity as changing from one who belongs to one who is 'othered'. Regretful and embarrassed, Jameleldin 'yearned towards the steady ground under their feet and their one-dimensional vision' (126). His repudiation of the Avar language signals new loyalties, loss of homeland and family, and a realisation that the Russian Empire and its sense of cultural superiority have affected his own views of Muslims. Jameleldin's cross-cultural encounter results in an inability to communicate with his cultural brethren, which is indicative of a fragmentation of the community from the individual. He not only drifts from his Muslim heritage over time, but is actively discouraged by figures in the Russian Empire from engaging with memories of his culture.

Although, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Aboulela's work does not generally constitute an act of 'writing back', I would argue that in *The Kindness of Enemies* Aboulela

challenges dominant historical and patriarchal narratives by using a female perspective. The specific narrative that she writes back to is Anna's recollection of events, published soon after the event. After Anna is returned to Russia – transferred from one male caregiver to another – she explains how the editor of a magazine titled *Kavkas* interviewed her on her experience of being captured and held prisoner (266). The real account, entitled *Captivity of Two Russian Princesses*, was written by E. A. Verderevsky and translated into English by H. S. Edwards. Aboulela recognises the existence of this text and cites it in her acknowledgements as a source that she consulted to write the novel. Significantly, the story was told in third person even though it was focalised from Anna's perspective. Anna's own voice was therefore not published, but was distanced through a third person narrative, transcribed by a male Russian writer, and then translated by an English author. Because Anna's story was retold by two male voices, it is difficult to know whether Anna felt able to tell the truth of her experience and, if she did, whether Verderevsky and then Edwards faithfully transcribed it.

In *Captivity of Two Russian Princesses*, there is a clear focus on how forms of dress dictated the relationship between the captors and the captives. Early on, the captured princesses express their frustration at having their dresses 'more or less torn' (38). Madame Drancy, perhaps due to her lower social status, appeared to have suffered far worse a fate, joining the princesses later on their journey 'exhausted, beaten, and almost without clothing' (56). This description portrays the captors as brutal and disrespectful of notions of female decency. Princess Anna, although treated with less brutality, describes herself in 'meagre clothing' (63), more specifically, a torn chemise (71). When Shamil asks to meet with her, she expresses how she is 'overcome with shame' at the 'costume she was obliged to wear' (70). Later offered a bag of clothes to choose from, Anna transforms: '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' (79). Wendy Lucas Castro explains the importance of dress in captivity narratives with a particular focus on narratives of English captivity by Native Americans. She argues that a state of dress or undress bestows certain power dynamics: '[u]nclothed, [the captives] were neither English nor Indian: there were no visual markers of status, which derived from the social cues associated with clothing' (107). Without clothing, the captives lacked obvious markers of 'social identity', and a return to clothing concurrently marked a return to civilisation (Castro 107). Lack of dress is therefore representative of potential assimilation into a supposedly inferior culture. Being dressed, particularly in clothes that resemble items found in the captor's culture, is a way to reinforce the power dynamic between the colonising force and the colonised or dissenting communities.

However, Aboulela uses Anna's first person narrative in *The Kindness of Enemies* to explore the role of captive women beyond notions of female propriety and clothing practices. Instead, she explores female bodily suffering and violence. The mother of a deceased newborn, Anna suffers from painful breasts that continue to produce milk long after it is needed (114), and endures the difficulty of menstruating in captivity (149). Aboulela emphasises the unjust facticity of how during war 'women's bodies […] serve as the battlefield on which male created aggressions are carried out' (Riley 1195). The women caught up in the violence of the Murid War find themselves in fear of their bodies being used as weapons against the opposing side. When Russian forces attacked the strongholds of the tribes, it was the men who fought and the women who 'fearing rape, covered their faces with their veils and jumped into the river' (31). The violation of their bodies by the enemy was a greater shame than death. When captured, Anna sees two men pulling and dragging the governess Madame Drancy, and cursing each other: '[a] cold understanding seeped through Anna; these two were fighting over Madame Drancy' (86). This highlights how women's bodies were used as rewards and commodities between men during war. Explaining to Anna the seriousness of her situation as a captive, Zeidat says:

> If the [ransom] 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 […] Already every day now one of his naibs approaches him with an offer to purchase you. (145)

In highlighting this continual fear of rape, Aboulela does not perpetuate a colonialist view of the Muslim tribes as uncivilised but rather infers that both the Russians and the Muslims of the Caucasus lived within patriarchal systems that viewed women's bodies as commodities to be traded, sold, and used. Although the threat of rape is ubiquitous, so too is the importance of sexual purity and monogamy. When Anna is told to write to the tsar begging for a ransom to be paid to Shamil, the latter tells her also to write to her husband informing him that she will be returned 'pure as the lilies, sheltered from all eyes like the gazelles of the desert' (123). Later, in a fit of rage, David claims that if Shamil 'makes my wife his slave then she is no longer my wife. She is not. I will renounce her' (227). Both of these examples show how a woman's value is dependent on her sexuality, and that ultimately her rape or assault by another man devalues her as her husband's property. By writing back to this historical text through an imaginative reconstruction of events, Aboulela is able to offer a female perspective that is unshackled from the constraints of nineteenth-century propriety.

Another way in which Aboulela draws the reader's attention to gendered issues is through narrating the perpetual control of women's bodies by men. By giving the wives

voices of their own, Aboulela opens up space for an Islamic and female perspective that is usually silenced under claims of an oppressive Islamic patriarchy. However, Aboulela's decision to illustrate the lives of Shamil's wives Zeidat, Chuanat, and Ameena and to shed light on their polygamous existence does not mean that she is uncritical of the patriarchal situation in which they live. For example, Anna notes that Ameena might only be sixteen or seventeen, '[n]ot more than child' (116). Initially looked after as one of Shamil's children, she 'matured and turned into a striking beauty' (119) and was soon taken by Shamil as his third wife. Disconcertingly, Chuanat teases her for crying for her mother (119), highlighting the youthfulness of Ameena as she was transformed from a daughter figure into a wife by male authority.

That said, Shamil is not shown to be brutal or unkind in his treatment of Ameena. When she admits she would rather be with a man closer to her own age, Shamil offers to divorce her (189). Anna's time spent with Shamil and his wives offers her a perspective on Islam that deviates from the prevailing nineteenth-century Russian belief that Muslims lived less 'civilised' lives. Although David is ultimately able to rescue his wife, her intimate interactions with Shamil and his family encourages Anna, and the reader, to criticise the colonialist assumption of non-white men lusting after European women. Anna's relatively positive experience resists the Orientalist stereotype of the savage native, and serves to question Russia's imperialist attitude towards Islam as 'an obstacle to be tolerated for now and obliterated in the future' (Mostashari 10).

Through her literary imagining of historical events, Aboulela is able to explore the personal aspects of these cross-cultural experiences. In using these first person narratives, particularly from the perspectives of Princess Anna and Jameleldin, she is able to dramatise the positive and negative aspects of Russian–Muslim relations in the nineteenth century. On a broader scale, Aboulela adopts a critical perspective on the structures of hegemony that existed at the time, particularly the Russian imperialist attitude towards its disempowered territories and the prevailing patriarchal traditions amongst both Muslim and Russian communities. It is this critical approach towards structures of oppression that connects the historical chapters with the modern ones, set in both Scotland and Khartoum in the present day. These oppressions are explored through British attitudes towards Muslims more generally, and in particular the attitude of state powers and institutions towards Muslims whom they deem 'suspicious'.

Shamil's sword becomes a recurring image throughout the present-day narrative's discussion of the true meaning of the term jihad. Out in their isolated farmhouse in Brechin (4), Oz (previously Osama), builds snowmen, an activity that would be deemed an

unremarkable, familiar exercise. He then takes Shamil's sword from where it is displayed on the wall, and swipes the heads off the snowmen. His mother is shocked, appalled, and worried what the neighbours might think, showing how a familiar and ordinary activity turns dangerous when the mock-beheading is enacted by someone with Oz's name, religious affiliation, and skin colour. Although Malak is aware of this danger and tells him to stop, Oz is reluctant to accept that a seemingly innocent activity in the snow could be read as symbolising something darker. This scene not only highlights the suspicion placed on Muslims amid quotidian activities, but also foregrounds the heightened awareness they must carry. An act that would otherwise be seen as the frivolous activity of a bored person becomes loaded with overtones of a threat of national security and the possibility of terrorists hiding in plain sight amongst the masses. Although Oz's fascination with the sword and with jihadi activity stems from his admiration of Shamil's Sufi interpretation of jihad in the early to mid-nineteenth century, he displays significant naivety towards the environment of suspicion that he lives in.

Oz views the efforts of Shamil and his followers to fight back against Russian expansion as a heroic interpretation of lesser jihad, or the physical struggle against Islam's adversaries. In a discussion between Oz and his mother Malak about the connotations of jihad, they disagree on how this striving can apply to the present day. A practising Sufi, Malak argues that true jihad is only ever greater jihad, or a personal and spiritual struggle: '[e]ver since 9/11, jihad has become synonymous with terrorism […] I blame the Wahhabis and the Salafists for this. Jihad is an internal and spiritual struggle' (8). She continues to argue 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' (9). In contrast, Oz argues that Sufis were not always peaceful, and that '[m]ost fighters against European Imperialism were Sufis. And Imam Shamil is a prime example' (9). Whilst Malak continues to assert that 'the horrible crimes of al-Qaeda' (9) do not represent true jihad, Oz argues that jihad is simply 'for getting us power over our enemies. Jihad is not something we should be ashamed of' (9). Oz develops his interest in jihad as a form of warfare by conducting research into historical understandings of the concept. However, he is soon arrested for downloading the al-Qaeda training manual from the US Justice Department website (101), even though he explains that it was for academic research. Later, he learns, a newspaper published an article about his arrest entitled '*The Stain of Al-Qaeda has Reached Scotland'* (286, italics in original), even though there was no evidence to convict him. Whether he is telling the truth or not, Aboulela does not divulge. Nevertheless, the extended period of time that Oz is held by the police under terrorist charges, and the hate mail that his mother receives after the accusatory

headlines, reveal a system that is deeply suspicious of Muslims. Without his visibly Muslim name Osama, a reader is left to wonder how determinedly the police would have pursued a conviction.

This is not to say that Aboulela portrays an entirely innocent character whose interest only lies in historical understandings of jihad. Her British Muslim characters struggle to consolidate a religious identity with a national one, particularly since they inhabit a society that calls for a zero-tolerance policy toward Muslims whose views may marginally deviate from established, and supposed, British values (Wintour n. pag.). This distinction between the 'good Muslim' and the 'bad Muslim', explains Mahmood Mamdani, was borne out of George W. Bush's post-9/11 discourse in which he enunciated a binary between Muslims who want to attack the West, and Muslims who are assimilated and peaceful. The problem with this distinction is that unless one actively proves to be a 'good Muslim', one is automatically presumed to be 'bad' (Mamdani 15), an expectation rarely afforded to other religious groups. In *The Kindness of Enemies*, the 'bad Muslim' stereotype is all too readily assigned to Oz.

It is clear that whilst Malak's understanding of jihad remains purely spiritual, Oz is more inclined towards a political interpretation. His reluctance to renounce the acts of Islamist groups distinguishes him from the 'ideal' British Muslim who 'subscribe[s] to a form of Islam that is palatable to Western thoughts and beliefs' (Qureshi 183). This pressure to prove Britishness while Muslim plagues Natasha's life in Aberdeen, and when suspicion falls on her during Oz's detention she thinks how performing a British identity as a Muslim is still not enough to render her beyond suspicion: 'all these actions somehow fell short of the complete irrevocable dissolution that was required' (6).

Oz, however, comes under particular pressure to rethink his Muslim identity in a way that goes beyond historical research and his mother's Sufi beliefs. This pressure comes from Muslim friends and acquaintances who adhere to more fundamentalist interpretations of Islam. After Oz is arrested, Natasha talks to one of his friends, a girl in a hijab whose name she does not know. The latter explains that there have been some incidents towards Muslim women at the same university. As an example, she tells Natasha of an incident of when a speaker, who is 'on some list or other' came to the university to give a lecture for the Muslim students. When the girl arrived she was told by the speaker to sit at the back with the other women. In her embarrassment and surprise, she left the lecture hall (207–8).

Oz also finds that his friends excoriate his mother because of her work as an actress. This job, they argue, is un-Islamic and especially unsuitable for a Muslim woman (207). While Oz has relatively relaxed views towards the role of Muslim women in public life, his friends' disapproval infiltrates his way of thinking and encourages a more traditional

approach. Whereas Malak is not Muslim enough for Oz's friend, she is too Muslim to avoid being profiled in her job. Speaking to Natasha, Malak lists the roles that she has taken on to Natasha: a witch in Macbeth, an auntie in *Bombay Barista*, a mother in the BBC show *Conan the Barbarian*, a wife of an Iranian ambassador in *Spooks*, as well as a viper in a Disney cartoon (4). From this inventory, it is clear that she is not only performing a gendered and somewhat secondary role – the auntie, the mother, the wife – but is also taking on the role of the untrustworthy foreigner – the witch who leads Macbeth astray, and the viper, a creature that symbolises the devil in biblical literature. These roles, once considered critically in light of Malak's identity as female and Muslim, show the dual pressures she is under and the struggle she undergoes to balance a Muslim and a British professional identity. Experiences such as Malak's in the workplace and Oz's in the university highlight the burden that falls upon Muslims in the post-9/11 world to choose either a 'bad Muslim' or 'good Muslim' identity, rather than one based on an amalgamation of both national and religious identities. Similarly to the binary between the imperialist Russians and the 'uncivilised' Caucasians that is challenged in the historical chapters, Aboulela highlights inequalities that prevail in British society.

When the police raid Oz's bedroom, the after-effects are particularly unsettling. Natasha notes that on the wall there is a poster of the Ka'ba, the Islamic pilgrimage centre in Mecca, and a *Spiderman* poster. This juxtaposition of the two loyalties, to Islam and to Western popular culture, invites the reader to consider Oz's difficult position as a young Muslim in Britain. Whilst his identity as both British and Muslim appears to function successfully, his arrest intimates the chance of a difficult future where suspicion of his loyalties could encourage him to gravitate towards an already available Islamist collective. This moment is additionally disconcerting for the reader as it highlights Oz's relative youth and impressionability, and therefore the potential for him to be negatively impacted in the future by such a traumatic experience. Ironically, he risks being pushed from the 'good Muslim' to the 'bad Muslim' by the British justice system rather than friends who may potentially become radicalised.

When Oz is released from police custody after twelve days of intensive questioning, Aboulela is careful not to exaggerate the effect this experience has had on him. Oz decides to leave the University of Aberdeen and continue his studies in Cardiff and, although this change may seem minor, his identity has been altered by the false accusations and his future is left uncertain. Nonetheless, as Natasha says, '[Oz] had struck me as being proud of Shamil, deeply loyal to Malak. Still, I knew that ache to belong. When you're young, it could drag you against your better judgement' (208). Although Oz's interest in jihad seems primarily

historical, his anger following his arrest may lead readers to wonder what deeper traumas this experience will cause. In other words, and to echo Rushdie's words in *The Satanic Verses* in reference to Saladin's transformation into an object of fear and terror, he may become the image that dominant British discourse constructs.

By narrating the Muslim tribes of the North Caucasus and their self-proclaimed jihad against the Russian Army alongside Oz's arrest for suspected terrorism, I argue that Aboulela is doing two things. Firstly, she depoliticises contemporary Anglo-American understandings of jihad as an act of anti-West aggression and instead encourages an awareness of the multiple meanings and interpretations of jihad, particularly its historical application against imperialist forces. Secondly, she criticises the British government's recent move to increase the 'regulation and governing of Muslim bodies at both a local and national government level' (Sian 183) through counter-terrorism programmes such as the Prevent strategy. She similarly lambasts the antagonist treatment of Muslims who show loyalty to their identities and heritages. Rather than simply encouraging the reader's empathy towards British Muslims, Aboulela exposes their unfair treatment in British society.

In the historical chapters, we learn that the most irksome aspect of David and Anna's relationship is their divided loyalties. Whilst David perceives Georgia as a country that borders on the uncivilised Anna finds it difficult to accept this and to integrate into Russian society. This trope of divided loyalties and hybrid identities is mirrored in the present-day chapters, particularly through the narratives of Malak and Natasha. Furthermore, both Anna and the twenty-first century characters find that their identities are divided along lines of power. The way they live their everyday lives is determined, respectively, by the unequal power relations between the Russians and the Georgians, and the British and its Muslim population.

Throughout the novel, Natasha is aware that her dark skin colour causes her to stand out as different from other Scottish people: '[h]ere I was conscious of being African in the Scottish countryside, of the need to justify my presence' (15). Because of her non-white identity, Natasha finds that she is consistently under suspicion in the post-9/11 environment. At the university where she works, she is expected to partake in an audit of her students, pinpointing the ones who she deems vulnerable to radicalisation. After Oz's arrest, her home is ransacked by the police and a senior colleague interrogates her as to why she did not write Oz's name on the list of vulnerable students. Rather than support her while she is under suspicion, her fellow academics are reluctant to be associated with her. All too readily, they succumb to the stereotype of the Muslim terrorist. Because of her Sudanese roots and her association with Oz and Malak, Natasha finds that she can never truly 'belong' in British

society, her name change from Hussein to Wilson ultimately proving pointless. Like Anna, a member of the Russian aristocracy but deeply loyal to Georgia, Natasha occupies the borderline between identities and finds that she does not quite belong in either. Oz similarly occupies this difficult space. Although he comfortably intertwines his identities of British and Muslim through the study of Shamil at the University of Aberdeen and by practising Sufism at home, he is still perceived as an 'outsider' by British authorities and becomes victim to aggressive anti-radicalisation legislation.

When Oz is accused of terrorist activities, his usually confident, professional mother is reduced to a stereotype of the unassimilated Muslim women, reminiscent of Aslam's characterisation of Kaukab in *Maps for Lost Lovers*. In Malak's state of shock, an accent 'crept in' and 'hurtled' her back to her mother tongue (77). Natasha thinks how:

> That wobble added years to her age, a slip-up as if she has been acting all the time, playing the role of a London actor, a glamorous woman of the world and now this was her real self. One of those who don't matter, who shuffle down the street, reeking of failure if not trouble, suspect and unwanted. (77)

In the face of aggressive state tactics such as Prevent and the omnipresence of Islamophobia after 9/11, Aboulela highlights how easy it is for a performed British identity to be shattered and an 'othered' one to be created. For both Malak and Natasha, Oz's arrest highlights the fragility of their identities as Muslim professionals. When Natasha's office and computers are searched by the police, she thinks '[e]very step climbed, every achievement, every recognition – all that hard work – had not taken me far enough, not truly redeemed me, not landed me on the safest shore' (167). Whilst Natasha may have literally arrived on a safe shore, she realises that she has not landed on the metaphorically safe shore of whiteness, and therefore Britishness.

For Natasha, the traumatic experience of Oz's arrest and the lack of support from her colleagues results in a desire to consolidate an identity. Her Westernised name and her professional success, she realises, will never allow her to truly be accepted as British. She decides to return to Khartoum, but finds that her strained relationship with her deceased father and her name change mean that she is no longer welcomed by her extended family (253). Her stepmother Safia even goes as far as to take Natasha to court to prove that she is no longer Muslim and should therefore have no right to her father's inheritance (279). Natasha explains, during the trial, that: 'I came [to Khartoum] so that I would not be an outcast, so that I would, even in a small way, faintly, marginally, tentatively, belong' (290). She finds, however, that returning to her former home leaves her with little sense of belonging, and this acts as a turning point that encourages Natasha to consolidate an identity

through religious rather than national affiliation.

Natasha and Malak attempt to deal with residual trauma of Oz's arrest by rethinking the ways in which they engage with Islam. Natasha goes to meet Malak at Dunnottar Castle, a ruined medieval fortress in Aberdeenshire that is rich with Scottish history. Natasha climbs the castle stairs and thinks of how Mary, Queen of Scots, must have visited, and how in 1652 'this was the one remaining place in Scotland in which a small garrison loyal to Charles II resisted Cromwell's army' (311). Here, the overthrow of the aristocracy by the Parliamentarians during the seventeenth-century Scottish campaign is evoked in order to draw judicious parallels between Britain's violent history and the British Muslim experience of maintaining faith and resisting prejudice in the diaspora. In this dramatic setting, looking out over the North Sea, Natasha spots Malak, dressed in a kaftan and turban, sitting on a Persian carpet recognisable from her home, reading the Qur'an (311). She tells Natasha that she has been travelling up and down the country, stopping each day to read a new section of the Qur'an and to pray (312). Struggling to understand Malak's venture, Natasha encouragingly says '[c]enturies ago, people in this very spot worshipped as you were worshipping just now'. To herself she thinks more sceptically '[a]nd centuries ago […] they also waged wars, resisted and rebelled around issues of faith' (313). Whilst Malak is able to practise her faith in the diaspora by finding spiritual motivation in historical places of worship such as Stonehenge (312), Natasha initially struggles to detach personal faith from political and social history.

Although the novel ends with a degree of pessimism toward the future relationship between Malak and Oz, it enables Natasha to reconsider her position as a Muslim in Britain. Natasha is under various pressures throughout the novel to engage with her Muslim identity on other people's terms. When returning to Khartoum to see her dying father, there is pressure from the extended family for her to marry, leave Britain, and return to her cultural and traditionally Islamic roots. In Britain, she feels the need to defend her name change from Hussein to Wilson in light of her university students asking her whether she is Muslim and therefore has an authentic voice. Within the institution she works, she is expected to prioritise her British identity over her Muslim identity by reporting students who she thinks have the potential to be radicalised. Having failed to pinpoint Oz, she finds herself under suspicion for collusion. By drawing on Shamil and her Sufi ancestors, it is Malak who is able to encourage Natasha to find a deeply personal way of practising Islam that is separate from her culture, ethnicity, and personal history. Mirroring the relationship between mentor Sheikh Jamel el-Din and student Imam Shamil, Natasha thinks, '[p]erhaps it was time to acknowledge that what I was after was spiritual. [Malak] was ready to be a guide and I would fight my

weakness in order to follow' (314). By travelling around the country reading the Qur'an and praying, Malak and Natasha are metaphorically claiming their place as Muslims in the British landscape.

Therefore, while the historical narrative encourages a sceptical approach towards contemporary Islamophobic legislation and narrow understandings of the term jihad, it also calls for a reconsideration of how Muslims engage with their post-migratory identities. Nash highlights how in Aboulela's previous fiction, she separates religion from culture and ultimately suggests that they do not need to be entwined. For example, in her 1999 novel *The Translator*, Scottish professor Rae moves from an academic understanding of Islam to a personal one when he converts for the sake of Sammar after falling in love with her. In *Minaret*, published in 2005, the protagonist Najwa rediscovers her faith within the multicultural community of Regent's Park Mosque in Central London. In the Muslim diaspora Aboulela's protagonists find, argues Nash, 'a religiosity disconnected from ethnicity and culture' (145). Indeed, Natasha Wilson's interest in Shamil appears to be primarily academic. She explains how she decided to submit a paper for a conference on the connections between Shamil's surrender to the Russians and modern-day Islamic terrorism and suicide bombers (310). Running parallel to her academic pursuit emerges a personal discovery, in which her understanding of Muslim resistance against oppressive forces morphs from abstract and academic to real and quotidian.

The way in which Aboulela approaches questions of religious and national identity, I would argue, is closely aligned with Stuart Hall's definition of cultural identity as not static but always changing, refusing to be 'fixed in some essentialized past' ('Cultural' 236). Both the historical and the contemporary narratives engage with the idea that individual identity is constantly in flux due to the 'continuous "play" of history, culture, and power' (Hall, 'Cultural' 236). The historical narrative directly engages with the power dynamics and shifting identities of those who are subject to the process of aggressive colonial expansion. The contemporary narrative, set in 2010, does not present a society under the control of a colonial power, but rather examines the subtle forms of postcolonial state and societal aggression against those whose are presumed to be radical Muslims. Through this back and forth between the modern day and the nineteenth century, Aboulela makes meaningful and critical connections between explicitly imperialist forms of aggression and today's post-9/11 era of suspicion toward Muslim citizens.

‘Could we have lived our lives ignoring politics?’: Imperialism and Global Violence in Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love*

Ahdaf Soueif was born in Cairo in 1950, and was educated in Egypt and England (Tageldin 84). She was awarded her B.A. in English Literature from the University of Cairo in 1971, and her M.A. in English and American literature at the American University of Cairo in 1973 (Nash 65). As an adult, she returned to England to undertake a doctorate in Linguistics, analysing metaphors in English poetry at Lancaster University (Chambers, *Muslim Eyes* 201). As well as being a fiction writer, Soueif has appeared in literary magazines, newspapers, and radio and television shows across the world (Nash 65). In 1983, her collection of short stories, *Aisha*, was shortlisted for the *Guardian* Fiction Prize (Chambers, ‘Soueif’ 246), and her first novel *In the Eye of the Sun* was published in 1992. This was followed by a collection of short stories entitled *Sandpiper*, published in 1996. *The Map of Love*, which came out in 1999, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize (Chambers, ‘Soueif’ 247).

Although collected stories from *Sandpiper* and *Aisha* were republished in *I Think of You* in 2007, Soueif has not produced any new fiction since the publication of *The Map of Love.* She has, however, produced a significant amount of non-fiction, such as a collection of social and political essays entitled *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground* (2004) and *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution* (2012). She is also the translator for Mourid Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah* (2005), and the editor of *Reflections on Islamic Art* (2011). She maintains a highly visible presence on the social media site Twitter, regularly engaging in discussions surrounding Middle Eastern politics. As of April 2017 she has tweeted over 26,000 times and amassed a following of over 44,000. Writing in August 2012, not long after the Egyptian presidential inauguration of Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party on 29 June (Alianak 86), Soueif explains the struggle of producing fiction at the height of the Arab Spring:

> Attempts at fiction right now would be too simple. The immediate truth is too glaring to allow a more subtle truth to take form. For reality has to take time to be processed, to transform into fiction. So it’s no use a story presenting itself, tempting, asking to be written, because another story will – in the next minute – come roaring over it, making the same demand. (‘Crisis’ n. pag.)

For Soueif, the desire to produce fiction has become overshadowed by the ongoing political and social turmoil of the Arab Spring. She explains that at this ‘time of crisis’, the time and

space needed for an author to process events, reflect on their significance, and reproduce them through fiction is difficult to obtain. For Soueif, fiction must be subtle and takes time to produce, something that is difficult during the political unrest of the Arab Spring ('Crisis' n. pag.). This sentiment expressed by Soueif is unsurprising given the sheer historical and political breadth that her last novel covers, and the substantial amount of research and reflection needed to write such an expansive book.

However, British Pakistani novelist Mohsin Hamid, author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, contradicts Soueif's claim, arguing that 'fiction […] instigates change. Fiction can say publicly what might otherwise appear unsayable, combating the coerced silence that is a favored weapon of those who have power' (Hamid and Prose n. pag.). For Hamid, fiction writing is an act of resistance and revolution in its own right rather than simply a reflection upon political events. Soueif's *The Map of Love* cannot comfortably be approached as a work devoid of political engagement. Although her structure of parallel narratives has not always been well received – Noha Hamdy describes the novel as a 'mongrel version of an Orientalist romance forcibly yoked to a postcolonial narrative' (186) – others have praised Soueif's ability to write a traditional romance novel, only to confound expectations through elements of 'imperial historiography' (Hassan 759). Amin Malak describes this novel as a work of 'revisionist metahistory' ('Colonial' 248) due to its interrogatory exploration into British colonialism and Egyptian nationalism, highlighting the close and complex relationship between fiction and history that permeates the novel.

Similarly to *The Kindness of Enemies*, *The Map of Love* engages with ideas of colonialism, state violence, history, and cross-cultural encounters. Using a wide range of artifacts and correspondences, such as letters, diary entries, paintings, tapestries, and clothes, the novel's late-twentieth century protagonist Amal al-Ghamrawi delves into the lives of her great-aunt Anna Winterbourne and great-uncle Sharif Basha, her early-twentieth-century ancestors. Two other central, but present-day, storylines run alongside this historical exploration into cross-cultural relations. One of these storylines involves Amal struggling with her daily life as a translator living alone in Cairo, her children having grown up and left. Disillusioned with her present and unsure about her future, Amal's genealogical quest causes her to retreat into the past to such an extent that the boundaries between the past and the present begin to blur, both consciously and unconsciously. For example, when uncovering information about a fraudulent letter written by Harry Boyle (British Agent and Consul General) to incite anti-Muslim sentiment in Egypt, Amal is desperate to 'rush back' to the past and tell Sharif (494). While reading an entry in Anna's diary, Amal narrates in a way that merges Anna's perspective with her own: 'As Anna lifts her eyes from the letter, I see

Mabrouka [the maid] come into the haramlek' (466). Here, Amal is not only reading *about* her family history, but has transported her imagination back in time and *within* this history, blurring the boundaries between past and present, reality and fantasy.

For Amal, tracing her family history becomes a way for her to avoid both her personal problems and larger political concerns. She thinks:

> 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. (234)

Amal eventually relinquishes the comfort of the past and engages with the problems of the present, namely economic reforms and the rising influence of Islamism in 1990s Egypt (Shehata 127), as well as the ongoing Israel–Palestine conflict. A family friend named 'Am Abu el-Ma'ati visits and explains to Amal that the people of her village Tawasi are struggling to keep the school open because the government suspects that the teachers are training the children to become terrorists (123–5). Gradually, because of incidents such as these, Amal undergoes a process of social and political awakening and decides to move back to the village to try and ease the clashes between the villagers and government officials. Running parallel to this is the story of Isabel Parkman and Amal's brother 'Omar. Their relationship mirrors that of Anna and Sharif eighty years earlier, but carries an 'eccentric temporality of incest' (Tageldin 93) as Isabel discovers that as a young man 'Omar was her mother's lover. The knowledge that he could potentially be her father lingers over their relationship, but when 'Omar refuses to take a DNA test, this question is ultimately left open (468).

In several of the previous novels I discussed, significant historical events are alluded to within contemporary narratives, but in *The Map of Love* the historical sections of the novel are narratives in themselves. There is also more discussion than in any of the other novels about the process of uncovering history, discovering stories, and tracing genealogy. Because of this, the novel not only functions as a work of historical fiction, but is conscious of the processes, and problems, of retrospection. The connection between the past and the present is more tenuous in *The Kindness of Enemies* than it is in *The Map of Love.* In *The Kindness of Enemies*, Aboulela uses real historical events to devise an imaginative narrative that offers a minority perspective on a crucial time in Muslim history. The connection between the past and the present is nebulous: Oz and Malak claim lineage with Imam Shamil through an unconfirmed family 'myth', and Natasha has a connection only through her research interests. The historical narrative runs parallel to the present-day narrative, but is only loosely stitched

together by these genealogical threads. The thematic connections of state violence and cross-cultural relations are for the characters and the reader to discover as the novel progresses.

In *The Map of Love*, Soueif aims to draw a veracious depiction of the era of British colonialism in Egypt, but her main characters are fictional. She does, however, scatter her narrative with real figures of British colonialism, such as Lord Cromer and Harry Boyle. In a letter to Anna's father-in-law Sir Charles, whose son Edward died on returning from the Anglo-Sudan War (1881–1899), Anna Winterbourne explains the difficulties of maintaining both Egyptian and English friendships:

> When I mentioned having been to the Opera with Madame Rushdi, Lord Cromer went quite stiff with disapproval and Harry Boyle took me aside afterwards and said to me 'You know she has turned Mohammedan?' as though that placed her outside the boundaries of polite society. (247)

Although a fictional encounter, Soueif is drawing attention to the kind of anti-Muslim discourse that circulated amongst the colonial elites in early twentieth-century Egypt. Egyptian society under British rule was highly segregated, and the British were reluctant to engage with any member of society who was not British, or to get involved in local Egyptian politics (Mak 54–55). Whilst the novel includes lengthy discussions between Sharif and his friends about both colonialism and Muslim fanaticism in Egypt, it also critically recalls the damage that colonialism has inflicted on Egypt. Soueif does this through conversations between Amal and her friends. Deena, a mathematics professor and political activist, claims that the British presence in Egypt 'froze our development: our move towards democracy, towards education, industrialisation, towards modernity' (223). By devising a narrative that places fictional characters within historical scenes and settings, Soueif is able to revisit the colonial period from both the empathetic standpoint of a British traveller and the critical standpoint of modern Egyptian communities. In doing this she employs a form of historical fiction writing that allows her to 'disturb and question the comfortable aspects of [...] previously held views of history' (Llewellyn and Heilmann, 'Hystorical' 139).

Noha Hamdy argues that the radical rethinking of history that the novel employs is rendered unsuccessful because of its Orientalist aspects. Orientalism, as famously considered by Edward Said's 1978 book of the same name, is an understanding of the Orient that 'has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world' (12). Therefore, it is a philosophy constructed by the Occident that divides the world into 'two unequal halves' (Said 12): the 'mysterious Orient' (Said 26) and the knowable Occident. By employing Orientalist techniques in the characterisation of Anna Winterbourne, one could argue that Soueif harks back to an obsolete understanding of Egyptian life.

Hamdy submits that *The Map of Love* consists of 'two synchronous yet opposing narrative paradigms: the Orientalist tale and its postcolonial counterpart' (185). Indeed, Anna's trip to Egypt was inspired by her visit to South Kensington to see the Orientalist paintings of John Frederick Lewis (1804–1876), a realist nineteenth-century painter who lived in Cairo from 1841 to 1851. His works are now housed in prominent art galleries in London such as the Tate and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Paintings such as 'The Harem' and 'The Siesta', both produced in 1876, depict intimate scenes in Egyptian harems of 'languid figures […] who are often given Western features' (*Tate* n. pag.). However, I would argue that Hamdy overstates the Orientalist aspect of the novel. She argues that:

> Anna's fascination [with Lewis's painting] does not only lie in an aesthetic appreciation of the painting; her delight is raised by the ontological specificity of the museum as a space of Western epistemological and visual superiority over the Islamic Orient where physical mobility, colonial fantasy, and the Western ethnographic gaze converge towards the privilege of slipping into and maintaining a viewer-focalizer position, thereby freezing the paintings in the discursive stasis of ekphrasis and anchoring the Orient in a fixture of harem tropes. Together they constitute a system of control in the production of narrative discourse. (190)

In other words, Anna's appreciation of the 'luminous beauty' of the paintings that 'caressed [her] very soul' (27) goes beyond pure aesthetic appreciation and instead places her as a voyeur from a position of Western dominance.

While this initially appears to be the case, there is more to be said about why Soueif uses the paintings of Frederick Lewis, rather than his contemporaries such as Frederick Goodall and David Roberts, to inspire Anna's travel to Egypt. In an article for *The Guardian*, Soueif explains that she found 'Lewis's work so attractive that it became a source of sustenance for the heroine' of *The Map of Love* ('Visions' n. pag.). Other painters of the time, such as William Holman Hunt, produced images of the East by 'making natives act out how he thinks natives should act' ('Visions' n. pag.). Lewis, in comparison, managed to convey 'a truth about the spirit of the place through his paintings' ('Visions' n. pag.).

Like Anna, Frederick Lewis spent about a decade living in Egypt, this act of 'going native' distinguishing him from contemporaneous Orientalist painters who only gained a fleeting glimpse of the country (Roberts 21). His contemporaries saw Lewis as having 'penetrated traditional culture and escaped the constraints of civilization by creating for himself a lifestyle and an abode that was comparable to traditional Ottoman domestic life' (Roberts 26). Similarly, Anna embraces the hybridity of her new cultural identity and adopts British dress for parties and functions (369) and Egyptian dress on an everyday basis (402).

Anna in fact begins visiting the South Kensington Museum as a way to escape from a tense domestic environment. On return from the Anglo-Sudan War, her husband Edward Winterbourne becomes ill, solemn, and unfriendly, pushing Anna into a state of loneliness. The reader never discovers what happened to Edward in the Sudan, but the novel hints that he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder after witnessing British brutality against the Sudanese population. This experience, combined with Sir Charles's occasional outbursts of anti-colonial sentiment, ignites in Anna a desire to experience firsthand and educate herself on Britain's role abroad, and to go beyond popular notions of Western superiority and paternalism. Like Lewis in 1841, Anna departs from British high society at the turn of the century and seeks out a genuine cross-cultural experience.

However, as Isra Ali argues, '[p]resence [...] did not always equate with authenticity'. Even Lewis's attempt at acculturation did not discourage him from painting scenes of an 'imagined Orient' (44) that would satisfy market demands for realist Oriental art (38–39). Furthermore, these paintings of 'inviting' women and 'violen[t]' men (I. Ali 40) were not only appreciated aesthetically, but also used by colonial powers for political purposes:

> The emphasis on the mistreatment of Muslim women by Muslim men lent the colonial project an air of nobility; rather than a grab for power and resources, the colonial enterprise could be recast as a progressive project that will advance the societies they invade and occupy and ultimately improve the standing of women. (I. Ali 34)

Evidently, Victorian Orientalist painters had the potential firstly, to influence public policy under the British Empire by adding to inaccurate representations of the East and, secondly, to turn cross-cultural experiences into profit-making endeavours. Whilst Soueif herself does not agree that Lewis's paintings had this effect, she does acknowledge the close relationship between art and politics. She argues that Thomas Seddon, William Holman Hunt's protégé, depicted Palestine as a desolate place in his paintings, thus helping to pave the way for Zionist settlement ('Visions' n. pag.). In contrast, Anna does not seek to benefit financially from her time in Egypt, nor to encourage inaccurate and damaging representations of the East. Although early in the novel Amal notices a self-conscious tone in Anna's diary entries, as if she is hoping to produce a publication from them (58), this ambition soon disintegrates as she becomes a member of Egyptian society rather than just an onlooker.

Hamdy's highly critical chapter goes on to argue that 'there remains an overpowering Victorian narrative sensibility about the novel which refashions itself as a "neo-self-orientalizing" tale deflecting its political motivations and narratorial agendas' (193). She is particularly scathing of the characterisation of Amal, asserting that Soueif's decision to litter

her speech with Arabic words 'pulls the story into the exotic, rather than the realistic' (189). I would suggest that Soueif's use of Arabic is emblematic of the novel's movement, not only through time, but across space. Although she has been criticised for writing in English due to a reluctance to relinquish Egypt's imperial past (Tageldin 88), the littering of Arabic words highlights the global interconnectedness of Britain, the US, and Egypt. Whilst Amal is metaphorically observing life in the harem, she does this from a position of both cultural understanding and genealogical inquisitiveness rather than as a means of profit or reproduction. Both Anna and Amal engage with unknown cultures and histories in order to reconsider their personal and political principles, and a smattering of Arabic is not enough to undermine this endeavour. Indeed, Soueif communicates a 'sense' of Egyptian Arabic, and how it is used within different social groups, through 'various forms of glossing that include echoing, assimilation through repetition, contextualization, and a glossary' (Moore, *Arab* 152). Although Isabel Parkman occasionally leans towards a damaging Orientalist rhetoric, such as suggesting the family history be adapted into a film for mass consumption (64), she eventually abandons this undertaking and becomes deeply involved with the Egyptian side of her family by having a child with 'Omar and learning Arabic. So while Orientalism is Soueif's way into the story of Anna and Sharif, it by no means remains a prominent theme throughout the novel.

Another way that Soueif evades the accusation of Orientalism is, like Aboulela, by employing a captivity narrative. Using white women American authors as an example, Christopher Castiglia explains that captivity narratives were often employed to sustain and augment essentialist understandings of race and gender. From the context of the United States, Castiglia explains how captivity narratives were used to justify imperial expansion by framing the Native American as savage and brutal, and the white women as vulnerable. Through these essentialisations, the white man emerged as heroic (2). Captivity narratives, therefore, served as 'powerful fables that stress the undesirability of race mixing' (Buss 2). However, these kind of narratives can be interpreted as liberating, particularly for women readers. Their state of captivity, and thus their position outside of the home and experience of cross-cultural interaction, offers a representation of women as strong and enduring hardship (Castiglia 4). Whether fictional or factual, captivity narratives enabled white women to question 'the discourses of knowledge and identity policed at/as the borders of white society' and to question racist and sexist binaries instigated by white men (Castiglia 6).

Both Aboulela and Soueif recast the captivity narratives by removing the female captive from a comfortable hierarchical structure of racial dominance and gendered submissiveness. For both Aboulela's Anna Chavchavadze and Soueif's Anna Winterbourne,

the experience of forced captivity leads them to the realisation that the weakness and vulnerability ascribed to them by white male discourse can be challenged and ultimately reversed. Furthermore, their understanding of whiteness as dominant in racial hierarchies is challenged as they integrate into an alternative society replete with unfamiliar traditions and domestic structures. By writing captivity narratives as minority writers and from the perspective of women, Aboulela and Soueif both use a traditionally imperialistic form to compose anti-colonial narratives. Whilst Anna Chavchavadze's captivity leads her to rethink her husband's anti-Muslim, pro-Russian imperialistic stance, Anna Winterbourne goes one step further by entirely renouncing her perceived racial dominance and integrating into Egyptian life, fully aware that her actions will result in estrangement from the white colonialists in Egypt.

Anna Winterbourne's move away from British society is a gradual process over the course of the novel. Early on, Anna refers to Lord Cromer as a kind of protector of white women against supposedly savage natives. When Anna is kidnapped, she asks Sharif if he is worried that news of the event will ever reach Cromer: 'I thought it might make an unpleasantness for you' (145). In this instance, she is aware of the power dynamic between the British colonialists and the native Egyptians, and knows that Cromer would attempt to protect her reputation as a white British woman. Her attitude towards Cromer changes during her relationship with her kidnapper Sharif. When Anna and Sharif announce to Lord Cromer the news of their engagement, he seems distressed by the situation and repeatedly tries to discuss the betrothal alone with Anna while excluding Sharif. In refusing to join Cromer in his assumption of white superiority in front of Sharif, Anna distances herself from Orientalist traditions. She does this partly by refusing to ask her fiancé to leave the room, and partly by refusing to speak in English, a language that Sharif has little understanding of. By insisting on speaking in French, she forces a cross-cultural discussion between the trio. Cromer, by insisting on speaking in English, continues to enforce a notion of British superiority. This difference between Anna and Cromer highlights the substantial move that Anna has made away from hierarchical and imperialist thinking.

Captivity narratives can be interpreted both as sustaining imperialist hierarchical thinking, and overturning the very same mode of thinking. By fictionalising British Egypt from a woman's standpoint, Soueif highlights the gender inequality inherent in the Victorian colonial context. Although Lord Cromer disapproves of Anna's marriage to Sharif because he sees an Egyptian man as inferior to a British woman, he is also aware that her marriage to, and sexual relations with, him will prevent her from ever re-entering British polite society. Similarly to Aboulela's Anna Chavchavadze, who is threatened with divorce if she is raped

by her kidnapper or his *naibs*, Anna Winterbourne's value is not only placed on her position in the colonial centre, but also on her sexual purity. Because of this, both women occupy a space of racial superiority and gender inferiority. On integrating into a non-white culture in Egypt, however, Anna's understanding of her position in this hierarchy changes. Through dialogic relationships with Egyptians, Anna is unable to maintain racial superiority due to being a minority in the community and bearing witness to life away from white male authority. Therefore, Anna's captivity and subsequent integration into Egyptian life results in the gradual development of critical thinking against empire. Whilst Anna's understanding of female purity does not subside on entering Egyptian society, it instead changes in practice. For example, she wears the veil and remains in the harem. Her understanding of strict codes surrounding women's bodies are not overturned, but rather translated across. This means that Anna's assumption that non-white societies are 'barbaric', in line with the colonial rhetoric that she would have been taught, is challenged once she is integrated into Egyptian society.

A particularly resonant moment that highlights Anna's act of crossing boundaries from British society into Egyptian is when she sees members of the British agency – 'Lord and Lady Chelsea, Lady Wolverton and Lady St Oswald together with the Honourable Sir Hedworth Lambton' (194) – at a train station on her way to Sinai. Unrecognisable in her veil, which becomes symbolic of a divide between herself and her British friends, they pass Anna without acknowledgement. She writes:

> *I felt at once the fear of being discovered and the strangeness of their sweeping by me without acknowledgement – but the oddest thing of all was that I suddenly saw them as bright, exotic creatures, walking in a kind of magical space, oblivious to all around them; at ease, chattering to each other as though they were out for a stroll in the park, while the people, pushed aside, watched and waited for them to pass.* (194–195, italics in original)

Although Anna is not quite expressing active criticism of the British presence in Egypt at this point, she begins to understand the enormity of the British presence. In this scene she switches places, becoming the watcher rather than watched, and the reader therefore follows her on a journey from Western aristocrat to Egyptian colonised subject. Although encouraged to visit Egypt by an Orientalist understanding of the country inspired by white male artists, Anna's experience of captivity allows her to become critical of British imperialism and gradually to speak out against it. Both Anna Chavchavadze and Anna Winterbourne, therefore, become conscious of how a long history of white male superiority has been entrenched in their understanding of both female and non-white identities. Each of them ultimately embarks on a path of rethinking this history.

Soueif further champions both a female and non-white perspective by writing a narrative that exemplifies the voices of Egyptian women in contrast with Frederick Lewis's static women in 'The Harem'. In 'The Harem', the women laze about erotically and pointlessly. The Egyptian harem, Inderpal Grewal explains, signified a space to be penetrated by colonial men and to be criticised for its backwardness by colonial women (82). Grewal goes on to argue that:

> While for the European male, the harem symbolized mystery and allure as well as female subservience and unfreedom, for the English-women [*sic*] the harem became an example of the consequence of the denial of freedom to women as well as the problem of the inferior races [...] [W]omen travelers often compared Asian and African women's lives to theirs and thought that they were free in comparison, even though they were traveling to escape their own circumscribed lives. (82)

Soueif depicts there being little difference between life in the Egyptian harem and women's everyday circumstances in Victorian Britain, an era well-known for upholding distinct and constrained gender roles. Although Anna travels to Egypt based on an Orientalist understanding of the country, her perspective on the Egyptian harem soon departs from traditional imperialist understandings.

Upon entering Egyptian society, Anna meets several women who have chosen life in Egypt over life in Europe, such as Madame Richard, the widow of a French engineer, who decided to remain in Egypt after his death (236) and Eugénie le Brun, the wife of a Turkish pasha and a Muslim convert (237). She also discovers, much to her admiration, that some women actively engage in the social and political issues surrounding women in Egypt. Zeinab Fawwaz, for example, publishes articles on the 'woman question' and has written a book about 'ladies of note' (237). Because of her integration into the harem, Anna begins to rethink historical, and primarily white and male, representations of Eastern women: '*I found the company and conversation most pleasing and quite contrary to the prevailing view of the life of the harem being one of indolence and torpor'* (237, italics in original).

Furthermore, the novel is punctuated by diary entries of Sharif's sister Layla al-Baroudi, offering not only an alternative perspective on the Eastern harem but the voice of someone within it. She writes:

> Could we have lived our lives ignoring politics? The Occupation [of Palestine] determined the crops that the fallah [agricultural labourer] planted, it stood in the face of every industrial project, it prevented us from establishing our own financial institutions, it hampered our wishes for education, it censored what could be published, it deprived us of a voice in the Ottoman parliament, it dictated what jobs

> our men could hold and it held back the emancipation of our women. […] And with every year that passed we saw our place in the train of modern nations receding (472)

A far cry from historical and artistic representations of Egyptian women in the harem as lazy and ignorant, Soueif writes Layla as a well-educated, astute character who is well aware of the problems of British colonialism in Egypt.

In this section, I now want to move away from debates about the Orientalist aspects of *The Map of Love* and instead draw attention to how Soueif, similarly to Aboulela, emphasises a time in history that is significant when thinking about the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. The novel is imbued with historical references and real political figures, and Soueif chooses to include the 1906 Denshawai Incident in the novel. Although the characters are not present at the event – being of an elite class rather than part of the *fellaheen* – Soueif shows that it causes ripples throughout Egyptian society. On 13 June 1906, a group of British officers led by Major Pine-Coffin entered the village of Denshawai to go pigeon shooting. When a fire began on a threshing floor in the village, the villagers attempted to remove the guns from the officers. Chaos ensued, and the soldiers were mobbed by the villagers. One of the officers tried to escape and later died of sunstroke and concussion; and Pine-Coffin had his left arm broken (Luke 278–9). Lord Cromer came down hard on the villagers. Four men were sentenced to death, nine were given penal servitude, three were sentenced to prison as well as receiving lashes, and five were given lashes (Luke 279). Although Cromer used the Denshawai incident to reaffirm British power through these punishments, it in fact had the opposite effect and encouraged support in Britain, Egypt, and elsewhere for an Egyptian nationalist movement (Luke 284).

This example of British brutality against imperial subjects was widely depicted in Egyptian literature after 1906. Two poems were published almost immediately after: *The Denshawai Event* by Hafiz Ibrahim and *Denshawai's Anniversary* by Ahmad Shawqi (Salama 163). Mahmud Tahir Haqqi's short novel, roughly translated as *The Maiden of Dinshway*, was published in 1906, and some argue that is was the first politicised work of literature in Arabic (Salama 175). Narrating the incident from the perspective of the villagers, it shows the British judges as arrogant, laughable, and gratuitously cruel, and the Egyptian prosecutor Ibrahim al-Hilbawi as a sycophantic, self-serving traitor. The novel ends with a sardonic request: 'Don't forget, Dinshway, to tell your children in the future generations about your afflictions, so that they can learn how civilized the twentieth century can be under British domination!' (Haqqi 48).

Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw also wrote about the shocking event in his 'Preface to Politicians' in *John Bull's Other Island*. He did this in order to 'rally world

opinion against the abuses of Empire', particularly British imperialism in Ireland and across the globe (Salama 182). Although Shaw admits that his identity as an Irishman had resulted in an 'implacable hostility to English domination' (63), he inveighs against the cruelty of the British response at Denshawai. In particular, he highlights the absurd notion that the incident was premeditated 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', according to the foreign secretary at the time, Sir Edward Grey (Shaw 62). Twenty-four years later, he would also condemn the British ability to display an 'unusual combination of mean spite with hyperbolic violence' by ordering Indian men to crawl past government buildings, referring to the 1919 Jallianwala Massacre, discussed in depth in Chapter Two.

Although being mainly employed for anti-imperialist rhetoric, the incident was also used as Nazi propaganda during the Second World War. This interpretation of the incident is not mentioned in Mohammad R. Salama's discussion of Denshawai in literature and popular culture. German poet Peter Huchel translated and adapted Shaw's text into a radio play, which was broadcast in Germany in 1940 (Parker, 'Huchel' 352). By using this tragic event in Egypt's history, Nazi officials produced propaganda aimed at encouraging the general population to view Britain, particularly its ruling classes, as the enemy (Parker, 'Radio Work' 131). Ironically, a text that drew attention to the brutality of British military officials was then appropriated and disseminated by one of the most brutal regimes in history. The many examples of literary and media adaptations of the event show how significant it was not just at the time, but also many years later as a means for denigrating imperialist regimes.

Although Salama offers a lengthy discussion of the Denshawai Incident itself, as well as a short discussion of Soueif's use of the event, little has been written on how and why Soueif uses the event, perhaps due to the novel's length and rich historical tapestry. Salama is more critical of Soueif's use of the event than he is towards the other writers mentioned above (Ibrahim, Shawqi, Haqqi, and Shaw). He claims that *The Map of Love* 'opens up a literary space that questions memory and forgetting', but is critical of her representation of pashas (high ranking officials in the Ottoman Empire) as being 'sympathetic [and] ethical' in contrast to the barbaric British (186). This sympathy towards the Ottoman elite and dislike of the British means that 'the novel's attempt at historical redemption is based on the false assumption that the English occupation shattered the Islamic past of Egypt' (186). In reality, he argues, the pashas were guilty of 'much barbarism' too (186). When the news of the incident arrives at the al-Baroudi household, the party is devastated and shocked by what has happened at Denshawai. But Salama asks: 'Which class is Soueif's novel redeeming, the

aristocrats or the [fellaheen]?' (187). Although Soueif's use of history is clear, what is not clear is exactly *whose* history Soueif is attempting to imagine through her novel. What is easily apparent, though, is that the novel is an act of 'postcolonial memory' (Salama 187). By imagining the Denshawai Incident through fiction and from the perspective of the anti-British Egyptian intelligentsia, Soueif is reviving the incident in the English-speaking imagination, encouraging a process of remembering and revisiting rather than forgetting.

In *The Map of Love*, Soueif's use of historical references means that she engages directly in an act of writing back against white, male, European hegemony. Edward Said describes Cromer's attitude towards 'Orientals' as homogenising (38), and his perspective of them as inherently different from Europeans (39). Egypt, and the East more generally, was seen by Orientalists such as Lord Cromer as the 'weak partner' in a binary created between the East and the West (40). In the parliamentary papers that detailed the 1906 Denshawai Incident, Lord Cromer writes, 'the fact that the officers were attacked and brutally maltreated when they had been deprived of their guns and were consequently defenceless, shows a very hostile and determined spirit on the part of the villagers' (*Correspondence* 6). In his 1908 book *Modern Egypt*, he does not mention the incident at all. Author Douglas Sladen went as far as to write, in *Egypt and the English* (1908), that 'When one is in the low parts of Cairo […] one is ordinarily safe from molestation unless fanaticism is aroused or a deliberate trap is laid by evil-doers as at Denshawai' (25). For him, the attack on the British officers was not just a sudden outbreak of violence, but rather a premeditated plan laid out by a group of anti-imperial and malevolent villagers. Sladen even goes as far as to argue that the Egyptian people would not have expressed such anger towards the British after Denshawai if it were not for one man, Ahmad Hilmi. Hilmi was an economist and politician, and he wrote for an Arabic daily newspaper called *Al Liwa*. In this newspaper, Sladen argues, Hilmi incited anger about Denshawai by claiming that a significant amount of correspondence regarding the event had been received. These correspondences, Sladen claims, did not exist and were rather 'concocted in the office by this man' (149). Almost unbelievably, he suggests that Egyptian discontent regarding Denshawai was non-existent, and that this anger towards such brutality was only felt by one, supposedly conniving and devious, man.

Although just two examples of white male writing about Egypt's experience of British rule, Sladen and Cromer embody the Eurocentric and vitriolic British attitude towards Egypt and its citizens. Soueif is able to write back to this discourse in *The Map of Love* by embedding in the narrative real historical characters that function in both Anna and Sharif's circles. Douglas Sladen appears briefly as a member of the British party with whom Anna associates with in the early days of her visit to Egypt (96). She listens to Sladen and the other

men discuss Egyptian politics and wishes she could 'whip out [her] journal and take notes' but feels that it would be inappropriate. Instead, she decides to sketch the scene and include the drawing in her letter to Sir Charles (96). Although supposedly not taking notes, Anna is able to sum up the conversation in detail and highlight the views of Sladen and Harry Boyle: 'it would take generations before the Natives were fit to rule themselves as they had neither integrity nor moral fibre, being too long accustomed to foreign rule' (99). Observing rather than participating, Anna is shown as functioning in British colonial circles but relegated to the sidelines due to her gender and lack of direct involvement in British rule.

This early scene allows space for colonial voices and as Anna assimilates into Egyptian life these voices are overtaken by Egyptian ones. After news of the Denshawai Incident spreads, we witness a scene in which Anna, Sharif, and various intellectuals and members of the ruling class express their sadness at what has occurred. Significantly, Ahmad Hilmi, whom Sladen slanders in his book, is present at the scene. He says, 'I have filed my report for *al-Liwa* […] I recorded the bare facts and begged readers to excuse me any further description' (427). Soueif's use of 'bare facts' to describe Hilmi's report for the Arabic newspaper is a way for her to redeem his reputation in light of Sladen's account. More importantly, it is a way for her to speak directly against white male hegemony and to offer Egyptians a voice long after the British have left. In itself, the proclamation of 'bare facts' functions in direct opposition to the assumption that the colonial powers were the purveyors of historical truth and accuracy.

Whilst Soueif's use of the Denshawai Incident operates as an exercise in postcolonial memory, I would argue that it also says something important about, first, gender and women's voices and, second, contemporary state violence. It is significant that it was exclusively men, before Soueif's novel was published, that wrote the previous literary explorations of Denshawai. By including the incident in her text, Soueif is exploring a specifically female experience, and she does this through her protagonist Anna. The incident proves to be a turning point for Anna, accelerating her ongoing acculturation into Egyptian nationalist circles and move away from British colonialism. Her diary entries show a very different perspective on the incident compared to figures such as Cromer. For example, 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' (424). She then explains that the officers at Denshawai did not heed the villagers' request to shoot at a distance from the villagers' homes, and disputes claims that the attack on the officers was predetermined (425). This does not only show Anna's distance from the colonisers in terms of this event alone, but builds a picture of her

ongoing disillusionment with British rule. She expresses concern that this incident will herald the beginning of a revolution, something that was predicted in the 'false and wicked letter' (426). This letter refers to the one written by Harry Boyle impersonating a disgruntled Egyptian and claiming that a revolution was being planned. Mr Barrington, Anna Winterbourne, and Sharif all believe that the letter is a forgery, and indeed in real life it was exposed to be false in a book written by Harry Boyle's wife, Clara, entitled *A Servant of the Empire*. Any naivety that Anna possessed about the role of the British in Egypt, particularly their supposed philanthropic aims of better education and public services, is dissolved when she begins to comprehend the systematic and ongoing violence that the British inflict upon Egyptian citizens under the guise of a 'civilising' mission. For Anna, moving from Britain to Egypt not only signifies a movement across cultural borders, but a movement from a silent, apolitical life to one of activism, a development that contradicts assumptions of women in the Middle East as silenced and cloistered. By rejecting the paternalistic structures of colonialism, she becomes both critical of Empire and of the demand that women stay out of politics.

Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewelyn touch upon this aspect of the novel in their book *Neo-Victorianism*, arguing that 'in the process of enculturation Anna thus moves from the Orientalist observer, adventurer, and travel writer to the politically committed nationalist-feminist journalist' (104). Anna's confidence in discussing and debating politics increases in parallel with her anti-colonial and nationalistic sentiment, showing the importance that incidents such as Denshawai had on perceptions of the British in Egypt. Nonetheless, the significance of Denshawai does not end with the rise of Egyptian nationalism or the need to maintain postcolonial memory. By exploring history alongside discussions of the Israel/Palestine conflict in the contemporary chapters, Soueif draws attention to the connections between early twentieth-century colonialism and the present-day conflict. By encouraging a reader to make these associations, Soueif is able to upbraid what she sees as present-day imperialism made palatable by the US, Britain, and Western media outlets.

Although no part of the novel is set in Palestine, the Israel/Palestine conflict haunts both the historical and contemporary chapters. As well as becoming more conscious of British injustices against the Egyptians, Anna writes to Sir Charles and explains her fears that the activities of the Jewish settlers 'are bound to cause a rift between the Jews on the one hand and the Christians and Moslems on the other'. (448) She further states that the Palestine Office in Jaffa is 'really a colonial office organising the purchase of land which from the day of its purchase is never to be allowed to pass into non-Jewish hands' (448). Previously ignorant of the growing problem in Palestine, Anna becomes aware of Zionism as a colonial enterprise gradually dispossessing the Palestinians of their land. Furthermore, Sharif and his

friend Shukri Bey are critical of US involvement with the Zionist project, citing a meeting held in Milwaukee that began the process of collecting 'contributions from Jews in all countries to buy Palestine from the Sultan' (316). Shukri Bey, who sees the settlers as colluding with the US and segregating themselves from everyday Arab life, asks: 'What are they doing in the midst of us?' (316). Although none of the historical characters are certain of how the situation in Palestine will develop, there is awareness of the injustice of settlement on Arab land.

This sense of injustice continues into the modern-day chapters. Although Amal explains that her mother is from Palestine (117), she feels little connection with this aspect of her past. Wishing for a tangible connection to this past, she thinks: 'I wish [my mother] had left me something; a letter, perhaps, written on a quiet evening […] A letter that I would read when I was older, and more able to understand' (119). Lacking substantial archival material from her mother, Amal must retreat into the past and the life of Anna Winterbourne in order to engage with the current crisis in Palestine. By adopting a retrospective position and reading about Anna's gradual development from apolitical to politically active, Amal becomes stronger in her convictions. When Tareq Bey, a love interest from her past, tries to discuss why they did not ever marry, she shows her disappointment with the man he has become: 'You're the one who's thinking of doing business with the Israelis'. He replies with 'forget about the Israelis […] I'm talking personal', to which she responds: 'the personal is the political' (338). Although aware that she is causing a rift between herself and Tareq, she refuses to be relegated to the 'private' sphere any longer.

Whilst the connection between Denshawai, Palestine, and colonial violence is not made explicit in the novel, Soueif's views on the situation are made clear in her non-fiction. In her collection of essays *Mezzeterra*, she shows how discourse about the assumed inalienable right of Israeli Zionists to Palestinian land has always been expressed in colonialist, anti-Islam rhetoric. The British Foreign Office, she writes, felt that Israel would 'provide a civilised bulwark against the barbarian hordes of Islam' at the end of the nineteenth century. Today's neoliberals in the US government similarly justify their connections with Israel through the need to maintain a united front against 'the "uncivilised" part of the world', namely Muslim countries in the Middle East (*Mezzeterra* 129). Although colonialism has been largely eradicated and condemned around the globe, the Israeli occupation of Palestine has been able to continue with little protest from Western powers.

Soueif explains that 'you have this project that continues and that continues publicly, overtly, massively in the face of a global discourse that is set against it – and is somehow powerless to stop it' (Rooney 481). By writing about the Denshawai Incident and other

examples of British brutality towards Egyptians, often Muslims, Soueif highlights the importance of remembering colonial atrocities long after they have happened. However, she is also highlighting contemporary acts of colonial violence perpetuated through a US-funded, highly militarised Israel. The problems in Palestine, she argues, are not just significant for the region, but for the global Muslim community. She says, 'what is happening in Palestine does not just affect Palestinians, it affects the Arab world, and it affects the Muslim community everywhere in the world' (482). Like Denshawai, the violence against the Palestinians is framed as another example of colonial violence against Arab, Muslim lives.

In this chapter I explored how Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela adopt narratives of family lineage and historical research in order to interrogate the relationship between imperialist regimes and present-day instances of culture crossing and violence in a globalised world. *The Kindness of Enemies*, I show, uses a historical narrative to argue for cross-cultural understanding and to expose the problems with contemporary multiculturalism in Britain. The twenty-first century setting that the characters occupy displays a supposedly optimistic multicultural society. Natasha is a successful academic, her friend Malak works in television, and Malak's son Oz is a top student at a British university. Under the surface, their lives are tainted with suspicion and stereotypes. The connection between the historical chapters and the contemporary ones is not made explicit, but I argue that Aboulela employs a narrative of the Russian empire to draw connections between colonial forms of violence and present-day suspicion of Muslims. Most importantly, she highlights the need for cross-cultural relations, but simultaneously implies that there are limitations to what the individual can achieve when living within regimes that allow inequalities between Russians and their annexed people, and between Britain and its Muslim population.

The Map of Love similarly explores cross-cultural relationships through a focus on intimate and familial relationships. However, Soueif's novel is less optimistic than Aboulela's about the potential of cross-cultural relationships. In a powerful act of anti-imperialism, Anna Winterbourne falls in love with and marries Sharif, only for him to be murdered while their marriage is still young. Coming full circle, the end of the novel suggests that 'Omar, who has a child with the American Isabel Parkman, has been murdered. Cross-cultural relationships, she shows, are tainted by politics and therefore violence. On a broader scale, Soueif employs a narrative of British brutality in colonial Egypt at Denshawai at once to examine the past and the atrocities that colonial powers committed under a guise of the civilising mission, and the future, at the human rights violations and mutual violence occurring between Israel and the people of the Palestinian territories. It is because of this far-reaching scope that I chose *The Map of Love* as my final novel to analyse, as it poses

questions about the future of cross-cultural encounters that can apply across many contexts: how much of an impact can cross-cultural relationships really have in the face of political turmoil? And what is the future of the global *ummah* if countries such as Britain and the US continue to support countries such as Israel, whose occupation of Palestine is reminiscent of the empires of the nineteenth century? Through narratives that combine both imperial history and present-day politics through genealogical quests, *The Kindness of Enemies* and *The Map of Love* highlight the importance of looking back to the past in order to make sense of the present.

Conclusion

In my introduction, I quoted Hayden White as saying 'the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other' (121). Indeed, as historical documents can offer alternative perspectives on historical events, so can novels. Both the historical document and the work of fiction are subjective interpretations of the world, and whilst the historical document aims for an objective, factual truth, the novel searches for an imaginative truth based on experience. The novels that I have discussed, whilst contemporary, show how historical events and concerns remain integral to how a Muslim may understand his or her identity in the Western world.

British colonial violence is a recurring concern throughout the novels that I discuss, and the impact that this oppressive hegemony had on Commonwealth subjects is portrayed as significant and enduring. Evidence of colonial attitudes being maintained in a postcolonial setting is abundant throughout the novels. This is evident, to offer two examples, when a murder investigation leads to the arrest of primarily black and Asian citizens in *The Satanic Verses*, and when Gabor embarks on a quasi-scientific, colonial-style pursuit of Muntaha as a hyper-sexualised and exotic object in *The Road From Damascus*. Colonial attitudes are characterised as an aspect of British life that hinder the development of sincere and successful multiculturalism. These kinds of incidents are shown as being so ubiquitous in British society that they become a major part of how Muslim identities are formed and understood.

Histories other than colonial are alluded to in the texts I discuss, such as personal histories of post-Second World War migration from the Commonwealth, race relations and protests of the 1980s, and 9/11. By engaging with these globally significant events, the texts, when approached as a collective, offer a comprehensive look at the changing social and cultural makeup of Britain, and cast a critical eye on a British understanding of its national identity as primarily white and traditionally Christian. The novels also allude to historical eras and events, I argue, to counteract the growing sense of colonial nostalgia in Britain. Alternative instances of historical truth are therefore interjected into the historical record through the novel form. This is not to say that history is only used to foreground the negative aspects of life in Britain for minority ethnic Muslims. Aboulela and Soueif, for example, narrate instances of cross-cultural encounters to demonstrate the potential that the individual has to form successful relationships with members of other cultures in the face of imperialism and state violence.

History and memory are closely entwined, and it is not easy to separate the two, particularly if we approach history as subjective like memory. Personal memories may be

subject to ‘memory distortion’ (Fischbach and Coyle x), or the changing of recollections over time, and the veracity of cultural memory is exposed to the subjective comprehension of those who impart such memories to others. Personal and familial memories, such as the torture of Marwan and Faris in *The Road From Damascus* and the exile of Shamas and Kaukab from Pakistan in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, are shown to be crucial to how the migrant characters are able to interact with others and build a future in their everyday lives in Britain. These traumatic memories, and the ‘disorienting’ act of migration itself, to echo Esra Santesso, often function as a way for the present-day characters to either engage in a nostalgic recollection of a homeland and a rejection of British life, seen in Aslam’s Kaukab and Rushdie’s Hind Sufyan, or as a memory that allows them to separate their past from their new future in the West, as seen in Yassin-Kassab’s Muntaha and Aboulela’s Natasha.

The novels show how cultural memory is important to the Muslim experience in Britain, and is often portrayed as being in direct contradiction to British collective memory. This form of memory is often shown as leaning towards narratives of British military dominance or of an infantilised, ineffectual East. When leaving his shift at the restaurant where he works in Trafalgar Square, Samad in *White Teeth* is faced with a statue of the man who ordered the execution of his great-grandfather Mangal Pande. Built in stone and placed in the centre of the multicultural metropolis, it emits a sense of permanency and longevity, and serves as a constant reminder of Britain’s brutal imperial past. Most importantly, it’s prominent position functions as a reminder that Britain approaches its actions in India as right and moral, turning a blind eye to the lives that were negatively affected. When opportunities for genuine multicultural encounters do occur, such as when Samad tries to teach Poppy about Bangladesh, they prove brief and unsuccessful.

Pande is represented in historical records and educational resources as desperate and weak, another example of British historiography encouraging a particular collective, national memory. In *Brick Lane*, Chanu teaches his children the poetry of Tagore and is frustrated by how the British education system represents Bangladesh as impoverished and plagued with natural disasters. Amrit Wilson explains the problem with the British education system:

> [The problem is its] essentially ethnocentric curriculum, its apathy, its built-in attitude that Western culture is the only culture and its pervasive mockery of people who are “different”. It is a system insidious but extremely powerful, where pupils may end up learning quite a lot about the way of life in ancient Rome and Greece but nothing about the way of life of their fellow pupils who are black. (96)

The discrepancies between cultural and collectives memories therefore encourage feelings of alienation amongst black and Asian communities in Britain. By employing these memories,

the authors I discuss offer narratives that contest British history and collective memory. Ahdaf Soueif, for example, imagines the Denshawai affair in Egypt through the eyes of the Egyptians and of Anna, a reformed Orientalist. By doing this, the novel interjects into British collective memory of its colonial past and insists on alternative and overlooked perspectives, something that I argue is shown as integral to an improved multiculturalism that acknowledges minority voices and histories.

Through my approach to the novels discussed, it becomes evident that history and memory play a significant role in how the novels' Muslim characters understand their identities in Britain. History and memory, however, do not function independently from other concerns. Class, for example, proves to be of significant importance to the characters of *Brick Lane* and *Maps for Lost Lovers* in particular, an aspect that I draw upon but that is discussed in much greater depth in Rehana Ahmed's monograph *Writing British Muslims*. Gender also proves to be a frequently intersecting theme across the novels, with migrant experiences often proving to differ for female characters. Kaukab in *Maps for Lost Lovers* and Hind in *The Satanic Verses*, for example, see their migrant experience as offering them very little. Their role within the home continues as it did in Pakistan and Bangladesh, respectively, and the two women are faced with the added challenges of racial hostilities, and their children becoming unrecognisable through their integration into Western life.

More optimistic representations of women's experiences can be seen in *Brick Lane* and *The Kindness of Enemies*. In the former, Nazneen ends her unhappy marriage by refusing to return to Bangladesh, and looks forward to a liberated future in Britain with her daughters. Natasha in *The Kindness of Enemies* finds that she no longer feels at home in Khartoum and is frustrated by Islamophobic hostility in her workplace, so finds comfort in embarking on a renewed faith in Islam. Characters like Nazneen and Natasha could be criticised for abandoning their cultural heritage for the sake of assimilation into Britain, but I argue that it is important not to relegate the female characters to either a nostalgic past or as part of a homogenous, Muslim collective. The novels portray a cornucopia of experience within Muslim communities in the West, as well as amongst Muslim women who are characterised from housewives and matriarchs to academics. Whilst some define their time in Britain by a longing to return to their pre-migration life, others focus on faith or community solidarity in order to build a life in Britain that is forward-looking yet cognisant of the past. Significantly, it is evident that novels written about and by Muslims in Britain do not adopt any form of consensus on what this experience entails. For some characters, history is something to be continuously challenged and interrogated for the sake of offering a non-Western perspective. For others, it is personal and painful, and something that must be relinquished for the sake of

an optimistic future. Memory, as well, is both approached as a way to maintain a proud, cultural heritage, and as something that divides migrant communities.

The key word that binds the ESRC network for which this Ph.D. was produced is 'multiculturalism'. In this thesis I have offered an understanding of multiculturalism that takes into account, firstly, the usefulness of fiction in understanding the multicultural experience, and secondly, how history and memory contribute to the Muslim experience of multiculturalism. To approach the former first, it is evident that fiction cannot be understood as a direct reflection of reality as this would deprive it of its imaginative qualities. Nevertheless, I consider these works of fiction as objects that are created out of a particular time and place and have something to say about the society from which they are produced.

Generally speaking, the novels do not engage with multiculturalism as a policy, although *The Kindness of Enemies* comes close by portraying Muslim characters who are victims of hostility and suspicion perpetuated by government officials and public institutions. Overall, the novels engage with multiculturalism as a reality and a state of being, and many of them are punctuated with defining experiences such as cross-cultural encounters that prove to be both positive and negative. Multiculturalism, as would be expected, is approached differently in all of the novels. In *White Teeth*, for example, multiculturalism is at the forefront of the novel and shapes the characters' everyday lives. In *Brick Lane*, the characters exist within multicultural societies and yet there is very little evidence of actual crossing of cultures. In *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *The Satanic Verses*, multiculturalism, or the merging of other cultures more generally, is expressed as insincere and tainted by perpetual nostalgia for colonial values and a refusal to acknowledge Britain's colonial past.

In *The Map of Love*, British multiculturalism is not explicitly narrated but is instead understood in a broader sense and alongside global, cross-cultural relationships between Muslims and Western powers. For Soueif, her historical narrative both criticises the British Empire and shows the potential, in the face of contemporary global problems, for successful integration across communities. Ultimately, the novels portray multiculturalism and, on a more global scale, cross-cultural encounters and understanding, as neither a success nor a failure. Instead, it is portrayed as ongoing and riddled with challenges, namely racism, hostility towards Muslims, colonial nostalgia, the role of the often Islamophobic right-wing press, exoticism of migrant subjects, and Britain's complicity in neocolonial projects such as the expansion of Israel. Indeed, these problems are exposed and explored through fiction and contribute to wider debates about the future of multiculturalism.

In this thesis, I contribute to knowledge about literary representations of Muslims, Muslims in Britain, and multiculturalism. I offer new readings of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*,

Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road From Damascus*, Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*, and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love.* My readings of these texts highlight the importance of history and memory in how Muslims living in multicultural Britain understand their identities and function in everyday life. By examining these texts through the lens of history and memory, it becomes clear that within novels spanning from the years 1988 to 2015, concerns with colonial history, migration, cultural heritage, and collective and cultural memory are crucial to imaginative production of the Muslim experience in Britain.

Opening up new interpretations of these texts is important not only because it expands our knowledge about the novels themselves, but because it also allows us to make more general statements about the role of history and memory in contemporary black and Asian diasporic fiction. Through the discussion of my chosen texts, it becomes apparent that in order to adopt a critical perspective towards the treatment of non-white subjects, often Muslim, it is necessary to acknowledge both instances of problematic recorded history and the personal and cultural memories of migrant subjects. Rather than appealing to nostalgia, I argue that the novels explore the practice of looking to the past as both necessary and identity-forming. This also allows my chosen authors, all of who are writing from positions of migrancy, to portray British identity as complex and hybrid, a statement that contradicts parochial and nationalist narratives about Britishness.

In accordance with the interdisciplinary nature of both this project and the research network that funded this project, I believe that this thesis creates a bridge between the disciplines of literature and politics. Whilst my qualitative methodology is one traditionally used in the study of English literature, I maintain an awareness of how the social reality of multiculturalism both influences and is explored by the texts. I show that within societies that are multicultural, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of the past in both how individuals and communities may form their British identities, and in how we can work toward a more successful multiculturalism. Examples of British collective memory are shown to be in opposition with the cultural memories of many diasporic subjects, and the lack of recognition in everyday discourses and by government bodies about how Britain's history is still important today is a divisive factor in our multicultural society. In completing this research, I hope to have, firstly, demonstrated the importance of using history and memory as a theoretical framework within the field of postcolonial studies, and secondly, opened up the potential for more avenues of interdisciplinary research that consider fiction as a valuable resource in the field of politics.

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